



# ALBURY & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC BULLETIN



Registered by Australia Post PP 225170/0019

**FEBRUARY 2015**

**553**

## **REPORT ON DECEMBER MEETING (10.12.2014)**

President Michael Browne opened our Christmas Meeting by welcoming special guests Bill McDonald OAM and Father Kevin Flanagan. Before moving on to their presentations Michael invited Marie Lee to show the group her meticulously drawn map of Albury which she has painted on a large canvas blind. The town plan includes 57 drawings of well known historical buildings portrayed as if you were viewing the town from a high point above the monument.

Members listened to an interview of Bill McDonald conducted by Alex Last from the world service BBC Witness Radio program.

Alex had contacted the Society via the website page to find someone who had personal experience with the rabbit plagues of the 1940s and the release of myxomatosis in the 1950s.

Father Kevin Flanagan then spoke on the history of the Sacred Heart School and the challenges involved with teaching and preaching in the early days of Black Range, later Lavington.

As usual the Members show and tell part of the evening revealed some eclectic items. These included a rustic potato masher, an officer's swagger stick which had been rescued from the tip and a brick. The brick came from a well dating from the 1860s discovered during the excavations for the new Art Gallery.

Congratulations were given to everyone involved in the Robbins and Porter Monoplane project which won an IMAGinE award.

Michael closed the Meeting with Xmas Greetings to all members and wished everyone a safe and happy new year.

## **NEXT MEETING WEDNESDAY 11 FEB, 2014**

**7.30pm at Commercial  
Club Albury  
"Valentine's Day" theme.**

**Speakers:  
Carolyn Dudenko  
Flowers of  
Distinction  
(formerly Martin's Florist)  
AMP Lane.**

**Joe Wooding on his  
father's jewellery shop that  
operated in Dean St in the  
early 1900's.**

**ALBURY LIBRARYMUSEUM  
KHAYAMIYA: KHEDIVAL  
TO CONTEMPORARY  
WHEN: 21 FEBRUARY TO  
12 APRIL**

Early days of Sacred Heart	Page 2
Rabbit Plagues & Myxo	Page 4
New Town Hall Albury	Page 7
IMAGinE Award	Page 8
Marie Lee	Page 8

## **ALBURY & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC**

**PO Box 822 ALBURY 2640**

**<[www.alburyhistory.org.au](http://www.alburyhistory.org.au)>**

**For your reference A&DHS account details are:**

**BSB 640 000 Acc No 327006S10 (Albury & District Historical Society Inc)**

**Patron:** Patricia Gould OAM

**Honorary Life Members:**

Howard Jones, Helen Livsey,  
June Shanahan, Jan Hunter.

**Public Officer:** Helen Livsey

**President:** Michael Browne 0428691220

**Vice-Presidents:** Joe Wooding, June  
Shanahan

**Secretary:** Helen Livsey 02 6021 3671

**Treasurer:** Catherine Browne

**Minute Secretary:** Catherine Browne

**Publicity Officer:** Jill Wooding

**Committee:** Peter Whitbourn,  
Jill Wooding, Ray Gear, Marion Taylor,  
Greg Ryan and Ron Haberfield.

**Bulletin Editor:** Marion Taylor  
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**Journals, Stock:** June Shanahan

**Meeting Greeter:** Jill Wooding

**Bulletin dispatch:** Ron Haberfield

**Meetings:** 2nd Wednesday of the  
month 7.30pm usually at Commercial  
Club Albury.

Committee meets 3rd Wednesday of  
the month 5.15pm at the Albury  
LibraryMuseum.

### **ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION**

Single: \$25

Family: \$33

Corporate: \$50

**Research** undertaken \$25 first hour.  
Enquiries in writing with \$25

## THE EARLY DAYS OF SACRED HEART SCHOOL BY FATHER KEVIN FLANAGAN



Sacred Heart Church & School, Wagga Rd.

The early foundation of the Catholic Church in Australia was overseen by Archbishop Polding. Most of the early settlers and convicts who were Catholic came from Ireland but the Archbishop was an English Benedictine monk. However his successor was an Irish Bishop. The first Catholic Mass in Albury was said in November 1843.

In 1854, St Patrick's Parish was established in Albury by Father John Maher and in 1858 St Brigid's, the first Catholic Church was built which was also the school that

many people have attended. In 1872 St Patrick's Church in Smollett St was opened.

Then in the 1890s Mass was held in Catholic homes in Black Range. It is hard to visualise horses and drays travelling over creek crossings and rough roads to get to Lavington. Father Griffin was parish priest of Albury when on Sunday June 19, 1904 the Black Range or St Mary's Church was built in Carsten St as a central place of worship for that area. Fr Griffin was the first celebrant, assisted by Fr Slattery and Fr Hartigan. The Freeman's Journal reported that the church was built "4 miles from Albury on rising ground and commanding an extensive and picturesque view." The paper also recorded that the building cost £130, the builder was Mr J S Adams and the building committee included Messrs T Walsh, T T Molloy, J P Eck, C C Reis and J Carey.

The Albury Banner and Wodonga Express of Friday 24 June 1904 reported ".... The building has been erected on an excellent site secured a good many years ago with commendable forethought by the Rev. Father O'Connell. It is understood that the Sisters of Mercy will visit Black Range every Sunday for the purpose of giving religious instruction ...."

The Sisters travelled from the Convent to Black Range in a hansom cab and it is noted from a book of etiquette of the day that if you were transporting a lady in a horse drawn vehicle you should always make sure she was facing away from the backside of the horse.

St Mary's at Black Range was initially a remote church. A story is told that one day before a funeral Mr Monk went to the undertakers in Albury with his horse and dray to pick up the body. He had to cross the Bungambrawatha Creek which was in flood. He decided it was safe to cross but unfortunately there was a deep trench in the middle where the horse became stuck and the coffin slid off the back of the dray and floated off around the next bend. The driver then managed to get out of the creek and had to go up and tell the priest and the mourning family what had happened. The next day they found the coffin and continued with the funeral service.

In 1918 the Wagga Diocese was formed by Bishop Dwyer. On April 14, 1936 a dual purpose building serving as a church and a school opened in Wagga Rd (GT Swim Centre now occupies the site) which eventually became Sacred Heart Church. The first school enrolment was of 103 pupils, 55 boys and 48 girls. Some familiar Lavington names in that first enrolment included Schneider, Buchhorn, Lechmere, Strauss, Rosser, Butt, English, Davern, Polkinghorne, Hilton and Mutsch. The nuns would come out from Albury to teach. Some of the classrooms were only divided by hessian and it was a huge strain on the teachers as class sizes were very large. There is an amusing letter written by Sister Monica Esler describing how they would travel out in an old car called "Elizabeth" which made a lot of noises that greatly embarrassed them – the car backfired all the way along the road. There was a great relationship between the school and others in the area. Sports days and fund raisers were held regularly. In fact there is an article in the Albury Banner showing the results of a Sack Race with Elaine Buchhorn coming first and June Buchhorn coming second.

**CONTINUED: THE EARLY DAYS OF SACRED HEART SCHOOL  
BY FATHER KEVIN FLANAGAN**

In 1955 Father Bongiorno established the parish of North Albury, which included the church on Wagga Rd. In 1958 St Anne's school was opened, then the Sacred Heart Church in Mate St the following year. The 1950s was a time of great migration. Fr Bongiorno had a great rapport with the early migrants. In 2015, we celebrate the 60th year of Sacred Heart, North Albury since its foundation in Mate St.

Footnote: Several parishioners from the early days of Sacred Heart Parish attended the A&DHS meeting, including two ladies from the original 1936 enrolment at the Wagga Rd school, Elaine and June Buchhorn.



Celebrating Christmas with Santa in 1953.

**Names of some of the 55 boys enrolled in 1936 include:**

Thomas Hannon, Eric & Stanley Lechmere, Francis, Anthony, Brian, Allan & Bernard Buchhorn, Louis & Herbert Schneider, Clifford & John Strauss, Frederick, Ray, William & Reginald Warr, Arthur, Keith & Kenneth Rosser, John Butt, Timothy, George & Liam Davern, Edward Polkinghorne, Thomas Doran, Raymond, Leo & John English, Anthony Hilton.

**Names of some of the 48 girls enrolled in 1936 include:**

Eileen, Rosemary & Maureen Hannon, Grace & Mary Rosser, Patricia, Kathleen & Helen Hilton, Helen, Carmel, Noreen & Borgia Flynn, Carmel & Joan Doran, Dulcie & Maisie Lechmere, Joyce Warr, Helen Hilton, Phylis Hehir, Shirley Mutsch, Barbara, Lorna & Elaine Buchhorn, Margaret Davern, Elva & Phylis Strauss, Doreen, Maisie & Violet Vidler.

## **RABBIT PLAGUES & MYXOMYOSIS** **A WITNESS BBC RADIO PROGRAM BY ALEX LAST**

### **A TRANSCRIPT OF THE INTERVIEW WITH BILL** **MCDONALD OAM, MULLENGANDRA**



Bill McDonald OAM  
Photo Courtesy: The Border Mail Albury

Witness BBC is a podcast which sources subjects who have lived through important events in history. Today we are taking you back to the 1940s and 50s to tell the story of Australia's rabbit plague which devastated the Australian countryside. "To say that the ground literally moved isn't an exaggeration, the rabbits were that thick and there was that many of them that you could go over a rise and into a gully and you would think the paddock was walking away." Rabbits had been introduced into Australia from Europe for sport in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and they soon became a nightmarish example of what can happen when an alien species is introduced into the environment.

SONG: These bunnies that I'm stopping, they fairly keep me hoppin, and I think I'll have a smoko when I get up to the tree."

By the 1930s, rabbit numbers were estimated to be in the billions, and they were spread across Australia. The countryside was being devastated, farming was badly hit. Bill McDonald was born in 1930 in Southern New South Wales, he grew up on the family farm which had been established by his Scottish great-grandfather in 1863.

"We lived right on the Sweetwater Creek, beautiful grazing country, as a kid, growing up, I was ten year old when my Dad went to the war and between my Mother and myself we used to milk cows and I'd milk them before I went to school. Most of the male population were away at the war, so during the course of the war years here, rabbit management would have been virtually non-existent. There just wasn't the man power, so the rabbits had an absolutely free run."

They eat the foliage above the ground and the roots and tubers below. Topsoil is washed away, this deep gorge is the result of the activities of rabbits.

In an attempt to slow down the invasion, farmers built fences hundreds of miles long, but the rabbits always break through. After the War when land owners return to their neglected farms, a thousand million rabbits had stripped the land and had become the greatest threat ever to Australian agriculture. The paddocks were bare as the top of a billiard table, the rabbits had eaten everything."

At the age of 18, Bill had gone to work at the Mullengandra Station, an 8000 acre sheep property, a few miles away from his family farm. The rabbits would eat the grass and then they would follow the roots of the grass into the ground because they are a scratching animal. So there was nothing to hold the soil together and there was no feed for the livestock. Skinny sheep will grow less wool and poorer quality wool. The farmers were encouraged to wage war on the rabbits, building rabbit proof fences around their paddocks and killing the rabbits inside with poison, as well as gassing their burrows and using machinery to rip up the rabbit warrens.

"Where I worked on Mullengandra, I was digging out and larvaciding (larvacide is a poisonous gas which you squirt down the burrows), it's not very good for your health. We had no breathing apparatus and we were using a deadly gas. Rabbits will congregate on disturbed ground, so you scrape the ground with a little prong on the tractor and then you drop off your baits. First we free fed with oats then about two nights after that you would lace the oats with strychnine and next morning go around and pick up the hundreds of dead rabbits.

And there were rabbits drives too, herding the animals into small enclosures where they would be killed in the thousands. At a rabbit drive in 1958 they killed 50,000 one afternoon.

You herded them to a fence that they couldn't get through, you made a fair bit of noise until they reached a caged area and then we started wringing their necks. Let's say I have had the opportunity of catching a rabbit for a rabbit pie over the last fifty years and I have declined the opportunity."

The slaughter made little impact on rabbit populations, so the Government finally gave approval for the use of biological warfare, the release of a disease from South America which only killed rabbits called myxomatosis.

**CONTINUED:**

## **RABBIT PLAGUES & MYXOMYOTIS**

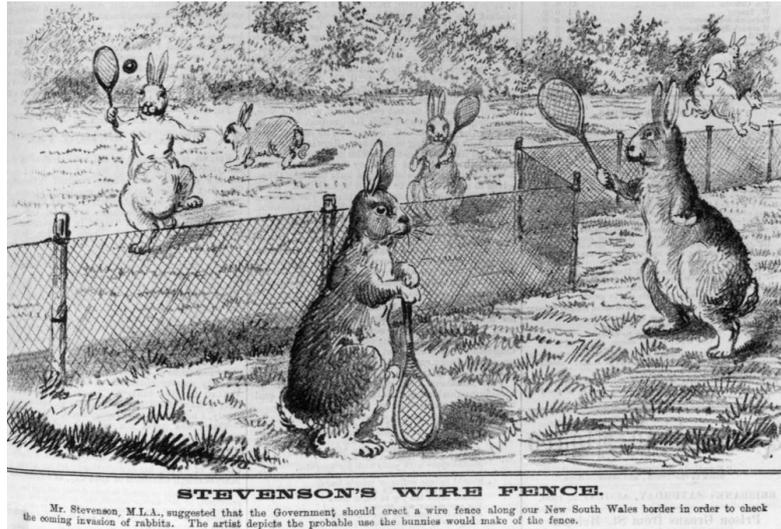


Photo Courtesy:  
State Library Qld

“Everyone was wondering, what more can we do, what’s the next move we can make, then myxomytosis was released and it really worked. We knew it was a virus spread by rabbit flea or mosquitos. There was four or five trials in 1950 and one of them was directly to the South of Mullengandra and everybody just hoped like blazes that it was going to be an effective way of doing something.”

Myxomytosis spread to practically every corner of South Eastern Australia where rabbits are to be found. It was a wonderful season with rains that filled swamps and ran creeks that are dry nine years in ten. This rainfall story is important, because in Australia, myxomatosis has been spread by water breeding insects, mainly mosquitos.

“They die a pretty hard death, their eyes all bung up and their genitals are all distorted, probably not long before they die. The bulk of them would be very nearly blind and they get very skinny because they can’t eat, I hope it all happens quick for them. We had a battle we had lost in relation to the control of rabbits and it meant if you wanted to breed sheep or grow wool you had to turn your back on any thoughts of *is it right or is it wrong* otherwise it just had to be done.”

Tens of millions succumbed to the disease and in many areas more than 90% of the rabbits died, but the environment did start to recover. The Australian rural economy surged.

“As the grass grew, the stock put on more condition, they cut more wool, the ewes had the ability to make more milk, not drop a lamb and have no milk and the lamb starves to death, it was an improvement all round.”

But some rabbits developed an immunity to myxomytosis and over time rabbit numbers began to grow once more. In the 1990s a new rabbit virus, the calicivirus was trialled in Australia and has since spread across the country killing large numbers of rabbits, but again some animals have proved resistant and so the battle goes on. Bill McDonald is now in his eighties and he still lives and works on his family farm in New South Wales. “I have a concern at the present moment. I think a couple of new generations aren’t in touch with what happened in the 1930s, 40s and 50s. I believe that rabbits could be a future problem again, yet people don’t work hard to contain any possible spread.”



Lionel Bull, Chief of the CSIR Division of Animal Health and Nutrition, releasing the first infected rabbits as part of the myxoma virus trial.

## PICK-A-BOX WITH BOB & DOLLY ALIAS JOE & JILL



### QUESTIONS:

- Q1. How many times has Albury's flood level reached 19 feet or more?
- Q2. What was the special donation made by the Commercial Club in 1928 to the Albury Jail and the Albury Hospital?
- Q3. What and where was the first moving picture screened in Albury?
- Q4. What was the Albury Gold Reward and how much was the prize?
- Q5. What business used a waterwheel in Dean St in 1886?
- Q6. In 1855 the paddlesteamer "Albury" was the first boat to reach Albury by river, what was the Captains name and where was it built?
- Q7. In what year did Albury first have:-
  - A. Reticulated water
  - B. Gas
  - C. Electricity
  - D. Electric Telegraph
  - E. Sewerage
  - F. Telephone
  - G. Ice making

OLD HUME



HIGHWAY

**ANSWERS:**  
Q1. 3 times. The highest in Oct 1870 was 19.33 feet.  
Q2. 1000 cigarettes each.  
Q3. November 1897 at the Mechanics Institute, a newsteel showing the World Boxing Championship.  
Q4. In 1857 thirty prominent Albury business men offered a 1500 pound reward to anyone who could find a commercial quantity of gold within 15 miles of Albury in NSW which would keep more than 500 diggers prospecting for more than 3 months. This reward was never paid.  
Q5. Border Post used a water wheel to run a printing press.  
Q6. Captain Johnson and the boat was built in Scotland.  
Q7. A. 1886. B. 1883. C. 1916. D. 1858. E. 1919. F. 1898. G. 1886.

'Old Hume Highway 31' is an organisation bringing together all of the bypassed communities along the entire length of the Old Hume Highway to form a single cohesive marketing structure. As a non profit body it is dedicated to increasing the public's awareness and usage of the Old Hume Highway. The group is working towards receiving the Federal, State, Local, commercial and private support necessary to preserve the history, the historic roads, landmarks, the regional and cultural communities and lifestyles along the Old Hume Highway.

'Old Hume Highway 31' is motoring along nicely. Incorporation into a not for profit limited company has been completed. Our name now is 'Old Hume Highway 31 Limited'.

Visitors to the Old Hume Highway have difficulty finding it as there is no map of the Old Hume Highway over its length available. Nor is there any standardised signage to let you know that you have found it. 'Old Hume Highway 31' has in preparation a full sized map both print and electronic of the Old Hume Highway from Sydney to Melbourne with a street insert for each town. On the reverse side of the map an advertising space will be available to each Shire on the Old Hume Highway. The work is being carried out by the same company who prepared the maps for the Roads & Marine Services' book "The Old Hume Highway - History begins with a road". Incidentally this book has just gone into reprint and is once again available. Negotiations to have a standardised sign available for erection along the full length of the Old Hume Highway have commenced with relevant authorities. Shortly people will be able to not only use the map to find the Old Hume Highway but also they will have signs to indicate if and when they are on it. This signage will also increase the public's awareness of the 'Old Hume Highway 31'.

A second article will appear in the next issue of the Route 66 Federation's magazine this time dealing with the exploration that lead to the Hume Highway and with the person after whom the highway was named, Hamilton Hume. Being an internationally distributed magazine, read by people around the world who enjoy driving on old roads, the continuing exposure can only be beneficial to the Old Hume Highway and Australia.

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NEW TOWN-HALL, ALBURY.

Australasian Sketcher, July 2, 1881 by an unknown artist.

## THE ALBURY TOWN HALL THAT NEVER WAS! BY GREG RYAN

In August 1880, Albury Municipal Council called for a competition for the design of a new Town Hall with “a cost not to exceed £5000” and with a £50 bonus offered.

There was some scepticism regarding Albury’s capacity to see the project through, with one correspondent to the *Evening News*, a Sydney newspaper, hoping that his letter might “prevent some from wasting their time” submitting designs.

The design of George R Johnson, a Melbourne architect was chosen. The *Australasian Sketcher with Pen and Pencil* reported: “NEW TOWN HALL, ALBURY. This building is about to be erected at the corner of Dean and Olive streets, Albury. The design embraces on the ground floor a large hall 83ft. by 40ft., with stage and balcony whilst adjoining are ladies’ and gentlemen’s dressing rooms, cloak and hat rooms, lavatories, &c, making the hall suitable for giving opera, drama, public meetings, balls, &c.”

Tenders for construction were called and in April 1882, the tender of John Hartley for £7600 (and without the tower) was accepted.

A few days after signing the contract, Hartley claimed to have made an error in his calculations, could not do the work and asked to be released from his contract. As the next lowest tender £11,000, the council decided “to intimate to the architect that, as it appeared his design could not be carried out for less than double the sum to which he had been limited, the council would expect him to prepare fresh plans for a building not to cost more than £5000 free of charge.”

In October 1883 the *Sydney Mail* reported: “The Albury Municipal Council appears likely to become involved in a law suit over the town-hall business. The plans of Mr. G. R. Johnson, a Melbourne architect, were accepted for this building, and the contract was let. The contractor then found he had made a serious mistake in his calculations, and declined to fulfil the contract, unless paid a large sum in excess of the amount of his tender. The Council, finding it impossible to build the hall for the sum proposed to be expended, have refrained from proceeding with the work. Mr. Johnson, who has been paid a considerable sum in respect of work already done, claims the usual commission, but offers to supply plans for a cheaper building *gratis*. The council holds that Mr. Johnson is in some sort responsible for the fiasco, as in arranging for the contract he did not insist on the contractor finding sureties. He now threatens an action.”

According to *The Argus* a “balance of some £205 is claimed by Mr. Johnson for plans, &c.” *The Sydney Mail* of December 1882 reported that the Albury Municipal Council “now thinks that by this negligence the architect has forfeited his claim to the full commission he demands on the entire cost of a building which now is not likely to be erected.”

The case dragged on and in May 1883, the *Evening News* reported that George Johnson wrote to council “expressing the hope that he would not be obliged to enforce his claim against the council by a Supreme Court action.”

Council had decided that instead of the grand new Town Hall, they would use the old telegraph offices as council chambers. In April 1884, the *Evening News* reported “An action has been begun by Mr. G. R. Johnson, of Melbourne, against the Albury borough council for a claim in connection with the preparation of plans for the town-hall.” The result of the court action is not known. Albury finally got a purpose built Town Hall in 1908, but quite modest compared with Johnson’s design.



Marie Lee with her beautifully drawn town plan of Albury

Photograph Courtesy The Border Mail Albury

### **IMAGINE AWARDS WINNER – ALBURY LIBRARYMUSEUM: FIRST FLIGHT**

For the 100 year anniversary of Azor Robbins and Alexander Porter's first flight in Albury, the LibraryMuseum celebrated the ingenuity and innovation of these men with the exhibition First Flight. The flight was a significant feat for Australia, as the first fully engineered and manufactured monoplane to fly in Australian history, and First Flight and its associated public programs allowed the viewer to transcend from passive observation to active participation to engage with this exciting story.

The IMAGInE awards took place at 107 Projects in Redfern, Sydney on Friday 14 November 2014. Recognising innovation and excellence in 500 museums, galleries and Aboriginal cultural centres across NSW, the IMAGInE industry awards acknowledges the outstanding achievement of over 8,000 individuals in fostering local communities, enhancing NSW's vibrant cultural tourism and improving visitor experiences.

The IMAGInE awards is an initiative of Museums & Galleries of NSW, developed in collaboration with Regional & Public Galleries NSW and Museums Australia NSW. Museums & Galleries of NSW is supported by the NSW Government through Arts NSW and is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

The full scale replica of the Robbins and Porter aircraft suspended from the Albury Library-Museum ceiling instantly captured the viewer's attention. Constructed using traditional techniques, it was built by 40 volunteers from Albury & District Historical Society using the local Manual Activity Centre. The Historical Society undertook research on the monoplane, its design, the construction methods, the documentation of actual events, and provided financial support for the project. Visitors to the exhibition could explore the 'touch and use' discovery cabinets, displaying mechanic tools and museum artefacts; experience an interactive flight simulator, based on actual events; and participate in workshops and programs during the anniversary weekend.

The monoplane was constructed in 1912-13 by Robbins and Porter in their motorcar garage at 532 Kiewa St Albury, the present site of the Albury LibraryMuseum. A partnership between the Albury & District Historical Society and AlburyCity saw construction of the replica shared among community groups and businesses who volunteered hundreds of hours.



**You can now find the Albury District Historical Society on Facebook!**  
**It is not necessary to sign up for Facebook to view the page. To have a look please go to**  
**<https://www.facebook.com/Albury.DHS>**