

ALBURY & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC BULLETIN

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AUGUST 2007

471

REPORT ON THE JULY MEETING (11/7/07)

Eighteen members attended the July meeting to hear Ron Ahern speak about his life-time experience as a tailor, most of it in Albury. Ron was fortunate to live through the golden age of the tailoring profession in Australia. Today the profession is in sharp decline for reasons Ron touched upon.

Discussion on the Question of the Month highlighted the changes that have occurred in the 170 year evolution of the road to Sydney from overlanders' track to high-speed freeway. The thought of semi-trailers travelling along Dean Street, as they once did, seems less than credible today.

We congratulated life member Howard Jones and his wife Hazel on 25 years in Albury after emigrating from Wales. The Society and the Albury community has bene-

fitted greatly from Howard's commitment to the preservation and dissemination of the history of this city and surrounding district. Howard thinks it is still too soon to give up his Welsh accent.

We passed around a watch and chain given to the Society by Mrs Eunice Collins in 1970. Both the watch and a locket attached to the chain are engraved. The watch belonged to Mrs Collins' husband Bill who farmed at Talgarno prior to moving to Pemberton Street Albury.

RON AHERN—ALBURY TAILOR

Talk given at the July meeting by Ron Ahern.

Have you heard of the potato famine in Ireland in the 1840s-1850s? Many thousands died of starvation and many more emigrated to America and Australia. My mother Nora came to Australia from County Cork as an 18

NEXT MEETING

WEDNESDAY

8 AUGUST 2007

7.30pm at Commercial Club
Albury

Speaker:

Mr R C (Chum) Watson:
"Growing up in Newmarket."

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Alexander Street and Alexandra Park; a recipe for confusion. What are the origins of the two similar names in East Albury?

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Apple Pyramid Cup	Page 3
Question of Month - changes to Sydney road	Page 3
Music books	Page 4
Max Dupain Exhibition	Page 4
RAAF at Sportsground	Page 4

**REMINDER
ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS
ARE DUE.**

ALBURY & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

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ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

Single: \$22

Family: \$30

Corporate: \$50

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

Committee meets 4th Tuesday of the month 5.15pm at Albury City Library.

A&DHS website:

www.alburycity.nsw.gov.au/museum/heritage

-month old with her parents Hanna and John Barrie about 1845. They settled at Wooragee near Beechworth, then in the grip of the gold rush. There were about 4,000 Chinese in the area, and if you go to Beechworth and visit the cemetery you will see where the Chinese are buried. My dad Arthur Ahern, also from County Cork, married Nora Barrie when he was 20 and she was 18. It seemed to be the usual thing back then. The family came to Albury and went on to have seven children. I was sixth in line. I had four older brothers and none of them wanted to be in the tailoring business with Dad and I was the last hope so he said this is it!

I spent six months learning the basics about tailoring from my father and then he decided to send me to the Sydney Technical School at the back of the Supreme Courts in Taylor Square. I went to school there for four nights a weeks from 6pm to 9 pm and at that time there was Manpower and clothing and food coupons. Clothing coupons were worth more than money. You didn't have any say where they would send you to work. I loved it as everywhere I went I was learning. My father use to always say to me you always listen to people even if they are ninety years of age, as you can always learn.

I was anxious to learn quickly and I loved changing jobs. Wentworth Avenue in Sydney was full of factories in the middle forties. They were taken over by the Government during the war and Manpower controlled all the workers. I would work all day, go to school in the evening and then when I finished at nine o'clock I would go and find a dance somewhere. I was only young and the hormones were jumping here and there and everywhere and I was having a wonderful time.

While I was in Sydney a couple of funny things happened. When the manpower released me I got a job in a very high class tailoring place, Sim & Chandler, on the corner Castlereagh and King Streets and I met some of the greatest people in the world there.

One particular gentleman was the Prime Minister of Australia at the time, Mr. R.G. Menzies, and I had the privilege of fitting him and making his doubled breasted suit.

Another famous customer was Athol Mulley. Anybody interested in racing would remember the champion racehorse Bernborough, and Athol Mulley was his jockey. Well he was marrying a girl by the name of June Dando. Her father had the bakery at Bexley. He was being married in tails, but by Friday night the silk lapel was not on the tails. I said I'd finish it, so next morning I was at work at 7am and at 2pm I delivered the suit to Chequers Restaurant where Mulley was getting dressed. When Mulley came to the shop to pay for the suit, he said to the boss, 'who finished my garment off?' Sid said, 'Ron did,' and he came over and gave me two £10 notes as a gift. It was about two week's wages for nothing.

I went home to spend Xmas 1947 with my parents and my father asked me to think about coming home to Albury to help run the business. I said I'd think about it. I was earning £15 a week in Sydney. Dad pointed out if I went into the business I'd earn £80. The offer was too good to knock back, so after a few months I came home.

My father started in premises where Foto Supplies is today (494 Dean St). He bought the business from Mr George Dinsmore and had 10 or 12 people working for him. Later he moved to the corner of AMP Lane and finally to the CBC Bank (now NAB) corner (Dean

and Kiewa Streets).

I was having lunch with Mum one day when Dad came home and said, 'Nora, I have just signed a lease for 25 years for a room above the bank for the amount of £5/5/5 per month.' We, father and son, finished up staying there for 56 years. Now it is about \$100 a week.

If you have one head and two hands you can make a lot of money if you want to work. When I first came home to help my father I was single. I would go to work at 8am in the morning and still be there at 1am the next morning trying to catch up.

Speaking of other tailors there was E. T. Roberts half way down Dean Street just before the Westpac Bank (613 Dean St). He lived in Sackville Street. Then there was Lowe and Billy Small. They split up and old Billy Small moved next to Bob Carroll who had a shoe repair business which adjoined the old Border Morning Mail office (590 Dean St). There was another tailor shop in Olive Street near the entrance to Centre Point owned by Mr. McGrory. Mr. Keith was further down Dean Street near the Roma Restaurant (472 Dean St), trading as the Adelaide Tailoring Co. Another tailor was a New Australian Peter Bartsch at the corner of Olive and Ebdon Streets. Unfortunately he had a stroke and moved to Canberra. Ozzie Tratz who came from Germany in 1957 worked for Mr Bartsch and took over the business. Sid Lieberman traded as Sid Taylor the Tailor at 481A Dean Street, but he didn't make the suits on the premises. He sent them away to have them made. Probably the last of Albury's tailors was Robert Saville who closed his shop in AMP Lane recently.

Mates Department store had a tailoring department with a workroom upstairs, but it never seem to make a profit as they had quite a few managers over a period of time. Mr. Farmer was

the boss of the men's wear department for some years. There was a guy from Holland, Mr Horacek doing the cutting and fitting at Mates for a while. He ran his own business on the corner of Olive and Ebden Streets for two or three years and then moved to Canada. Ted Wightwick also worked for Mates before opening his own business down in Kiewa Street just past the entrance of the West End Plaza.

My father died in 1977 and two or three years after that my wife developed cancer and I couldn't work full time in the business. I persuaded Ozzie Tratz to join me and control the business. Eighteen months later I signed a contract with the Army to alter uniforms for apprentices at Latchford Barracks. There was an army tailor, Russ Johnson, out there and he pinned them for us to make them to the right size. The army would drop the work in Friday morning and pick up Monday afternoon. Some of the girls would work Saturday and Sundays if necessary. I was getting sick at looking at khaki especially as the colour of the trousers and jackets rarely matched.

Tailoring has been great experience over the years but you will never see a genuine tailor again. It's too dear. It is the cost of labour and the hours that you have to put into produce a good suit. Recently a former client showed me a beautifully tailored suit for which he paid \$2,500. Few people will pay that.

Ron Ahern's siblings were:
 George Arthur b. 1912
 Leslie Thomas b. 1914
 Evelyn John b. 1916
 Albert Keith b. 1917
 Joyce Mary b. 1919
 Ronald James b. 1923
 Elizabeth Isabel b. 1927



APPLE PYRAMID COMPETITION

The Society has been given a cup with the inscription:

**LAVINGTON SHOW
 Apple Pyramid Competition
 1928 Won by Lavington Valley**

Where or what was Lavington Valley; a locality, or an orchard name?

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

The Hume Freeway is the latest change to the road to Sydney. What have been the earlier routes through and from Albury?

Helen Livsey, Ray Gear, Roma Freeman, Kevin Monte, Michael Browne, June Shanahan and Chris McQuellin contributed to the answer.

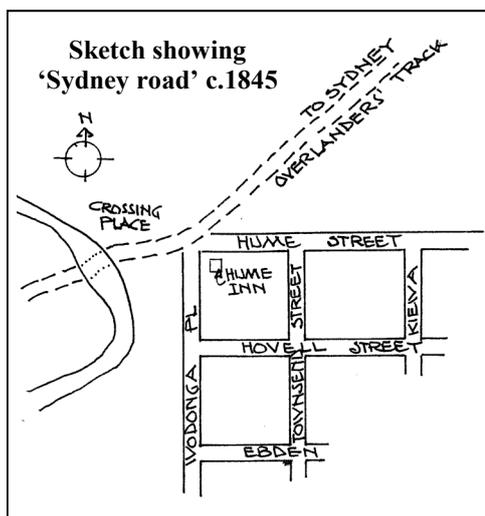
Townsend's 1839 map shows a track striking out from about corner of Wodonga Place and Hume Street towards the north east. It is labelled 'To Sydney'. Townsend made no attempt to survey the town around this track, but established a strict north oriented grid. As the town grew, the Sydney road was

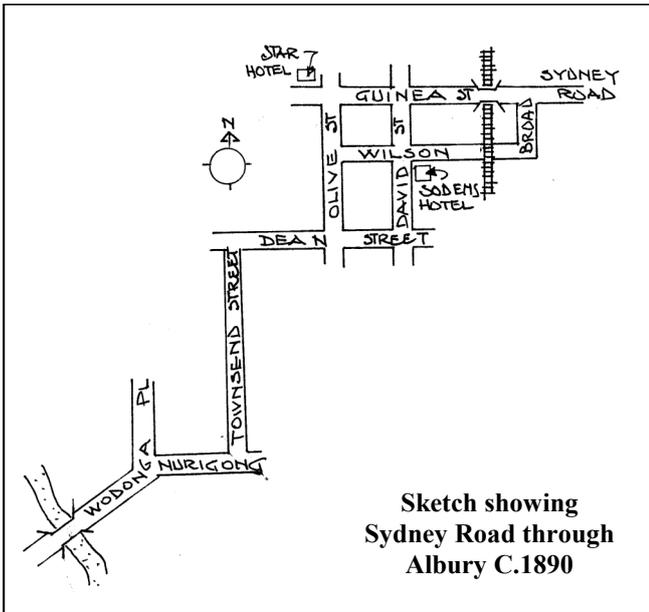
forced to make a series of turns to follow streets to reach the Crossing Place, the punt location and then the Union Bridge (1861). The track to the Crossing Place can be easily seen on an aerial photo map, taken in 1949 and held by the LibraryMuseum. It also shows a location for Robert Brown's hut.

The arrival of the railway (1881) was an impediment to the Sydney road. The road arrived from the direction of Wirlinga along what is known today as Borella Road, turned south down Broad Street then west along Wilson Street to cross the railway at a level crossing and proceed past Sodens Advance Australia Hotel (1857), then via Olive Street to Dean Street and the Globe Hotel; then to Townsend Street and more hotels and the Bank of NSW (Kia Ora) to Nurigong Street and Wodonga Place to the Union Bridge (and the Turks Head and Punt Hotels). The construction of the Guinea Street Bridge (c.1888) re-routed the Sydney road straight along Guinea Street to Olive Street, and the Star Hotel(1879) then down to Dean Street.

When Young Street was formed, Sydney traffic flowed to the eastern end of Dean Street and the Treminus Hotel (1881) then the full length of Dean Street.

The completion of the Hume Dam (1936) and the flooding of the Bowna Arm brought about a major change to the road north of Albury. The highway from Sydney was diverted through Table Top rejoining the Sydney Road north of Thurgoona and entering Albury along Borella Road. Wagga Road and Mate Street became the preferred route from Sydney about the time of WWII.





Albury. Died 1940 at Albury. Her father, James Mitchell was the youngest son of Mrs Elizabeth Mitchell (nee Huon) after whom Elizabeth Mitchell Drive Thurgoona is named. Mrs Mitchell was the sister of Wodonga pioneers, Charles and Paul Huon (de Kerrileau). James Mitchell ran Table Top station. Dr Andrews says he

was "well known as a successful grazier and horse owner, and for his active efforts for the advancement of the district." (*First settlers of the Upper Murray* p. 49)

Annie Huon

I can find no definite information on this lady, however she and Mabel Mitchell were probably second cousins.

The Huon, or Huon de Kerilleau, family were early settlers in the Albury-Wodonga district arriving in 1836.

Annie was possibly the daughter of William & Florence Huon of

After WWII road traffic along Wodonga Place became heavier and the District Hospital complained about the noise, so in 1948, the highway reverted to Townsend Street and Ebdon Street to Wodonga Place and the bridge. Later again Hume Street replaced Ebdon Street as the preferred route.

Our thanks to all who contributed information to what was a much bigger question than first thought, but we are still left with questions unanswered. For example: while we are familiar with what was until 4 March 2007, the Hume Highway: Wodonga Place, Hume Street, Young Street, North Street, Mate Street and Wagga Road. But when did that route become the preferred route and Sydney Road become Old Sydney Road? Also when did Young Street become the route from Guinea to Dean Street?

MUSIC BOOKS

The Society recently passed to the Albury City collection 4 bound volumes of sheet music dating from 1893. Three of the books were owned by Mabel J Mitchell and the other by Annie Huon.

Mabel Josephine Mitchell

Born 1876 at Albury to James and Sarah J Mitchell. Married James Stephen 1901 at

Wodonga station, or Henry & Mrs Huon (nee Stuckey, d.1915). Help with completing the provenance of the music books would be appreciated.

MAX DUPAIN EXHIBITION AT REGIONAL ART GALLERY

The Max Dupain in Albury photographic exhibition is at Albury Art Gallery until October and will be of great interest to our members. Taken in 1938/9 there are splendid photos of Dean Street which will bring back memories for the older members and astonish newer Albury residents. When the Exhibition was opened on 6 July the Hoyts Theatre photos had many romantics sighing as they remembered the good old days!

RAAF AT ALBURY SPORTS-GROUND

Chris McQuellin has a photograph showing a group of men in RAAF uniform outside the grandstand at Albury Sports Ground. A sign on a door behind them is labeled 'Adjutant'. Two men identified in the photo are Edgar Passant and Jack Phillips.

Chris would like information about the date, the group and the RAAF at the Sports Ground.

WHAT ARE YOU RESEARCHING?

I would like to publish a list of members and their particular areas of interest in future *Bulletins*. If you would like to be included please let me.

For starters:

- Chris McQuellin is interested in Albury's Boer War soldiers and Air Training Corps in Albury;
- Ray Gear is interested in Early Hotels in Albury & District, especially any photographs.

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