

# Albury & District Historical Society Inc

May 2022

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Wiradjuri Country, PO Box 822 ALBURY 2640

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An undated photograph of Towong Hill homestead as it was in the first half of the 20th Century.

Compare with the image on page 4 taken after the 2020 bushfires.

## Next Meeting

Wednesday, May 11, 2022

7.30 pm, Commercial Club

**Topic:** Managing Murray River water; Border Bushwalking Club

**Speakers:** Digby Jacobs  
Eileen Clark

**ALBURY LIBRARYMUSEUM**  
**Nurture—It Takes a Village**  
**Until June 19**

Page 2 Tom Mitchell

Page 5 Herbert Aldridge

Page 6 Celebrating AlburyCity

Page 7 AlburyCity with Minecraft  
Arrival of NE Rail

Page 8 Digitisation projects

## PRESIDENT'S NOTES FOR MAY

After no meetings since December, we had a good turn-up of members at our April meeting. Honor Auchinleck was our guest speaker, talking about her “Very Ordinary, Extraordinary” father, Tom Mitchell (see page 2). That was followed by Colbey Baines speaking about how he will be developing a ‘Then and Now’ animation of Albury using Minecraft. You will have to refer to his explanation on page 7 to understand.

The Society’s new Privacy Policy has been adopted by the committee and is available on our website. If you cannot access it there and would like a copy, please contact Helen (contact details on page 8). Further policies will be available shortly. At our May meeting we will have a closer look at the Society’s draft revised Objectives. A reminder that they were distributed to members with our April Bulletin mailout and you will be invited to comment and/or ask questions at our May meeting.

We have been notified that our application to Wodonga Council for a grant to produce two YouTube videos relating to the impact of rail arriving in Wodonga in 1873 has been successful. More details on page 7. Also, AlburyCity has approved a grant for further scanning of the BMM for inclusion on the Trove website (see page 8).

At our May meeting we will hear from Digby Jacobs, Regional Manager of the Murray Darling Basin Authority speaking on aspects of water management in the Murray River and its tributaries. Digby will be followed by Eileen Clark, 40 years a member of Border Bushwalking Club, speaking about the history of her club and their activities.

Finally, a very warm welcome to new member, Jane Morrison, of Weston Creek ACT.

## A VERY ORDINARY EXTRAORDINARY MAN

Honor Auchinleck

*Thank you for asking me to speak to you about my father. Mark and I were delighted to be with you in April.*

This time 80 years ago Tom Mitchell, along with almost 15,000 others had been prisoners of war under the Japanese in Changi Prisoner of War Camp for two months since the Fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942. Apparently Sir Winston Churchill called the fall of Singapore to the Japanese “the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British History.”

With his first Anzac Day as a POW approaching, we can only guess what Tom and many of his friends and colleagues from the 8<sup>th</sup> Division as well as British and Indian forces might have felt by the time that first Anzac Day in Changi dawned. They mightn’t have known about Churchill’s remark, but it was clear that they had been a part of a defeat worse than that at Gallipoli.

Tom often said in being inadequately trained and equipped, they felt let down by the Australian government and then with the fall of Singapore they felt they had let down their country. When you think about it, the spirit of Anzac is made up of an infinite number of stories. Tom’s is just one of them. The story of Anzac continues to grow as Australian service personnel continue to serve in some of the world’s many trouble spots.

Tom was born into a privileged family on the family cattle station at Towong Hill, near Corryong on 11 November 1906. At nine years old, Tom remembered the outbreak of the First World War and the Gallipoli Campaign. Significantly Tom recalled how in 1915, horrified by the carnage on Gallipoli and the Western Front, his maternal grandparents Sir Thomas and Lady Dibbs gave their fine sandstone home *Graythwaite* on Sydney’s north shore to the Red Cross for the rehabilitation of returned servicemen. Tom became a cadet at Cranbrook where he was a foundation student – the school first took students in 1918.

In 1942, twenty-seven years after the Allied defeat on Gallipoli, Tom’s memories had lost little of their poignancy and immediacy. He had three cousins who did not return from the First War – two of the three cousins celebrated Christmas 1913 in Switzerland with Tom, his younger sister Honnor and his parents Walter Edward and Winfred Mitchell. It was the last time Tom saw two of the three cousins. How could have they known that they were on the cusp of extraordinary times? Tom never forgot his first cousin Malcolm Chisholm, the first Australian killed in action on 27 August 1914 in the Battle of Le Cateau.

In his diary on Anzac Day 1942 Tom wrote:

Just back from the dawn service in front of the Gordon [Highlanders] officers’ mess – men trampling harshly on the bitumen and softly thudding on the grass – the building a black block against the few stars in the sky – a dais on big concrete pipes – the murmur of voices and glow of fast-becoming-rare cigarettes – note “G” on the bugle and “attention, stand-at-ease, stand-easy. O God Our Help in Ages Past, Our hope for years to come” – accordion and choir did well but little or no response from the mob – getting a little lighter – the faint gleam of a small segment of the Straights of Johore between us and Ubin Island – “Boots” [Brigadier Callaghan’s] speech, fair enough, in an unmodulated voice – he harped on the memories of the Anzacs and as usual said nothing about the future and how we could do something tangible to honour the Anzacs. Always our sentiments seemed to be backwards and trying to get comfort from the past – no wonder people start looking over their shoulders in battle! – then a solo, “There is no Death, the Christian cannot perish” – it is lighter now – “Abide with Me” and the Last Post and Reveille. Wreaths were laid, on and in front of a simple cross on the platform by representatives of units at Gallipoli.

Tom was a POW in Changi for three and a half years until 21 September 1945 when he embarked on that ‘floating garrison’ SS Largs Bay in Singapore Harbour for Darwin, Brisbane and Sydney. His diaries read as if, as a POW, he quickly slipped into endurance mode as a way of coping with his incarceration and his entries became sparsely factual. Gone are most of the rich descriptions of his surroundings that coloured his letters written during the previous year from Malaya and in the weeks before the fall of Singapore.

His diaries seem to belie his medical difficulties associated with a cracked skull and concussion following a car accident on 10 February 1942. The consequent headaches plagued Tom for the rest of his life and were part of the underlying cause of the recurring tumour that contributed to his death on 4 February 1984.

With the current profile on returned service personnel’s or veterans’ mental health, the question remains as to how Tom coped with his experience as a POW and how he coped with re-establishing his life on his return after the war? Perhaps making little of hardship was one of Tom’s methods of coping. He was always quick to



Tom Mitchell in the 1930s

point out that Changi was a relative holiday camp compared with the Burma Railway and the Sandakan Death Marches.

Tom's friendship with, and the kindness of, Medical Officer Kennedy Burnside were crucial to his survival from every point of view. From Tom's Changi diary he clearly kept his mind busy, thinking, reading, studying geology, helping Ken Burnside with some malaria research and talking skiing and other things that he would like to be doing instead of enduring the grim, everyday realities of being a POW. In 1943 the establishment of the Changi Ski Club became one of his most remarkable, if rather unlikely, coping strategies. Commenting on the Changi Ski Club, Tom remarked "the 'ski' club assumed an unbelievable reality in our lives of unreality and uncertainty on the edge of – the very near edge – of that which lies beyond all human existence."

Perhaps while trying to prepare himself for the end of the war in one of his last notebooks he recorded the following lines from Shakespeare's play 'Richard II' (Act V, Scene V) *In the Dungeon of the Castle*:

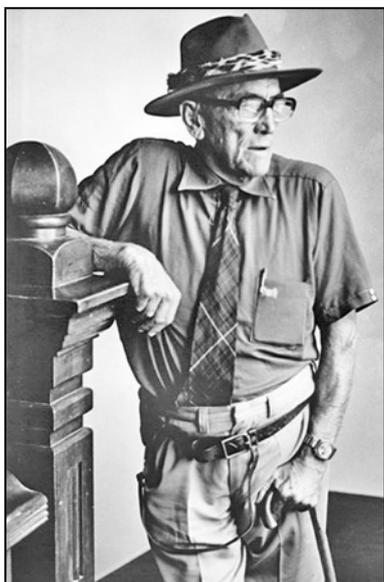
King Richard: I have been studying how to compare  
This prison, where I live, unto the world.

In a reflection Tom wrote in 1981, he explained:

As a POW we had a common purpose – to survive, and not to let the little yellow swine beat us – NIL BASTARDO CARBORUNDUM [don't let the bastard get you down]. There were, of course, divisions of taste and interest but hopes and fears were generally shared in our one-family spirit.

Close on the heels, however, of that first heady "Whacko, we're on our way home!" had come the realization that there were battles ahead, and our once despised Changi "home" felt strangely like a shabby but comfortable old slipper. The "we" and "our" of our POW existence gradually became "I" and "mine" as men worried quietly about meeting their wives, children, and sweethearts again, about earning a living, about the hundred-and-one things that had nothing to do with survival. Personally, despite my efforts to the contrary, I felt mentally and physically flat, as if I were in a vacuum, or in a trough between one wave the next.

These days he might have been diagnosed as suffering from Post Traumatic Stress. He might have despised the label, just as there may be service personnel who have returned from operations who also despise any form of mental diagnosis. While there wasn't much, if any, help for returning POWs, there weren't damaging labels either. Nobody was going to stand in the way of some ambition. The great thing was to find gainful employment and re-establish a niche in society.



Tom at home during his latter years

Remarkably eighteen months after Tom returned home from the Second World War he was elected to Parliament in a bi-election brought about by the death of Roy Paton, the popular sitting member. Tom had stood for the United Australia Party in March 1935 just weeks before he and Elyne announced their engagement! Apparently he chose to launch his election campaign at Koetong where some of his supporters dressed in kilts in deference to Tom's distant Scottish heritage and when they were short of sporrans they created them from the straw that came around the beer bottles! He stood in October 1937 but again failed to dislodge the popular Roy. With his characteristic good manners, Tom promptly wrote and congratulated Roy. In his thank you letter, Roy said he would have written to Tom if, and when the boot was on the other foot. Sadly Roy was not around to write the letter when Tom was elected in June 1947, but Tom remembered him as being a perfect gentleman and a very good local member of parliament of Victoria.

During his career Tom served as Attorney General from June 1950 until December 1952 and Solicitor General from June 1950 until December 1951. He served on a number of committees including the Standing Orders Committee between 1947 and 1955 and the Statute Law Revision Committee from 1950 to 1958.

Tom might have recognised that when his mother Winifred died on 7 August 1953, a light had gone out of his life and much of his political ambition had faded with it. He lost his greatest supporter and personal and political confidante and advisor<sup>1</sup>. From that time on, his main ambition was to serve others and help the less fortunate in his electorate in any way he could. Additionally he also enjoyed his work with many of the Parliamentary committees. The library committee was his favourite as it enabled him to indulge his ever-present thirst for knowledge.

<sup>1</sup>Tom had also lost his archivist. Winifred kept all his letters, newspaper clippings and memorabilia he'd sent her.

I have often wondered if his real reason for standing for Parliament was the knowledge that his widowed mother had given up so much for him to help him develop his career? I have pondered if the choice had been entirely his, whether he would have chosen to devote his life to skiing and the winter sports instead of politics?

On Friday 2 August, 2013, in a copy of *Falls Creek & Mount Beauty 'This Week'* (Winter Edition), Dianna Patterson wrote,

Tom Mitchell played a significant role in the development of the [Falls Creek] village and is deserving of recognition for the role he played, if not as a 'founding father' but as a guiding 'godfather.'<sup>2</sup>

In another article Tom claimed, his "greatest achievement has been getting the Victorian alpine resorts going." Although in his diary entry on 26 February 1943, Tom recorded the Changi Ski Club's resolution to "approach Repat through RSSL (Returned Sailors and Soldiers' League) for grants of land in snow areas plus finance to develop and train ski troops," Tom's achievements fell short of his dreams but possibly the success of the development of Falls Creek compensated, but to what extent, we will never know. I suspect Tom always believed he could have done better.

Tom began his ski racing career in 1931 winning his first Australian (Slalom and Downhill) Ski Championship, he went on to win National titles in 1931, 1932, 1933 and 1934 and he also achieved an impressive record ski racing in New Zealand. Once he became the local member for Benambra, he had to choose politics or skiing and he'd chosen politics. Perhaps it was a choice he regretted. Although he never admitted it, age must have been a determinant!

Tom enjoyed his long and distinguished involvement with the Boy Scouts and is fondly remembered by many. Although overshadowed by Elyne's literary successes, Tom was a talented non-fiction writer, having published a handbook about skiing entitled *Ski Heil* in 1937 and countless newspaper and magazine articles. He was also a talented photographer.

In the 1976 New Year's Honours, Tom was made a companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG). Although there is no archival proof, within the family, there was rumour that Tom had turned down one of what he called irreverently 'Gough's Gongs'! In the 1976 New Year's Honours Tom was the only Victorian to be awarded a CMG. The honour was for service to the community "particularly in the field of politics, alpine sports and safety and writing."<sup>3</sup> Tom was justifiably proud of the recognition. Perhaps his service to the Boy Scouts could have been mentioned too.

Tom had a cool head in challenging circumstances and in a crisis. He could be mercurial and unpredictable but when the chips were down, he was wonderfully kind. More senior members of the cross-border community perhaps remember him best in his role as the local member for the electorate of Benambra for 29 years from 1947 until his retirement in 1976. He is remembered for his big voice and there were those that said that if he was speaking in the Legislative Assembly, he could be heard in the Legislative Council. He was also remembered for his eccentricities and knitting in Parliament! Christine Watson at *de Kerilleau* tried to teach Tom to knit socks but he wasn't very good when it came to the heel! Until 1976, Wodonga was in his electorate.

Politicians come and go and some are remembered and some are not. Some are remembered for the wrong reasons and most of us joke and criticise them. As his daughter, I suppose you would expect me to say that he was a remarkable man, and in many ways he was. In the title of my talk, I refer to him as a "very extraordinary, ordinary man." One-time local pharmacist Stewart Ross, remarked how Tom could talk to anyone and it didn't matter from what walk of life they came.

He was extraordinary for the way he managed to create his life on his homecoming from the Second World War. Like many former POWs he didn't speak about his war years very much except that starvation haunted him and he hated seeing any food left on our plates.

Perhaps typical of his generation, he was a tough father, but certainly not without humour! About our childhood likes



*Towong Hill* after the devastating 2020 bushfires.

<sup>2</sup>Patterson, Dianna, 'Tom Mitchell – Ski Champion & Visionary' in *Falls Creek & Mount Beauty 'This Week'* (Winter Edition), Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2013) p14

<sup>3</sup>*Corryong Courier* (21 January 1976) p1

and dislikes he remarked “All food is good food!” Late on if the portions served in a restaurant were too generous for me, he’d offer to help in a “small matter of social difficulty!” That meant he would happily swap plates and finish my meal! He drove my mother Elyne to distraction, as he would eat anything and everything and she never knew if there was enough bread. He loved rice and insisted on having it with his main meal on a daily basis.

On 6 January 2020 when we saw the devastation of Tom’s beloved home Towong Hill and how the fire had scorched the headstone on his grave on the ridge overlooking the homestead, I realised Tom had endured enough during his lifetime without a scorching from hell in the Black Summer Fires in his afterlife. It was time I did something about commemorating him in some way, so I began writing. I have completed a first draft to which I am now preparing to return. I was delighted when Howard Jones emailed saying he’d had a ‘crack’ at having an explanatory plaque placed on Thomas Mitchell Drive in Wodonga. Perhaps it is time we had another ‘crack’ and reminded people of the significance of those like Tom who gave a life of service for the good of others.

## **FAMOUS BUT FORGOTTEN FOR 80 YEARS: HERBERT ALDRIDGE 1901-51**

**Howard Jones**

A pioneer of Australian radio and film who served in two world wars lies in an unmarked grave in the Waugh Road Cemetery in Albury. Herbert (“Bert”) Aldridge, 50, died in Albury District Hospital on September 16, 1951 from pneumonia and pulmonary oedema. The RSL assisted at his funeral, but there is no military inscription – nothing but a bare plot.

Aldridge’s significant contribution to broadcasting and his bravery in operating forbidden radios in Nazi prisoner-of-war camps has been forgotten.

Discovering his grave only happened by chance. I recently spotted the headline “Film pioneer is dead” in the *Argus* newspaper for September 18 1951 (while perusing TROVE). I then found the *Border Morning Mail* had a report headed “Famous radio engineer dies.” Researching official records and newspapers, I found his story included service in Africa in two different armies.

Aldridge was born in Liverpool, England, in August 1901, a son and grandson of makers of clocks and watches. British records show he was an apprentice electrician when he joined the Royal Flying Corps in July 1917 for “boy service”. He was just 16 years old, and stood 160cm (five feet, three inches).

He transferred to the new Royal Air Force in April 1918. In August 1919 he joined the British Army, serving in Sudan and Egypt as a corporal. With Army permission, he migrated to Melbourne, aged 22, living with his mother and brothers in Bendigo at first.

Aldridge designed the first powerful transmitters for early Melbourne stations 3AR and 3KZ in 1925 and 1930 respectively, pioneered “continuous broadcasting” and devised mobile transmitters (in vehicles). He set up Radio 7ZL in Launceston in 1925. He also installed equipment for the first “Talkies” in Melbourne in 1928-29.

Aldridge enlisted in December 1939, lying that his age was 34 instead of 38 (until 1940, the upper age limit for AIF recruits was 35). He served in Signals with the 6<sup>th</sup> Division Engineers as a corporal until captured between Benghazi and Tobruk in 1941.

Aldridge endured four years in POW camps in Libya, Italy, Poland and Germany. One was Stalag VIII-A, a huge camp in what is now Zgorzelec, Poland. Early in 1945, he survived a 600-mile (almost 1000 km) “death march” in which almost 4000 POWs were marched westwards for 10 weeks on starvation rations, many dying in the snow. On April 20, 1945, Australian newspapers published sensational interviews with freed POWs in Duderstadt, including Aldridge, detailing the German soldiers’ cruelty.

As well as making clandestine radios in camps, Aldridge helped his mates ease their boredom through theatrical activities, debates, education classes and hobby groups.

Living in the Riverina post-war, he joined the Wagga RSL sub-branch but moved to Englehardt Street, Albury until his death. He never married. His mother and brothers survived him. Alex was a teacher and artist. Fred, a journalist, was a war correspondent in the Pacific in 1944-45.

Albury RSL sub-branch is examining what can be done to mark Herbert Aldridge’s grave.



Richard in his '75 Years Ago' segment focuses on celebrations for Albury City Proclamation Day on April 10, 1947.

The front page headlines read "Thousands Celebrate Albury's Greatest Day." The *Border Morning Mail* article opened with "Albury became a city yesterday, and the people celebrated it throughout the day and far into the evening."

Albury had a half-day holiday and celebrations started after the 11.45am arrival by air of the Governor of NSW, Lieutenant-General John Northcott, with his wife and daughter.



The Floral Clock in Dean Square.

The procession at the Town Hall as it made its way towards the Showgrounds.

The Council float lead the parade, drawn by six bullocks especially trained for the event. The wording on the float was "Albury City, 1947—We Honour our Pioneers." Three girls from a popular girl competition were on board (the popular girl competition was a fund-raising event for the hospital). Dancing girls were in national costumes. The Town Band, Caledonian Band and fire engine were part of the procession. The *Border Morning Mail* estimated that 6,000 people were in Dean Street to celebrate "Albury's Greatest Day."

The procession arrived at the Albury Sportsground at 2.45pm where school children paraded before the Governor in front of a crowd that the BMM estimated to be 10,000 strong. The festivities involved about 2000 school children. There was maypole and folk dancing, before the popular girl competition culminated with a herald dashing up on horseback with the results calculated, handed to the Mayor and the 'Queen' announced, Miss Shirley Arnold having raised £1,241.

During the afternoon, Albury Mayor, Alderman Bunton read an address from the people of Albury, NSW, to the people of Albury, Surrey, England. The address was recorded by the ABC and broadcast directly to England [a recording of Alderman Bunton's address can be heard on our website at <https://alburyhistory.org.au/resources/downloads/>].



Following a civic reception, the Governor read the proclamation in front of the Town Hall proclaiming Albury a city before unveiling a commemorative plaque on the front of the Town Hall (now MAMA).

Many dignitaries were in attendance and a special tribute paid to invited pioneer townspeople who were presented at the Town Hall. Then followed an inspection of a beautiful floral clock constructed for the occasion in Dean Square.

At 2pm, a procession of 25 floats left Young Street, turning into Dean Street. The Governor and other dignitaries viewed



Albury Council's float.



Part of the procession arriving at the Sportsground, Maypoles on the oval.

Then followed a 20-minute revue. The program concluded with a dramatized re-enactment of the arrival of Hume & Hovell.

The procession down Dean Street was repeated at 7.30pm that evening and a spectacular fireworks display (Council had spent £120 on the display) winding up an important day in the history of Albury.

Left: The scene at Albury Sportsground with school children bowed down to form an Australia pattern and a Maypole in the foreground.

As with any community, sharing information and forging generational bonds is key to preserving the stories that lie with people and the place they call home. It develops a sense of belonging and unlocks appreciation for the rich tapestry of lived experiences and changing times that have contributed to a growing city.

With digital technology continuing to evolve and becoming more streamlined than the contraptions of old, new opportunities to engage local areas present exciting new ways to connect with young people through a familiar medium.

At the April Society meeting, I was privileged to share a snapshot of a new virtual experience, in a gesture for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Albury's cityhood. This project is a joint initiative intended for the LibraryMuseum with hopes to inspire further collaborations with the A&DHS in the future.

Through the use of an unconventional tool, Minecraft – a video game made education platform by Microsoft – an interactive 1:1 scale recreation of Albury CBD in a 'retroesque' art style has been created. This experience will allow children and families of all ages to explore the CBD, interacting with different elements to reveal historical re-makes of key buildings and learn about stories from the past.

The display is still under development, with final edits being made for a pop-up launch during the second school term. It is an exciting approach to captivate a new generation in a relevant way.



Two views of the Dean/Kiewa Street corner created by Colbey using Minecraft: the Post Office, Mate's building and the Globe building.

### **ARRIVAL OF THE NORTH-EAST RAILWAY FROM MELBOURNE TO WODONGA IN 1873**

In 2023 it will be 150 years since rail arrived in Wodonga from Melbourne. A&DHS has received a grant of \$3,000 from Wodonga Council to work with Wodonga Historical Society in developing two video documentaries on the impact of the North-east railway on Wodonga. The project to be coordinated by Bruce Pennay.

The videos will explore the ways in which the arrival of the NE Railway in 1873 and its extension across the river in 1883 transformed the lives of Wodonga residents.

They will describe and analyse the events which commemorated the arrival of the railway and the junction of the railways, so as to explain the physical, economic, political and social changes which accompanied these railway developments.

Both are key moments in Wodonga's creation stories, relating the town's development to other urban centres in NE Victoria and across river. The proposed evidence-based story-telling, builds on existing and new research to produce an education resource aimed primarily at the general public and will be freely available to all in a familiar social medium. It will be promoted state-wide at no further cost and at no profit.



Visit our website for photos of old Albury, history articles, past Bulletins and much more. Go to: <https://alburyhistory.org.au/>



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Have you visited our YouTube Channel?

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDzIPypinJegksrO-l2ssVg>



## WAGGA WAGGA RATE BOOKS DIGITISATION PROJECT

Congratulations to Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society who have welcomed the support of the State Government and the RAHS through the 2021 Cultural Grants Program for their Rate Books Digitisation Project.

The funding will see rate records of the Wagga Wagga Council, dated from 1870, digitised and available on the State Archives website. The records cover the Wagga Wagga Borough Council, the Wagga Wagga Municipal Council and the Wagga Wagga City Council.

The records will be a combination of Rate books and Rate Valuation books. All of the records will be posted online later this year, and anyone in the world will be able to view the records on the State Archives website.

The records provide information about properties, houses, buildings, and people, which is not available elsewhere, and are invaluable to those researching local and family histories, or heritage significance.

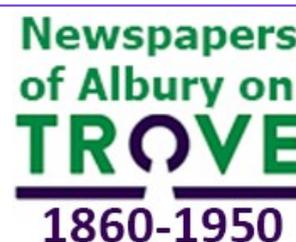
The records vary from year to year but generally record the names and occupations of both the owner and occupant of each rateable property, along with a description of any building. Additional information can include the area and dimensions of the property, and the improved and unimproved values.

The Wagga Wagga Rate Books Digitisation Project is a \$17,000 project supported by the State Government, the RAHS, and five local groups – Charles Sturt University, Museum of the Riverina, Wagga Wagga City Library, Wagga Wagga & District Family History Society, and the Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society.

## BORDER MORNING MAIL DIGITISING FOR THE TROVE WEBSITE

The Society has just been notified that we have been successful in receiving a grant from AlburyCity to continue our program of digitising Albury newspapers and making them available on the Trove website.

We will be receiving \$8085 which will be spent on scanning the *Border Morning Mail* of 1950. It will take about one year before the pages appear on the website.



## A&DHS Corporate Sponsors

Albury & District Historical Society receives generous support from the following sponsors.

Please click on the logo to visit their respective websites.



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**Meeting Greeter:** Cheryl Bromley

**Web Editor:** Greg Ryan

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

The Committee meets on the third  
Wednesday of the month at 3 pm  
at the Albury LibraryMuseum.

#### ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

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Corporate: \$100

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**Research** undertaken, \$25 first  
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