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Tiger Nest Monastery – the image that tourists have of Bhutan.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, August 14, 2024

7.30 pm, Commercial Club Albury

Topic: World War I casualties

Speaker: Honor Auchinleck

ALBURY LIBRARYMUSEUM

Ancient Rome

On until September 1

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PRESIDENT'S NOTES FOR AUGUST

When we think of Nepal and Bhutan we think of the Himalayas, trekking, white water rafting and “high end” tourism. At our July meeting, Albury residents Dr Malcolm and Wendy Moore introduced us to the reality of the country for the majority of its inhabitants. In a very interesting presentation, followed by numerous questions from our members, we gained an insight into how it came to pass that Albury now has a Bhutanese community of about 1500 people.

I thank Steve Judd and Victor Selway for their contribution to our Society as committee members in 2023/24. It is with great pleasure that I welcome Howard Jones and Robyn Hawking to the committee. Howard is a life member of the Society and his experience and knowledge will be a great asset. Members will remember Robyn from the talk she gave in February 2023 about how she traced family members who posed as models for the Tom Roberts masterpiece “Shearing the Rams.”

We have a great deal to look forward to for the remainder of the year. The Uiver anniversary in October will be a busy time for us. The UMCT will be holding a dinner at the Commercial Club on Friday 25 October and I hope there will be a strong representation of our members in attendance. At that time it is possible that we will also receive a visit from our friend in Florida USA, Cesar Becerra, who will continue the story of Mary Brickell – the “Albury Girl” and co-founder of Miami. In November there will be a focus on the 200th anniversary of the arrival of Hume and Hovell followed in December by our Christmas Dinner on 11 December.

Reminder that membership subscriptions for 2024/25 became due last month, single members \$30, family members \$35. Members who require a posted Bulletin please pay an extra \$12 towards postage.

2024/25 Subs Due

Wendy and I lived in Albury from 1986 to 2006. I worked in general practice in Lavington while Wendy worked as a speech pathologist and rehabilitation case manager. We raised our family here. At the end of 2006 we moved away and the first four years of our time away were spent in Nepal. These were amazing, transformative years. Now the road has led us back to Albury again, having returned to settle in 2023.

At the end of 2006 we settled in Dharan, in eastern Nepal. I worked in the Department of General Practice and Emergency at the BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences. This is a 700-bed university-hospital that is the tertiary hospital for the east. Our department taught medical students and post-grad students in GP and emergency medicine. We also ran the general outpatients' unit and the emergency room. This is a government-run hospital and I was paid by the Government of Nepal. At that time there was a mix of Nepali and Australian faculty in the Department but it is now led by Nepali doctors.

The medical system in Nepal is all 'user-pays' with a very small budget to help the poorest. Patients in our emergency department had to buy all of their iv fluids, needles, tubing, medication and dressings. Each patient



relied on their friends or family to organise the money and the supplies for their treatment. So, illness is often a major financial burden and can leave families destitute. A farming family might need to sell their ox to pay for medical bills – but if they recover, they have lost their ability to work the farm and have to try to start over.

The main aim of my being in Nepal wasn't to provide more treatment to patients, it was to train local people to become doctors and health workers. We wanted to become redundant and able to leave without leaving a hole in the system. As GPs we wanted to strengthen the role of generalist doctors so that Nepal didn't continue down the path of relying on single-organ or single



The BPKIHS Faculty in 2009, Malcolm on the right

system specialists to provide care. We knew the value of having a system that is based on doctors who can manage 'whole patients'. Even in Australia this system is now under threat.



Wendy with her ladies displaying some of their jewellery

Meanwhile, Wendy met Kopila Basnet who was in charge of an NGO called Samunnat Nepal. It works to assist women who are victims of domestic violence to rebuild their lives. This organisation is based in a town called Birtamode, 2-3 hours bus ride away from Dharan. It provides a range of services to the women who come for help: legal support for divorce and property settlement; emergency accommodation and support for living expenses; training in income-generation skills; education expenses for children; and counselling where possible.

Wendy agreed to help train the women to make polymer jewellery. She travelled there every alternate week to work with the organisation and the women it was assisting. This close relationship has continued. The jewellery is now made by ten women who have been trained, some for 17 years. They have become highly

proficient artisans – and several now recognise themselves as artists. The jewellery is sold internationally, and the money raised from this supports the running of the organisation. Wendy received an Order of Australia Medal for this work in 2021.

While living in eastern Nepal, we came to know that there were 7 refugee camps nearby that were home to over 100,000 Bhutanese refugees. At that time, the first Bhutanese refugees were being resettled in Albury and we had contact with teachers from Murray High School, where several students had commenced. A group of teachers and students wanted to visit the camps and see where the students had come from. We were able to assist with getting access to the camps where they were able to meet in a camp school with Bhutanese teachers and students. This was a great meeting.

So, we learned the story that had led to this mass exodus of Bhutanese people.

The Kingdom of Bhutan is an independent country of around 700,000 people. In the 1980s there was a large population of Bhutanese people in the south of the country who had Nepalese ancestry. They were known as 'Lhotsampas'. They had come to the country since the late 1800s to do agricultural and land-clearing work. They spoke Nepali and were mostly Hindu, continuing their Nepalese culture. Bhutan is a predominantly Buddhist country.



A map of eastern Nepal.
The blue dots are sites of refugee camps.

In the 1980s the Bhutanese government became concerned about a risk of political agitation and a movement for democracy. This movement was building in Nepal at the time. The Bhutanese government stated concerns about illegal migration. Some Lhotsampas were forced to leave the country on the grounds of not having proper citizenship papers. There was growing cultural repression. People were unable to use their Nepali language in schools and were forced to wear northern Bhutanese dress. Many were arrested and tortured, some were killed. Houses were demolished, people lost their jobs and land was confiscated.

In the 1990s over 100,000 Lhotsampas escaped across the southern border into India. The Indian government didn't allow them to stay and they moved west into Nepal where they settled on the side of the Mai river. There was disease and malnutrition, many people died. The Nepalese government asked the UNHCR to establish refugee camps – they set up seven. The majority of refugees settled in the camps. An estimated 35,000 settled outside the camps in India, Nepal and other countries.

Neither Nepal nor Bhutan could reach agreement about resettling the refugees. A 'third-country' solution was eventually worked out, led by the US who offered to take 60,000 refugees, eventually taking 85% of those resettled. Australia and Canada have both taken over 6000, with several other countries taking smaller numbers.

In Australia, the refugees have settled in most states with many going to Adelaide, Perth, Hobart and Sydney. The first group of 22 refugees arrived in Albury in October 2008. There are now well over 1500 in Albury Wodonga, and many have moved here from other cities because of the success of the community. They have received great support from local councils, the Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau and the Murray Valley Sanctuary Refugee Group. Some of the more 'senior' refugees meet for 'coffee and cards' in the Albury and Lavington libraries each week. You can drop in and meet them in the foyer of the Albury Library/Museum each Monday morning.

For further information on the Samunnat Nepal project go to <https://samunnat.co>

Some of the Samunnat jewellery is stocked by Sally Weatherlake at Albury Picture Framers in AMP Lane.

For a great insight into the story of the Lhotsampa Bhutanese refugees, you can read 'Bhutan to Blacktown: Losing everything and finding Australia' by Om Dhungel, available in the local library.

SNIPPET FROM BRUCE PENNAY

Museums History NSW has mounted an online exhibition *Canberra the Federal Capital Contest* which features excerpts of applications from forty sites hopeful of becoming Australia's new Federal Capital.

Click on the link: [Canberra the Federal Capital Contest](#)

Albury's submission is the collective work of an impressive array of experts and even includes a glossy pictorial publication promoting the attractions of the area and a snappy summary of the main points in its favour.

Albury's first Union Bridge of 1861 replaced punts that had operated from the western end of Hovell street since 1848 and from 1858 at the end of Wodonga street a short street from the southern end of Wodonga Place. Fluctuating water levels caused problems for the ferry operator and passengers. Floods strained the ferry lines and low water made approaches to the punt very boggy. A bridge was needed.

In 1861 the first Union Bridge opened, very close to the location of the present, and third, Union Bridge.

During the October 1867 flood, the third highest ever recorded in Albury, the *Border Post* reported "that the whole of the culverts and bridges between Albury and Wodonga are carried away, the one over the Wodonga Creek being the last one to go." In times of flood, all intercolonial travel had to be by boat. The same *Post* article pointed out that a boat used to de-snag the river was used in "keeping up a daily communication with Victoria, and bringing over the Victorian mails. Their adventure is not without risk, the current being very strong. The party had to tow their boat across the river by walking on the parapets of the bridge, [the Union Bridge] and they waded up to their waists in water, carrying the mails on their shoulders from the bridge to Albury."

After flooding subsided, repair work was urgently required. The *Albury Banner* reported "It is seriously contemplated that a subscription be raised in Albury and Belvoir [Wodonga] to repair the old bridge across the Wodonga Creek, so as to prevent the present deplorable stagnation of inter-colonial trade causing much more distress on both sides of the Murray."

With little or no financial assistance from the Victorian Government, repairs were slow in coming. The *Banner* noted in May 1869 that "From our advertising columns we observe that tenders are called for forming, draining, and metalling forty-one chains of the main Sydney road at the township of Belvoir. Something has also been done towards repairing the road through the Wodonga Flats, which, since the floods of 1867, has been such a bugbear to travellers during the winter season. By the erection of a bridge over the Wodonga Creek, the road has been rendered passable for traffic, unless perhaps in cases of flood. To have placed the road in its former condition, and re-erected the bridges along the line between Belvoir and Albury, would entail so great an expense as not to justify the [Yackandandah Shire] Council in undertaking the work without the assistance of the Government, and this assistance the Government does not appear inclined to grant, at all events until the construction of the North-Eastern line of railway is commenced."

Roads, bridges and culverts had not long been repaired before the 1870 flood, which was even higher than in 1867, though not as destructive. The *Banner* told readers that "The Wodonga flats have been navigable by boat for a week past, and much inconvenience has resulted from the practical stoppage of all except the most urgent traffic which has thereby occurred. The charge for ferrying over a horse is 10 shillings, and foot passengers 2 shillings 6 pence, these remunerative charges being for the trip one way only."

Road traffic must have returned to normal by December 1870 with George Filmer advertising in the *Banner*: "An Express Coach to Wodonga will leave the Exchange Hotel [Albury] every day at half-past 9 and half-past 11am, and at 5 and 6 o'clock pm, and from Mackay's Hotel Wodonga to Albury at half-past 8 and half-past 10am, and half-past 1 and 4 o'clock pm."

Coach between Albury and Wodonga.

AN EXPRESS COACH to Wodonga will leave the Exchange Hotel every day at Half-past Nine and Half-past Eleven a.m.; and at 5 and 6 o'clock p.m.; and from Mackay's Hotel, Wodonga, to Albury, at Half-past Eight and Half-past Ten a.m., and Half-past One and Four o'clock p.m.

G. FILMER.

The following May, we read that "A hackney coach license is granted to George Filmer, to carry seven passengers."

With rail on its way to Wodonga from Melbourne, Filmer soon had competition. In December 1872 the *Banner* noted that "A stage carriage license was granted to Henry Reed." Then in May of the following year "In anticipation of the traffic likely on completion of the railway line, another omnibus proprietor has entered the field. With three omnibuses plying on the road, we certainly cannot complain that facilities for intercourse between the two townships are wanting."

The noun *omnibus* originated in the 1820s as a French word for long, horse-drawn vehicles to transport people. In Latin, *omnibus* means 'for all.' What we commonly refer to as a *bus* is a shortened form of the word *omnibus*.

In May 1873 it was noted that "Robert Morris applied for a stage carriage license for an omnibus, plying between Wodonga and Albury. Application granted" and "Henry Such applied for a stage carriage license. Application granted."

When the north-east rail line terminated at Wodonga in November 1873, it was another ten years before rail linked Wodonga and Albury. In 1875, Crawford Coaches "purchased

from the Victorian Railway department the exclusive right of driving omnibuses into the reserve at the Wodonga railway terminus.”

Freak Accident

A freak accident landed George Filmer in Albury Court in 1876. Filmer’s coach driver was travelling east on Dean street and crossed to the right hand side of the road, stopping to let a passenger off at the Albury Hotel. A Crawford’s coach heading west ran into Filmer’s coach and a protruding pole on the stationary coach speared and killed one of Crawford’s horses. Judge Forbes ruled “that drivers of conveyances must keep to the left,” Filmer’s driver should have completed a U-turn and pulled up facing west – the judge awarded damages of £15 plus costs.

Albury Banner, February 26, 1876

Albury coach builders benefitted from the competition. The *Albury Banner* reported in August 1878 that “We had an opportunity a few days since of inspecting a new omnibus turned out from the factory of Messrs Higgins and Baker to the order of H A Crawford and Co, and intended for the traffic between Albury and Wodonga. The new vehicle is substantially constructed and very neatly finished; the work throughout indeed could hardly be surpassed, either for strength or elegance of appearance ... constructed to carry twelve passengers ... “

The Great Southern Rail line reached Albury from Sydney in February 1881. However it was over two years before a rail bridge connected the NSW and

Victorian rail systems. That increased demand for coach travel across Wodonga Flats.

The *Weekly Times* reported on February 5, 1881 “The completion of the railway line between Sydney and Albury was celebrated, Thursday ... The time in which the journey can now be made between Sydney and Melbourne has been narrowed down to twenty-five hours and twenty minutes, the fares being as follows:— First-class, single, £4; first-class, return, £5 5s; second-class, single, £3; second-class, return, £4. In addition, there is an extra shilling to pay for transit by omnibus from Wodonga to Albury. On the New South Wales line sleeping cars will run with every mail train, in which a berth may be obtained for an extra fare of 10s. These cars contain twenty beds, which are made to fold away in the daytime.” The same article listed a typical timetable: “On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays a train will leave Sydney at 8.20 am, arriving at Albury the following morning at 1.05 o’clock. Through passengers can then catch the 6.10 train at Wodonga, and reach Melbourne at 1.58 pm the same day.”

Competition was reduced between Wodonga/Albury coach operators when a temporary wooden rail bridge across the Murray River opened in June 1883. This bridge completed the rail connection between Sydney and Melbourne. Crawford Coaches had done well from the arrangement, charging one shilling for travel from Wodonga to Albury, much of it between the Wodonga rail terminus and Albury for which they purchased exclusive rights in 1875.



A coach with ‘Victorian Railways’ signage prepares to depart Albury Railway Station on the day that the arrival of the Great Southern Rail from Sydney was celebrated in February 1881.



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FAREWELL JAN HUNTER

Helen Livsey

Jan Hunter joined the Albury Historical Society in 1985 and we didn't realise then what a gift she would be to the Society and to the history of Albury and its people. She wrote the first seven books in the Historical Society's Papers series and later recorded the buildings of her father, Les Chick, resulting in the 2013 book *L F Chick, Building Contractor, and Albury Builders and Allied Trades Contractors c1900-c1960*. She published *Building the Neighbourhood Central North Albury 1920-1950*, followed by many more Papers, several biographical. She addressed the Society, and other community organisations, on diverse subjects. Her first address to the Society was *Health, Education and me* – Jan contracted polio at the age of eight years.

Jan's life began at Albury's Meramie Private Hospital in 1937. She was educated at North Albury Infants School and Albury High School and was an accomplished pianist. She married Doug in 1959 and they had three children, the last one being born in New Guinea where they spent some years. Jan qualified as a teacher and joined the staff of Xavier High School in 1984 teaching English, History and Drama.

Jan's life story in her memorial booklet is most comprehensive and we congratulate the family on that production.

Jan and Doug have both contributed greatly to the education and entertainment of our members. We are extremely grateful to them both for their contributions to the Society and for volunteering at the Albury LibraryMuseum cataloguing local history items.

Jan became an Honorary Life Member of the Historical Society in 2014. We will greatly miss her friendship and her care for others.



Life Membership 2014

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The Committee meets on the third
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