

Albury & District Historical Society Inc

May 2025

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The maritime experts who found the wreck of the *Montevideo Maru*.
Front: Retired Commodore Tim Brown, Captain Roger Turner, Andrea Williams. Back: Max Uechtritz, Neale Maude, John Mullen.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, May 14, 2025

7.30 pm, Commercial Club, Albury

Topic: Death by Misadventure – the Wodonga Rail Tragedy

Speaker: Andrew Johnston

ALBURY LIBRARYMUSEUM
Birds Eye View – photos from Monument Hill.
Until August 17

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SLV Blogs

PRESIDENT'S NOTES FOR MAY

Captain Roger Turner gave a polished presentation at our last meeting to help bring closure for relatives of two local men who perished on the *Montevideo Maru*. Captain Turner arrived at the meeting early and stayed afterwards chatting personally to relatives and answering their questions. We hope to have him join us again to tell us about his successful search for Australia's first two submarines one of which sank and the other scuttled.

We recently participated in the ceremony to mark the 100th anniversary of the "unveiling" of the Albury & District War Memorial, known to us as "The Monument." It was an honour and a privilege to speak on behalf of our society.

The ceremony was jointly organised by AlburyCity and the RSL and I thank them both for the opportunity to address the gathering. We recently noted the 80th anniversary of the end of WW2 and in light of these two important milestones our guest speakers have focussed on a military theme. In the second half of the year we will turn our attention to local history, including the 175th anniversary of the Albury Public School and the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Girl Guides in Albury.

We always enjoy a presentation by one of our own members talking about their family or the area they grew up in. If you have information about a local subject but do not feel confident about making the presentation yourself, we can help. We can put the information together and arrange for one of our members to present it for you. Please approach Jenny Romero, our speaker co-ordinator, if you think that you are aware of an item of local history which would make a good subject for a talk.

This month we warmly welcome new members Noel & Val White.

Captain Roger Turner CEng, RN was the Search Director of the team searching for the Japanese prisoner of war ship, *Montevideo Maru*. Captain Turner studied at the Royal Naval College Greenwich, now a museum. A marine engineer, he served in the Royal Navy for thirty years specialising in nuclear submarines. He was a senior engineer on a Polaris submarine. He also held diplomatic appointments, one in Moscow and another in Brazil.



After leaving the Royal Navy, Captain Turner and his family moved to Australia. He now lives near Bright, Victoria. Captain Turner was guest speaker at our April meeting.

Albury's Connection with the Montevideo Maru

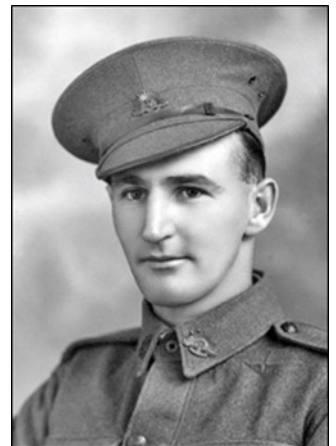
On February 28, 1941 the 23rd Infantry Brigade conducted a parade through Albury. It was the largest parade in Albury's history. Over 3000 men from the 2/21st Battalion, the 2/22nd Battalion and the 2/40th



3000 soldiers parade in Dean St Albury,
February 28, 1941

Battalion took part in the parade. In April 1941 the 2/21st Battalion was sent to Ambon in Indonesia, the 2/40th Battalion was sent to West Timor, and 2/22nd Battalion was sent to Rabaul. Less than a third of the 3000 Albury marchers survived the war.

Private George William Lanham served with the 2/22nd Battalion. Private Lanham was from Albury. The 2/22nd Battalion completed their training at Bonegilla. They were sent to Rabaul, New Britain as part of the "Lark Force" on April 26, 1941. Their role was to protect the air bases at Lakunai and Vunakanau, and the seaplane base at Rabaul.



were overwhelmed by 5000 invading Japanese soldiers. It is estimated that 300 of the 2/22nd managed to escape and returned to Australia, 160 were captured and massacred at the Tol Plantation and the remainder were interned as prisoners-of-war and were held in camps in Rabaul. Private Lanham was captured and became a prisoner-of-war.

On January 23, 1942 the 1400 men of the Lark Force



Corporal Gordon Bradley Reed (Bunny) was deployed with the 1st Independent Group. The group was one of twelve commando companies formed during World War II. The 1st Independent Group was formed in June 1941. Once deployed overseas the group was stationed in a number of different locations, but the main force was in New Ireland to defend the Kavieng Airfield. With the invasion of New Ireland some of the 1st Independent Group escaped on a schooner, the *Induna Star*. It was sighted by a Japanese plane, attacked and forced to surrender. The survivors were taken to Rabaul and became prisoners-of-war. Corporal Reed was one of the men captured.

Montevideo Maru's Final Trip

After the fall of Rabaul, it became the major Japanese base in the region until 1943. In the Rabaul prisoner of war camps the officers were separated from the non-commissioned officers and men and transported to Japan until the end of the War.

The non-commissioned officers and male prisoners were held in atrocious conditions until June 22, 1942. The Japanese had been transporting prisoners of war to Hainan Island to use them as forced labour. The prisoners held in Rabaul were also to be sent to Hainan Island where, according to the survivors of the Hainan Island war camps, they would be forced to work like slaves.



Group portrait of the 2/22nd Battalion

In total, 852 prisoners-of-war and 201 civilians from 14 allied nations were put on the Japanese ship *Montevideo Maru* on the morning of June 22, 1942. The ship sailed for Hainan later that day. She was escorted for the first part of the passage but proceeded without escorts or air cover as she approached the Babuyan Channel north of the Philippines. As she exited that Channel she was spotted by the USS *Sturgeon*, an American Salmon Class submarine.

On June 5, USS *Sturgeon* commenced its fourth patrol just west of Manila. She was capable of a speed of 18 knots surfaced and 9 knots submerged. Its commander was Lt Cdr William [Bull] Leslie Wright, USN.

The *Montevideo Maru* was eight days into her voyage when spotted going at her best speed of around 17 knots. The submarine could barely keep up. At around midnight the *Montevideo Maru* slowed down to an economic cruising speed of around 12 knots which allowed the submarine to overhaul, dive and assume a torpedo firing position.



USS *Sturgeon*

The submarine fired four torpedoes at the ship. USS *Sturgeon*'s log records an impact at 2.29 am, hitting the ship about 25 metres aft of the funnel. Surviving Japanese sailors reported two explosions, and corroborated the submarine's report that the ship sank by the stern in around 11 minutes.

Captain Turner explained how and why the ship broke apart on sinking – the weight of the sinking stern of the ship put forces on the structure that it was not designed to withstand. This caused a fracture of the bridge superstructure and the ship broke into two parts that would settle some 500m apart on the sea floor.

It has been recorded that 102 of the Japanese crew and guards survived to reach the Philippines but many were lost in skirmishes with the local forces before some rejoined the occupying Japanese forces.

While the exact number of people killed has never been confirmed, it is believed that 852 Australian military personnel, and 201 civilians lost their lives in the tragedy together with 20 Japanese. The loss is considered Australia's worst maritime disaster. Corporal Reed and Private Lanham died in the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*.

Finding the *Montevideo Maru*'s Final Resting Place

The ship sank on July 1, 1942 in the South China Sea. Its final resting location was not known for 81 years.



The Silentworld Foundation and Fugro, a Dutch company that supplied the deep-sea survey ship, took on the humanitarian project to find the final resting place of the *Montevideo Maru*. They hoped that finding the ship would bring peace and closure to those affected by the tragedy. It took five years of research and preparation. The ship *Fugro Equator* with its team of maritime experts together with the Silentworld search team commenced the search on April 6, 2023.

Captain Turner explained the complexity of searching a vast and unknown ocean floor for a wreck of a ship, sunk 81 years earlier, in the middle of night, in war time, with only approximate co-ordinates to identify its possible location.

According to the USS *Sturgeon*'s log, the *Montevideo Maru* sank about 65 nautical miles west of Cape Bojeador, Luzon, an island of the Philippines. The search team identified the 'Most Probably Position' together with two secondary possible positions. Apart from a dangerous storm which forced the team to suspend the search and seek shelter in lee of the Philippines, the search was carried out in mainly calm waters.

Captain Turner described the relief when first examining the 'most probable position.' The sea floor was "boringly flat," and no major obstructions were observed. The team initially conducted "bottom contour mapping" allowing them to program the autonomous underwater vehicle (AUV) so that it could operate at a constant height over the seabed. Using what Captain Turner referred to as a snail shell search pattern, the AUV

began collecting data. It took time for the data to be downloaded to the ship's computers and for the team to examine the images being generated from the AUV.

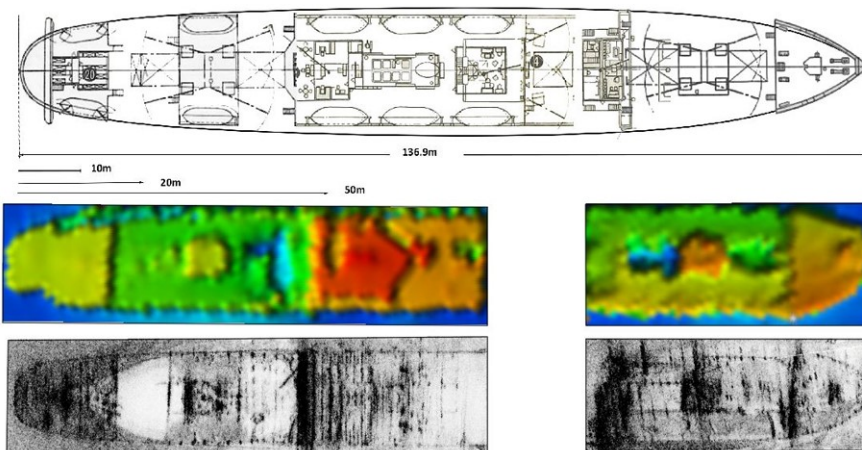
On the third AUV mission, after twelve days of searching, the team located the *Montevideo Maru*. When the images of the wreck first came into view, there was a moment of quiet contemplation while the team gazed at the images on the screens. They were confident they had found the *Montevideo Maru*, but more work was to be done, more data and images to be collected to confirm without a doubt that it was the ship they were wanting to find. It was an emotional moment for the team when the images first appeared.



The AUV

The elation of finding the ship quickly moved to sadness. They were looking at the gravesite of more than 1000 people. Two people on board the *Fugro* had family members lost in the tragedy and had spent much of their lives tracking down the location of the ship and tracking down the victims and their descendants.

The *Montevideo Maru* wreck was located at a depth of over 4000 metres (deeper than the *Titanic*) by Fugro's AUV on April 18, 2023. It took several days to confirm the identity of the wreck. Expert analysis by maritime archaeologists, conservators and ex-naval officers, and using scans of the wreck, including the hold, the foremast and the bow, and using computer generated imaging, they matched the images captured by the AUV against file drawings of the ship. The team finally confirmed what they already knew: they had found the *Montevideo Maru*.



Ship drawing compared with AUV scan data

The search team expanded the search to collect images of the debris field from the sinking ship. Although it was scattered over a large area, the debris was clustered in two main areas around the two significant sections of the wreck.

The images confirmed the Japanese ship was not only carrying prisoners-of-war, but the ship was also carrying war supplies. Captain Turner explained that by the time of the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*, almost all nations had abandoned the

rules of war at sea and as such the *Montevideo Maru* was a legitimate target. At the time of the sinking, the ship was not brightly lit up as it should have been if signaling it was carrying prisoners-of-war, and it was travelling at speed.

The Commander of the *USS Sturgeon*, once he found out that the ship was carrying Australian prisoners of war and learnt how many lost their lives, bore the agony of his regret for the rest of his life.

Captain Turner explained that the wreck is the “final resting place” of the 1,073 souls who perished with her but because it is in international waters it is not covered by the War Graves Act, so it does not have the protection usually afforded war graves. The Silentworld Foundation did not and will not disturb the wreck. The human remains and artifacts will not be removed.

“It’s a tomb that must be treated with appropriate respect,” said Captain Turner.

When asked why we do this, Captain Turner observed that it is only an accident of time and birth that it was not any one or indeed many of us who might have been on board that ship. Had that been the case it would be comforting to think that someone, some time would want to come and find us.

He added that it is important that we bring more than just words when we say “Lest We Forget.”

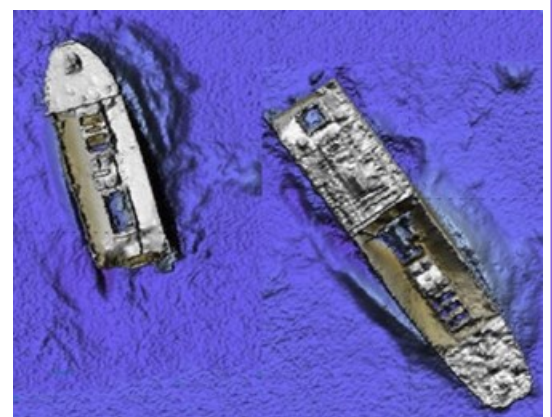


Image of hull sections compiled from AUV multibeam sonar data.

How did our forebears find their way at night without street lights? Many would not venture out unless there was plenty of moonlight. However, life went on at night. On June 28, 1864 James Fallon hosted a 'Great Ball' commencing at 8pm with over 400 guests arriving (Albury's population about 1000). Guests in their finery had to get home safely in the dark – there was no street lighting in 1864 and for many nothing more than a waning crescent moon rising at about 3 am that night to show the way home (*an account of the 'Great Ball' is on page 7*).

People often learned to rely on detailed mental maps of their surroundings. In the dark they could recall the layout of the town, the position of obstacles such as trees and potholes. They would remember details of a familiar trail. A portable lantern may have been used fuelled by animal fats, vegetable oils, whale oil or more likely kerosene which became readily available in the mid-19th century and revolutionised lighting.

The *Albury Banner* of July 15, 1865 commented that Albury was slow to introduce street lighting:

It is proposed to partially light the town of Albury by placing twelve lamps at the intersections of the principal streets and certainly these would make a great difference in their appearance at night. They are proposed to be lighted with kerosene, and we understand that Chiltern and Rutherglen are now most efficiently lighted by that means. We do not know why Albury should be behind, for we see by the following, from the *Pastoral Times*, that the little township of Deniliquin is about to go a step farther ahead and aspire to gas.

In June the following year the *Banner* published specifications for the position of Lamp Lighter:

1. That the contractor light the twelve (12) lamps of the town with the best kerosene oil and wicks, the same and all other materials to be provided by the contractor.
2. That the lamps be lighted every evening at dark, except when the moon rises before 7pm, and kept burning until 1 o'clock the next morning, except on full moonlight nights, when the lamps may be extinguished as soon as the moon rises.
3. That the contractor keeps the lamps in as good order and condition as when the contract is accepted at his own risk and expense.
4. That the lamps be kept perfectly clean and in good order, and well-trimmed.
5. That the Public Works Committee superintend the above works, and on the contractor's receiving notice from the Town Clerk of any want or defect in the lighting it shall be immediately attended to and remedied by him.

Tenders were called and the *Banner* reported on June 30, 1866 that only one tender had been received, that of William Green for £90 for twelve months. Just seven days later, Mr Green resigned, stating that the wicks required were not what he had anticipated.

Tenders were called again in August and this time for a one month trial. Four were received and again Mr Green's tender was accepted for 16 shillings per week.

Two weeks later the *Banner* was happy with the results:

ENLIGHTENMENT OF ALBURY.—At last darkness has been dispersed from a few of the streets in Albury, by the lighting of the twelve town lamps ... Last Saturday night a Municipal lamp-lighter, with a veritable ladder on his shoulder, was to be seen running from post to post; and in the course of half an hour or so we had a general out-door illumination ...The experiment is being tried for a month only, but we believe the public will be so satisfied with the result of the experiment.

But all was not going to plan. In October a correspondent to the *Border Post* complained "On stormy nights when lights are most required, the lamps invariably get blown out by the wind." One month later the *Banner* lamented that the lights were off again:

LOCAL DARKNESS.— For a little time we had light in Albury through the medium of the Municipal lamps, but the time of the contractor having expired, and, as he has declared his unwillingness to continue the contract, fresh tenders are now called for to light and tend the lamps for a period of four months.

Tenders were called at the end of November 1866. The successful tenderer was Mr F O'Sullivan.

It was not long before Albury Municipal Council began looking for a more convenient fuel than kerosene which was quite expensive and had to be daily carried around town to each street light.

In May 1879 the *Border Post* wrote:

Street Lighting—It is beyond a joke to hear of the large amount paid by the Borough Council for kerosene when so little light is shed in consideration thereof. Last Wednesday night not a single lamp post in Albury was illuminated.



One of Albury's street lamps preserved on the roundabout at the intersection of Kiewa and Poole streets

There were two failed efforts in the 1870s to raise the necessary capital for an Albury gas works. In June 1882 a meeting was called which resulted in the formation of the Albury Gas Company.

By August, shareholders had purchased all 6000 shares, tenders for plant construction were called for in September and in December Messrs Hayes, Scanlon, Edmondson, Abercrombie, Griffith and Allan were confirmed as a board of directors.

The company purchased land in Kiewa Street between Hume and Smollett Streets. Contractors Stevens and Kyle had the plant well under way early in 1883, building a gas tank 18 feet deep and 38 feet in diameter, walled with bricks 18 inches thick. Gas could be produced day and night, burning up to 300 pounds (136 kg) of coal daily.

Albury was lit with gas for the first time on Saturday June 2, 1883. The *Albury Banner* noted that “townspeople and principal shareholders met and the works formally set going.” The occasion was celebrated with toasts of champagne.

The *Ovens & Murray Advertiser* reported that initially, mains were laid down from:

Kiewa-street, from the works to the Oddfellows’ Hall; Dean-street, from the Club Hotel up to Olive-street; Townsend-street, from Dean-street to the custom house; Smollett-street, from Townsend-street right up to the railway station, and Olive-street, from Smollett to Wilson street. These will be the first, and afterwards, “if sufficient inducement offered,” we suppose the company will carry the mains further afield.

Tenders were accepted for lighting the street lights, the company charging £10 per annum to light each gas lamp (initially there were 16) and Mr J Brougham charging 9s 11d per lamp per month for the remaining kerosene lamps outside the gas company’s range.

Galvanised piping was used underground while lead tubing was used for lighting and cooking points in homes. Disused lead can still be found in some original Albury residences.

The gas company, being responsible to shareholders, was not always enthusiastic about extending their network. As a result, on several occasions over the next thirty years, there were proposals from Albury Municipal Council to purchase the company and all its assets. In October 1890, Council offered £8000. In reply, Mr J H Paine, secretary of the gas company, wrote that the “offer is much below the market value of the shares” and the directors asked £14000 for the works.

The gas company responded, expanding their works, installing a new gas tank, 21 feet deep and 80 feet in diameter, completed in 1892.

In 1891 some gas street lights were moved to the centre of major intersections. Mr G S Dulley, inspector of lamps, reported to council:

Now that the ornamental trees in the streets had attained their present growth the street lamps were of very little use except at the immediate corners, and he suggested that lamps be placed in the centre of the road at the intersection of the principal streets, as the lamps would have much more effect.

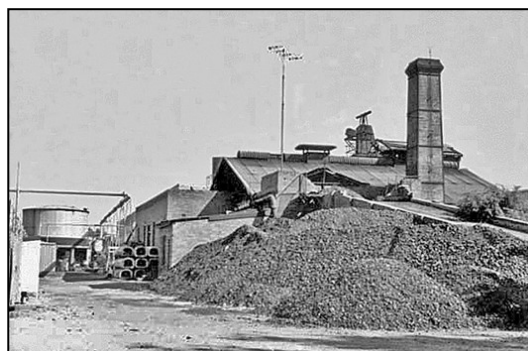
By 1887 Council was talking electricity, having first encountered this 19th century phenomenon when it was used to light the engine shed at the railway for the banquet to celebrate the inter-colony connection of the railways in 1883. In 1889 the *Border Post* reported “Alderman Ten Brink stated that thousands of pounds could have been saved had Council adopted a system of electric lighting three years ago.”

In October 1912, ratepayers of Albury approved at the ballot box a new ‘Albury Electric Scheme’ – to borrow £10,500 to establish a scheme for “lighting, pumping and sewerage,” to be paid back within 30 years using a rate of three-eighths of a penny charged on unimproved property values.

The Albury Gas Company contract to light Albury’s streets was terminated after electricity was at last switched on to provide street lighting on July 28, 1916. The *Border Morning Mail* told readers “Electricity Scheme Completed ... the town of Albury takes on an added beauty after dusk ... the softer brilliancy is so great that the papers on the boards outside the ‘Border Morning Mail’ office can be comfortably read.”

On August 26, 1916 the *BMM* reported that: “the street gas lamps ... were yesterday removed from their central positions at the intersections of the principal streets.”

The decision had been made to locate the power plant in an extension of the Waterworks Pumphouse. That source was switched off in 1926 with the supply then coming 290 miles (467 km) from Yallourn in Victoria. A switch to the NSW electricity grid was not made until 1958.



Albury gas works in Kiewa St

TUESDAY last, Coronation day, too, by the way, saw the realisation of a great event in Albury, and one long expected — namely, the holding of a ball such as the Border City nor any town between the two centres of the sister states has yet witnessed. The occasion was the partial completion of new stores on a most extensive scale by Mr James T Fallon, whose name, fame, and business relations extend throughout the Upper Murray districts. Invitations had been sent out for seven hundred to celebrate the completion of the new building, of which, as a matter of course, we should first say something about.

Mr Fallon has for some months been occupied in building on his recent purchase of land adjoining the Globe Hotel, and in close proximity to the centres of population in the form of the Telegraph-office, Church of England, Court-House, Mechanics' Institute, site for Post office, Police Barracks, Market, &c, &c, and on Tuesday evening last an assemblage met to do honor [sic] to the occasion, which must even have surprised the giver of the feast. For a day or two previously Albury was being filled with visitors; for a week or two stores had been ransacked and turned over for the latest or the earliest fashions in flowers, silks, feathers, and laces to adorn and decorate feminine beauty. Great was the demand, and great the exertions of all the local storekeepers to do honor [sic] to the occasion, so that in the end Albury produced an event at which Albury itself was surprised upon more points than one.

There was surprise at the capacity for a ball of such magnitude, surprise at the liberality of the donor, surprise at the numbers and beauty which adorned it, surprise, in fact, at its general and great success. The heart of the host must have beaten in quickened pulsations as he saw the couples pouring into the room to chronicle the event. At eight o'clock they began to come, and, for half-a-dozen hours, the cry was, "still they come." For the information of those not there we would say that there was a ball-room of eighty-five feet by forty feet, into which four hundred from Albury, and from every direction in Victoria, to Beechworth, and, in New South Wales, to the Ten Mile Creek, Corowa and Billabong, and to Tumbarumba, poured, hour after hour.

The room, although unfinished, was decorated and furnished in good style, everyone in the town being ready for days before to lend a willing hand to make an appearance suitable to the event. Evergreens did good service, flags of all colors [sic] and nations came into play, Chinese lanterns and newly brought into light old decorations from past events, such as the celebration of the marriage of the Prince of Wales, &c, helped well to fill up; while a choice collection of primeval, mediaeval, and modern celebrities, from Eve down to Coombes the Champion of the Thames, and Clasper the Champion of the Tyne smiled down upon the votaries of Terpsichore, from gilded frame and overdone bower and festoon of wattle, peppermint and gum, nodding approvingly as the floor vibrated to the twinkling feet of the dancers.

Many were the hearts lost, but they were those of beauty and loveliness, wishing to be mated; many were the toes trodden upon, wanting more room. And the charm of all was that good humor [sic] was the presiding genius. Cliqueism, and setting up of shoulders, sitting in corners, and, in fact, all snobbisms were of no avail. They were fairly beaten down, and, we would hope, extinguished forever in Albury. It was seen how so very much better they could be done without that we should hope they will be ashamed of themselves, and never again show their faces. And after doing a dozen dances came a supper, of who shall say what magnitude or extent? Who shall count the fowls, geese, turkeys, and *blanc manges*? who number the plates, knives, forks, and glasses employed to consume them? Mr Lewis Jones, the purveyor, alone can tell. And then more dancing; more toe-crushing; more heart-breaking. Shoemakers and parsons will soon have a busy time of it or we are much mistaken. Surely the host will require assistance before long to enable him to properly open the next ball he gives. In a word, let us say that the welcome was hearty, the provision ample, the event most enjoyable, and the music abominable, against which only good dancing and a thorough determination for enjoyment, with a frequent display of patience to catch the time could possibly have contended.



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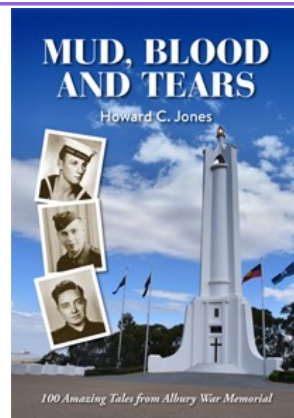
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MUD, BLOOD AND TEARS

A new book by Howard Jones honours 100 who lost their lives in conflicts overseas and are commemorated at the Albury War Memorial. "Mud, Blood and Tears" covers four conflicts, the Boer War, World Wars 1 and 2 and the Vietnam War. The book is a collection of biographies, describing life before the conflicts and the circumstances of their death at the frontline or at sea or in the air or as prisoners of war. The book is published by Albury & District Historical Society in recognition of the centenary of the Albury War Memorial which was commemorated on Anzac Day.

The book costs \$20 and is available for sale at Albury LibraryMuseum in Kiewa street, Albury Newsagency in Olive street and 2Grey Birds in Dean street.



MORE SLV BLOGS

The State Library of Victoria continues to publish interesting blogs. A recent one has particular local interest featuring well-known author Elyne Mitchell, mother of Society member Honor Auchinleck.

Click on the links below.

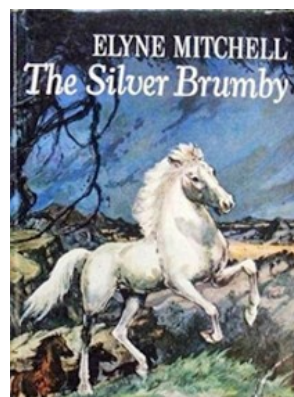
Elyne Mitchell: [Reconnecting with The Silver Brumby](#)

What Melbourne was like in the mid-19th century: [Melbourne in 1852](#)

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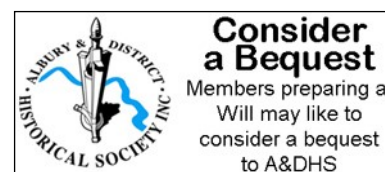
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Meetings: Second Wednesday of the month (except January) at 7.30 pm usually at the Commercial Club Albury.

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

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