

Albury & District Historical Society Inc

June 2025

No 667

Wiradjuri Country, PO Box 822 ALBURY 2640

<https://alburyhistory.org.au/>

For Your Reference A&DHS account details are:

BSB 640 000 Acc No 111097776

Registered by Australia Post PP 225170/0019 ISSN 2207-1237



Next Meeting

Wednesday, June 11, 2025

7.30 pm, Commercial Club, Albury

Topic: Albury's WWI Story

Cast: Society members and Albury LibraryMuseum staff.



The crash scene in Wodonga the morning after the tragic collision in 1943 that resulted in the death of 25 on the bus.

ALBURY LIBRARYMUSEUM
Walking Through a
Songline
From National Museum
June 14 to September 7

Page 2 Bus/Rail Tragedy

Page 4 Shooting at Oaklands

Page 6 Sundial/Mates Ltd

Page 7 Railway Station Clock

Page 8 Walter Alfred Selle

PRESIDENT'S NOTES FOR JUNE

Another well attended meeting in May was addressed by Superintendent Paul Smith aided by Senior Constable Ash Bolt of the Police Media Unit. We watched and heard the shocking story of the shooting death of Sergeant Howe, felled in the line of duty in 1963. Superintendent Smith is creating a museum of police historical items in the police training centre. We are very willing to give the Superintendent our help and support as he builds this important legacy. We also heard from Andrew Johnston speaking in detail about the Wodonga rail tragedy in 1943 which claimed the lives of 24 soldiers and the civilian bus driver. A thoroughly researched book about the tragedy was purchased by a number of members on the night. The meeting continued our military theme to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of WWII.

Our Annual General Meeting is approaching in July. If you would like to put your name forward to join our committee, now is a good time to let your intentions known. Nomination forms will be available on our welcome table in June.

Mon Taylor of Redhead Media kindly gave us permission to upload to our YouTube channel her video recording of the service commemorating the centenary of the Albury War Memorial. The 42 minute video can be viewed at [Albury War Memorial Centenary](#).

Our meeting in June will take a very different format. Members will be treated to an evening at the theatre. As you know, Doug Hunter wrote a series of scripts highlighting the places of significance to WWI and the support given to our soldiers fighting at the Front. The scripts were written in support of an exhibition at the ALM and involved three bus tours, all of which were fully subscribed. This is an opportunity for members to hear the interesting details of events which were happening in Albury as the war progressed.

A big welcome to four new members who joined our Society in the last few weeks: Lyn Lillecrapp, Megan Lavender, Arthur Castano and John Jorgenson.

There were two presentations at our May meeting, each focused on a tragic event that occurred some time ago in our district. The telling of the story of each event ensures that they will not be forgotten.

Resting peacefully in the Adelaide River Cemetery, a 113 kilometre drive south of Darwin on the Stuart Highway, the remains of the first two casualties of Australia's involvement in World War II lie in Commonwealth war graves. Disillusioned by a conflicted legacy surrounding the enormous loss of life in the Great War (WWI), seven million Australians tuned into the wireless on September 15, 1939 to hear the Prime Minister declare that the country, once again, was at war.

Two days after the declaration of war, 23 year-old Flying Officer Arnold Dolphin from NSW and 28 year-old Corporal Harold Johnson from Victoria were members of the RAAF ferrying a Wirraway aircraft to Darwin for coastal patrol missions. Sadly, the aircraft stalled and crashed killing both men.

Australia's well-chronicled record of WWII, describing how and why a country has such an ongoing national reverence towards its military force, contains volumes of stories recollecting the bravery and courage of Australia's Second Imperial Force – the 2nd AIF. Nearly one million Australian men, just like Arnold and Harold, were rushed to fight in a war, and many paid the ultimate price.

A total of 39,649 Australian souls were lost during Australia's 1939-1945 WWII experiences. Understandably, not every one of those deaths is recorded in detail. Countless stories of Australia's involvement in the war, and the thousands of victims, still remain anonymous – they are the unknown soldiers and for many known only to God. But there is also a growing quantum of soldiers who have added to Australia's casualty rates. But they are not treated as one of the unknown; they are regarded as the unimportant. Their deaths are equally painful, but they have been branded insignificant simply because they did not even make it to the battle. Instead, their lives came to an end by errant misfortune whilst on home soil training for the honour.

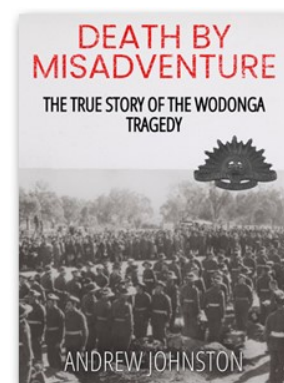
Drawing from my experience as a former infantry soldier and military investigator, I am intimately acquainted with the reality that training accidents, suicides, misadventures, and sometimes a hierarchy's complacency towards safety (prioritising it below realism) continue to exact a toll on the lives of ordinary Australian men and women in uniform. The rationale is straightforward: training must mirror the realities of combat as closely as possible, enabling troops to be optimally prepared for the challenges of the battlefield. Engaging with live ammunition, explosives, and intricate heavy machinery designed for destruction constitutes a dangerous occupation, one frequently accompanied by fatal outcomes.

But what of the families of those so-called 'unimportant' military victims whose lives are claimed by ignoble circumstances? How do they grapple with the knowledge that their cherished ones fell victim to inglorious incidents unrelated to combat? Must they endure a secret indignity, aware that their loved ones did not meet their end at an adversary's hands but became mute casualties of accidents, incompetence, or misadventure?

Left to navigate the aftermath of military training accidents, these families endure their struggles in isolation, often shrouded in heavy silence. Deprived of public acknowledgment or an outpouring of collective mourning, their sacrifices remain unremarked. How do they summon the strength to survive the initial onslaught of horror and preserve the legacy of respect their loved ones deserve?

In the latter phase of my military career, my role as an Army investigator immersed me in tragedy and death, exposing me to the heart-wrenching sacrifices of individuals who perished in seemingly innocuous incidents. First-hand encounters with the wrenching pain and grief experienced by families served as poignant reminders that the experience of loss, irrespective of its origin, shared a common thread of universal suffering. These are narratives and encounters forever etched into my memory. During my writing and research, I began to grasp the extent to which military training incidents occurred with an alarming frequency, particularly during the tumultuous years of WWII from 1939 to 1945.

Publishing my first non-fictional book, *The Forgotten Rising Sons* (2014), narrating the story behind the unfortunate death of 26 young soldiers at Kapooka in May 1945, I thought my inaugural writing exploration was complete. Following the release, I did not sit back to rest but rather to reflect. The process was one of the most humbling and moving experiences in over two decades as a soldier. The final product became my talisman – something I could pick up and flip through with pride, not for completing the undertaking but for the powerful purpose of contribution. Through uncovering unknown Australian history, I achieved more than writing a military history book – I made a difference.



Examining the disaster in detail and meeting the families, friends, and relatives of the deceased (lives previously unknown to me but from whom I learned much) moved me beyond words. I had donated my time and effort to the very families the tragedy had profoundly impacted. Their courage, strength, and commitment to the story were more extraordinary than my venture to research and put words on a page. They had lived in the fog of misinformation for decades. Incredibly honoured, I presented them with a tangible legacy of their loved ones. The last chapters of the book told the life stories of the victims. Among the pages, I created a portal to a passage in time – a chance for loved ones to read, reflect, reconnect, and get to know their long-lost heroes – grandfathers, fathers, brothers, and uncles.

Drawing upon meticulously preserved archives, I immersed myself in the world of WWII soldiers during the turbulent years of 1939-1945 – stepping into their shoes to understand their lives and sacrifices. My fascination with this pivotal era in Australia's history led me to uncover forgotten corners of the past, seeking stories that remained buried in time.

It is this deep connection to the untold histories of Australia's wartime heroes that naturally guided me toward the Wodonga tragedy. This research represents a continuation of my mission – a moral obligation – to shine a light on these forgotten chapters and reveal the harrowing day when war came to Wodonga.

In the quiet evening of May 8, 1943, at Wodonga, a 14-tonne steel locomotive of the Victorian Railways thundered in reverse toward its destination at Bandiana. Around the same time, a small overcrowded timber bus packed with excited servicemen and women departed Bonegilla Camp, heading to Albury for a night of well-deserved revelry.

As the bus approached a dangerous rail-road juncture on Tallangatta Road (now Thomas Mitchell Drive, Wodonga), a thin veil of confusion began to settle around the racecourse level crossing, setting the stage for a catastrophic collision. The lights of Wodonga rendered the road and rail crossing ahead a confusing flickering kaleidoscope of what was moving and what was stationary.



A similar bus, a Reo 2LM of Charles Lucas, also on the Bonegilla-Albury run during WWII.



A similar A2 steam locomotive running in reverse, with little visibility for the crew.

Railway Engine No 86382, its lights blackened out by wartime regulations to avoid air attacks, maintained a steady speed of 18 miles per hour, travelling backward due to the absence of a turntable at Wodonga. Unaware of the nearly invisible locomotive, the bus crept toward the level crossing. The driver's ears were deafened by the lively chatter of the passengers, rendering the engine's regulation warning blasts inaudible. As the bus edged closer to the tracks, bystanders and the engine driver could see the impending disaster – but it was too late. The bus driver never saw or heard the approaching locomotive.

In less than a minute, 21 of Australia's revered soldiers, including AWAS Signalwoman Anne Anderson, were killed instantly, their bodies strewn across the scene. Tales of heroism emerged as survivors were rescued from the wreckage by strangers and rushed back to the military hospital at the camp they had left. Tragically, many succumbed to their injuries, bringing the total death toll to 25, including the civilian bus driver. The border towns of Wodonga and Albury were plunged into shock. As news spread, the nation gasped in horror, questioning how such a tragedy could occur.

After the local coroner issued the death certificates, a Military Court of Inquiry was convened to investigate the circumstances of the accident. The inquiry was rudimentary. Days later the largest military funeral and coordinated interment of troops on home soil took place at the Albury War Cemetery. Meanwhile, a Coronial Inquest sought to assign responsibility: was it the Army or the Victorian Railways Commission? Ultimately deemed a misadventure, no one was held accountable, leaving families to fight for compensation in court –

struggling against bureaucratic oversight that cost lives and livelihoods.

As with many WWII stories, the nation eventually moved on, relegating the Wodonga tragedy and its victims to folklore. The senseless loss, amplified by the scale of this futile tragedy, became the defining wartime story of Wodonga. Learning of this event ignited an obligation within me to research and write its first true account. *Death by Misadventure* recounts the establishment of Bonegilla Camp, the logistics of troop movements, and the fateful journeys of the bus and locomotive. It captures the catastrophic collision, rescue efforts, and solemn farewells. This story lays bare the frustration of wartime bureaucracy that endangered lives, while celebrating the resilience and heroism of survivors and rescuers confronting the unimaginable.



Soldiers standing to attention beside each of 24 coffins, Albury War Cemetery, May 12 1943

By identifying victims and tracing their life stories, the Wodonga tragedy embodies the human sacrifices made by Australians during the war and illustrates the indiscriminate, unpredictable nature of military service and the tragic futility of war. Recounting the Wodonga tragedy was a story I felt compelled to write. Documenting these events has been both an honour and a solemn duty – creating a testament of national remembrance while preserving the memory of those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Though the tragedy's circumstances may feel distant to some, its lessons remain timeless, and a visit to the Albury War Cemetery to look upon the headstones of Wodonga's 24 victims is a must. Each headstone tells a silent story, a life interrupted but not forgotten, embodying the sacrifices made during one of history's darkest chapters. These graves are not merely markers of loss; they are enduring reminders of resilience, bravery, and the human cost of war – a legacy that must be respected and remembered by all who stand before them.

SERGEANT CYRIL HOWE QPM

Senior Constable Ashley Bold

At our May meeting we also heard from Superintendent Paul Smith, commander of the Murray River Police District, and Senior Constable Ash Bold of the police media group. They told the tragic story of Constable First Class Cyril Howe of Oaklands Police Station, shot and killed while on duty in December 1963.

Constable First Class Cyril Howe was the Officer in Charge of Oaklands Police Station in the state's Riverina Region. The constable – who lived at the police station with his wife and three young children – was well respected in the tiny community.

The lot of a country cop in those days was long hours, and the lack of radio communication – which is now taken for granted in today's modern era – would have devastating consequences for Constable Howe.

About 6.30pm on Thursday December 19, 1963, Constable Howe was contacted by police from the neighbouring district to seek assistance in locating 47-year-old local man, William Little. Little was wanted for questioning over the theft of a cheque book belonging to his former employer.

Within an hour of the request, Constable Howe located Little driving along a



Constable Cyril Howe

country road. Little – who was in the car with five young children including his 14-year-old stepdaughter – was stopped. After a brief discussion he was directed to drive to Oaklands Police Station whilst Constable Howe followed.

On route to the police station, Little suddenly drove in the opposite direction at high speed and a pursuit was commenced.



Constable Howe's police vehicle with shattered windows from gunfire

A short time later Little stopped the vehicle. As Constable Howe approached, Little opened the driver's door armed with a shotgun and fired, striking the constable in the stomach. Little then used the children as a human shield as he continued shooting.

Constable Howe took cover from behind the police vehicle. Refusing to shoot directly at Little for fear of striking the children, he instead fired his service weapon wide of Little in a futile attempt to intimidate him into surrendering.

During the dramatic gun battle, Constable Howe's pistol jammed and he was again shot. Little then drove from the scene with the children.

Despite being seriously injured and unable to call for assistance, Constable Howe had the fortitude to write

"Little, Little" in his note book and on another page wrote, "Little shot me."

With his condition rapidly deteriorating Constable Howe entered the bullet ridden police vehicle driving it a short distance before running off the road into a gully.

It would not be until 1am the following day that two nearby farmers were alerted to the distant sound of a continual car horn. Upon investigating, the farmers located Constable Howe and raised the alarm.

In spite of that it would be several more hours before Constable Howe was finally admitted to Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. Sadly, he would succumb to his injuries later that evening.

Before passing away, Constable Howe was able to describe in detail what had occurred.

A major investigation commenced to locate Little and inquiries soon ascertained that Little was driving a stolen car. It was also established that shortly after the shooting of the constable, Little murdered his former employer.

A week after Constable Howe's death, police received information that Little was hiding out in a shed with the 14-year-old girl on a property within the district.



As a contingent of police surrounded the shed two-gun shots were heard.

Inside the shed police found the bodies of Little and his teenage stepdaughter. It appeared he was aware of the police presence, where he shot the girl before turning the gun on himself.

It was later learnt that Little had been involved in an inappropriate relationship with the child.

For his actions and dedication to duty, Constable Howe was posthumously awarded the Queen's Police Medal for Gallantry and promoted to Sergeant 3rd Class.

The jamming of Constable Howe's pistol led to this type of firearm being phased out and replaced with the Smith & Wesson .38 calibre six shot revolver. This weapon would in turn be replaced in the 1990s.

The notebook used by Constable Howe is currently on display at the NSW Police Academy in Goulburn.

Constable Howe's daughter Kim reflects on her father. "I was only four years old when he died and I have no memories of him. I just wish I could have got to know that man," she said.



The sundial in Albury Botanic Gardens was presented to the City of Albury 75 years ago. A gift from Mate's Limited, it was unveiled on June 6, 1950 to commemorate 100 years of trading by the firm since Thomas Hodges Mate opened his first Albury store in 1850 on the corner of Hume and Townsend streets.

The plinth carrying the dial and surrounding stonework and cast stone seats had been set in place by Albury builder, Frederick William Lemcke.

When the sundial was unveiled, the *Border Morning Mail* reported that "Despite the unfavourable conditions, about 100 people were present at the Botanical Gardens yesterday, when the sundial and surroundings, the centenary gift of Mate's Ltd,

were formally handed over to the people of Albury and district, through the Mayor (Ald Bunton) and Cr J E Jelbart, representing the Hume Shire Council.

"At the request of Mr H W Gray, general manager of Mate's, two of the firm's oldest employees, Miss Myrtle Adams and Mr Sid Wright, uncovered the sundial, and formally made the presentation."

Addressing the crowd, Mr Gray said "the store which commemorates his name [T H Mate] is not so much a memorial to its founder but a monument to the great social, commercial, pastoral and industrial progress that our store has witnessed over the past 100 years. The qualities which made Albury one of the great inland cities of our Commonwealth were responsible for the success of our business. Mate's has literally grown up with this city. We shared its adversities and its achievements and our enterprise expanded as Albury grew from village to town and from town to city."

Alderman Bunton responded "When we see this sundial we pause to think what we owe to the pioneers of this district. This might be a memorial to the pioneers of Mate's, but it is also a memorial to all pioneers of the district."

Councillor Jelbart added that "he recalled that in the early days Mate's had sent their wagons north, east, south and west, conveying to the pioneers their domestic and station requirements. He was pleased to see present at the ceremony Mr McLaughlin, who drove one of the firm's wagons out as far as Urana. 'That service not only helped the people living 50 and 100 miles away from Albury, but helped in the development of the district. It is a service of which any firm might well be proud. In the 1890s, when most banks were forced to close, Mate's still carried on' said Cr Jelbart."



The Plaque reads:

1850-1950

"It matters not how long we live, but how."

Bailey

This Sundial and surrounding setting was presented to the people of Albury and District by Mate's Limited on the occasion of the Centenary of the Company
1st May 1950



T. H. MATE & Co., 1850.
Corner HUME and TOWNSEND STREETS.

The store that T H Mate first established in 1850 was known for many years as the Union Store, perhaps an early expression of a desire to unite the two early colonies, New South Wales and Victoria (Victoria became a separate colony in July 1851).

An advertisement in the *Border Post* in 1857 announced that the Union Store "opened by the case ... brocaded silks, the newest and most recherche productions in summer dresses in every novelty of material, Swiss cambrics, ladies'

printed morning wrappers, shawls and mantles, ladies' hats, rice straw and millinery bonnets, French and English ribbons and flowers ... extra stout for tents, linen, hollands, diapers, and huckabacks, parasols, lace and muslin goods, haberdashery and trimmings of every description."

An article in the *BMM* in 1950 reported that "An old copy book of trading late in the last century tells of the goods sold in T H Mate's Townsend street store. There were lamps, carriage candles at 10d a pound, boot blacking, twist tobacco, 10lb of sugar for 1/8, handkerchief calico at 1/4 a yard, lager beer at 11/6 a dozen, 10 casks of cement at £9/10, women's shoes at 6/- pair, a case of kerosene at 10/9, coffee 1/9, butter 10d, tea 1/6 and household candles at 7d a pound."

In 1884 the store moved to the two-storey building that survives on the corner of Hume and Townsend streets. Trade had started to shift to Dean street so Mate's bought land at the corner of Dean and Kiewa streets for £700 and in 1900 a new modern store opened on the site. That store was totally destroyed in the disastrous fire of December 1915 – a new store, extended a number of times and still recognisable in Albury's streetscape, opened in August of the following year.

Mate's store was managed for many years by T H Mate's son-in-law George Arthur Thompson and later his son (Mate's grandson) Douglas Arthur Thompson. Mate's great grandson, Peter Thompson was killed serving in the RAAF in World War II. In March 1947, controlling interest in the firm was purchased by Burns Philp and Company Limited.



Mate's 1884 building, Hume & Townsend streets



The 1899 store, Dean & Kiewa streets (artist's impression)



ALBURY RAILWAY STATION CLOCK

How observant are you?
Can you spot the problem with the Albury Railway Station clock? The left hand image faces west, looking down Smollett street, the right hand image faces south.
Look closely at twenty past the hour. Which is correct, looking south or looking west?

Photographed by Geoff Romero



Click on the link or use the QR code:

Visit [A&DHS website](#)

Visit our [YouTube Channel](#)



Click on the link below to visit our [Facebook page](#)



WALTER ALBERT SELLE CBE (1883-1968)

A journalist for *Smith's Weekly* described him in 1920 as the "Man with a Memory." The paper went on to say that as clerk of examinations at the University of Sydney "he knows the names, faces, and academic status and attainments of every University student."

Walter Selle was born in Albury, the son of Henry Selle, coach builder, and Rosetta (née Brumm), both born in Albury to parents who migrated from Germany. Educated at Albury Public School, Walter went on to teach mathematics at Fort Street Model School in Sydney.

After studying at the University of Sydney, he became registrar of the university in 1924, a position he held for most of the next 34 years broken only by short stints as acting vice-chancellor in 1932-33 and again in 1948. More details of Walter's life can be found in his entry in the [Australian Dictionary of Biography](#).

Walter's nephew Doctor Hal Selle, also educated at Albury Public School, became general superintendent of Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in 1944, a position he held until 1958, when he left to take up the position as chairman of the New South Wales Hospitals Commission.

Both of these men, along with other past pupils, will be remembered in August this year when Albury Public School will be celebrating 175 years educating Albury children.

The organising committee will be pleased to hear from anyone with stories and photos of past students.



The Archibald Prize winning portrait (1949) of Walter Selle, now part of The University of Sydney art collection.

A&DHS Corporate Sponsors

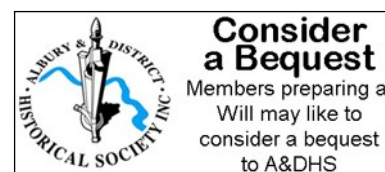
Albury & District Historical Society receives generous support from the following sponsors.

Please click on the logo to visit their respective websites.



Disclaimer: The Albury & District Historical Society Inc, and/or its members, through this newsletter, endeavours to provide accurate and reliable information, but does not warrant or make any representation regarding the accuracy or reliability of information contained within this newsletter.

To the maximum extent permitted by applicable law, the Society and/or its members shall not be liable for any damages of any kind relating to the use of this information, including without limitation, direct, indirect, special, compensatory or consequential damages, loss of profits or damage to property, even if the Society and/or its members have been advised of the possibility of such damages.



Patron: Greg Aplin

Honorary Life Members:

Howard Jones, June Shanahan,

Helen Livsey, Bruce Pennay

President: Geoff Romero

Vice-President: Greg Ryan

Secretary: Helen Livsey

alburyhistory@bigpond.com

02 6021 3671

Treasurer: Simon Burgess

Minute Secretary: Yelly Evenhuis

Publicity Officer: Helen Livsey

Public Officer: Helen Livsey

Committee: Jenny Romero, Robyn Hawking, Peter Harper, Howard Jones.

Bulletin Editor: Greg Ryan

gmjryan@bigpond.com

Publications & Stock Officer: Volunteer needed

Bulletin dispatch (by post): Richard Lee

Meeting Greeter: Yelly Evenhuis

Web Editor: Greg Ryan

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.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

Single: \$30 Family: \$35

Corporate: \$100

Note: There is a \$12 surcharge for mailed Bulletins.

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