

## Canberra & District Historical Society Inc

Founded 10 December 1953

PO Box 315, Curtin ACT 2605

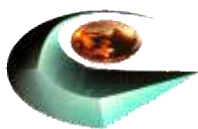
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# Canberra History News





## Canberra & District Historical Society Inc.

### **Council**

<i>President:</i>	Allen Mawer
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<i>Honorary Curator</i>	Michael Hall
<i>CDHS Canberra Historical Journal</i>	Editors: Kay Walsh and David Wardle (published two times each year)
<i>CDHS Canberra History News</i>	Editor: Ann Tündern-Smith with Graham Hannaford, Frances McGee and Nick Swain (published four times each year)

**Location** Curtin Shopping Centre, Curtin ACT  
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Canberra & District History  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/829568883839247/>

**Office Hours**  
*We hope that there are no more COVID-19 surprises so that we can maintain these hours of opening :*  
Tuesdays: 11.00 am to 5.00 pm,  
most Wednesdays (11.00 am to 2.00 pm) and  
most Saturdays (10.00 am to 12.00 noon).

**Monthly meetings have returned!**  
*We are meeting again in the Vercoe Room, Wesley Uniting Church, 22 National Circuit, Forrest.  
Enter the carpark from Fitzroy Street after 5 pm, when the boom gate is lifted.*

*Front Cover: The trees running diagonally across the left of the 1960 photo are on Kings Avenue and the two large buildings to their right are the John Gorton Building and Old Parliament House. So what are the three buildings with curved roofs in front of the John Gorton Building, connected to a fourth, near the Molonglo River? What was their purpose? Much is revealed on pages 13-15.*

*Photograph courtesy of the National Archives of Australia  
NAA: A1200, L36013*

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# Canberra History News

*The Newsletter of the Canberra & District Historical Society Inc.*

**Edition No. 483**

**ISSN 1839-4612**

**June 2022**

*Canberra History News is issued QUARTERLY in March, June, September and December of each year.*

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*Views expressed in articles, reviews, etc., are those of the authors  
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## Calendar of CDHS Events

<i>Tuesday, 14 June 2022 5 for 5.30 – 6.30 pm</i>	<b>Members' Meeting: Linda Beveridge, Convenor of the Friends of Black Mountain, will talk about Black Mountain — An Important Local Icon.</b> Veroe Room, Wesley Uniting Church, 22 National Circuit, Forrest. Enter the carpark from Fitzroy Street after 5 pm, when the boom gate is lifted.
<i>Tuesday 12 July 2022, 5 for 5.30 – 6.30 pm</i>	<b>Members' Meeting, speakers to be advised.</b> Veroe Room, Wesley Uniting Church, 22 National Circuit, Forrest. Enter the carpark from Fitzroy Street after 5 pm, when the boom gate is lifted.
<i>Tuesday 2 August 2022</i>	<b>Deadline for contributions to the next issue of this newsletter.</b>
<i>Tuesday 9 August 2022, 5 for 5.30 – 6.30 pm</i>	<b>Members' Meeting, speakers to be advised.</b> Veroe Room, Wesley Uniting Church, 22 National Circuit, Forrest. Enter the carpark from Fitzroy Street after 5 pm, when the boom gate is lifted.
<i>Saturday, 13 August 2022</i>	<b>ACT Region Heritage Symposium 2022, in partnership with Australia ICOMOS, Canberra Archaeological Society and the National Trust (ACT).</b> Atheneum, Llewellyn Hall, ANU. More details to be advised.
<i>Tuesday, 13 September 2022, 5 for 5.30 – 6.30 pm</i>	<b>Annual General Meeting:</b> in the Veroe Room, Wesley Uniting Church, 22 National Circuit, Forrest. Enter the carpark from Fitzroy Street after 5 pm, when the boom gate is lifted.

## Other Events

<i>Third Wednesday every month 12.30 – 1.30 pm from February</i>	<b>Regional Studies Network</b> CDHS, Curtin.
<i>Sundays 12.00 noon – 4.00 pm Thursdays 9.00 am – 12.00 pm or by request</i>	<b>Hall School Museum and Heritage Centre</b> 17-19 Palmer St, Hall To book, email <a href="mailto:museum@hall.act.au">museum@hall.act.au</a> or phone 6230 9630.
<i>Wednesdays, 11 am or by request</i>	<b>Heritage Tours of St Andrew's Church, 1 State Circle, Forrest.</b> To book, phone Wendy, 62916136, Ann, 62812436 or David, 62821635.
<i>Second Sunday of every month 10 am–4 pm</i>	<b>Tuggeranong Schoolhouse, 34 Enid Lorimer Circuit, Chisholm,</b> run by CDHS member, Elizabeth Burness, phone 0400 391 440.
<i>September 2022</i>	<b>60th Anniversary of Woden Valley,</b> Eddison Park, Phillip, to be organised by the Woden Valley Community Council.

## THAT Time Again!

It's time to renew your membership, please! We've put a renewal form on the back page of this newsletter. Please note that if you have not renewed before the AGM on 13 September, you will not be eligible to influence the Society's future. Also, there'll be no more of these interesting newsletters and no journals if you don't renew!

And tax time approaches! Donate now to the CDHS and get a portion of it back soon in your tax refund. In these parlous times, CDHS relies on your donations! There's a line on the membership renewal form for you to use to add your donation.

If you prefer, you can phone the office with your Visa or Mastercard details, or drop in with your card or cash when the office is open. That goes for the renewal too, but please bring your form with you if you have completed it. Office details on [page 2](#).

Donation receipts acceptable to the Tax Office will be issued for all donations.

Looking forward to hearing from you!



# ACT Region Heritage Symposium

## Heritage and Healing: How Heritage Helps [?]

**SATURDAY 13 AUGUST 2022**  
**ANU ACTON CAMPUS**

Health and wellbeing have come to the fore in society owing to the challenges of recent years where dramatic changes have been imposed on our normal way of life. In response to lockdowns and natural disasters, there is a desire for bringing people together to promote the health and healing of our communities.

Join us for the 2022 ACT Region Heritage Symposium to explore the following questions:

- What role could heritage have in enhancing our wellbeing and enriching our lives?
- How have our heritage and its intangible values given us a sense of place, of a continuity from the past to present?
- How can cultural engagement contribute to healing?

Convened by Heritage Partners:



### ***Canberra Day Oration and Members' Meetings***

Professor Brian Schmidt, Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University, gave another excellent Canberra Day oration, on the anniversary of the announcement of our city's name, 12 March. Once again, the National Library of Australia generously provided the venue, as well as a sound engineer who doubled as a photographer. The next issue of our *Canberra Historical Journal* will carry the full text.

As many members will be aware, this year CDHS had to find another location for our monthly members' meetings. Fortunately, we were able to obtain a room for the rest of the year at the historic Wesley Uniting Church in the suburb of Forrest. Appropriately the first talk, at our April meeting, was by Don Whitbread OAM, on the history and heritage of Wesley. The talk was followed by a tour of some of the church's more interesting memorials.

At the May meeting, local historian Mark Butz addressed an enthusiastic audience on the subject of Canberra's Ill-Fated City Railway – What Happened to Walter Burley Griffin's Planned Rail Connection with Yass and Goulburn? Both meetings were extremely well attended.

A report on Don Whitbread's talk appears below, while Mark Butz kindly has agreed to provide a summary of his talk for our next newsletter.

*Esther Davies and Ann Tündern-Smith*

### ***Monthly Meeting: Tuesday, 12 April 2022 History and Heritage at Wesley Uniting Church with Don Whitbread OAM***

In great part due to COVID-19 restrictions but, more recently, due to changes in the organisation which was providing a free monthly place to meet, we have had few members' meetings since February 2020.

Pent up demand was met finally when we were able to have a very appropriate Don Whitbread as our first speaker in our new venue, the Vercoe Room in the Wesley Uniting Church complex in Forrest. Don's talk was appropriate because of his long personal connection with the Church, as his father had been appointed an early minister there.

A large audience included Wesley parishioners who had been advised about the talk. Please remember that you are welcome always to bring guests to our monthly meetings.

The Commonwealth Government's early 20th century decision to establish a National Capital in a separate Federal Capital Territory (now ACT) was the precursor to churches generally, and for the Methodists in particular, to build in Canberra. The Government made available

sites for a central church in each denomination and laid down conditions for their design and building.

The first Methodist minister, Reverend Richard Boyer, was appointed to Canberra in 1914, and was a great preacher. He enlisted in 1915 and took part in the Gallipoli landing. Later, he became the first Chairman of the newly formed ABC and was knighted.

Selection of a site for the Methodist church took some time but was eventually decided in 1925. It became known as the Central Site. The then Minister was Reverend EL Vercoe, in whose memory the room in which we are now able to meet was named.

In 1926, the Methodist General Conference conducted a competition for the design of a church for the Central Site. It also prepared a pamphlet to solicit funds from across Australia for building a major church.

A lot of Wesley's early history is recorded in Jim Udy's book, *Living Stones*. It traces the history of Methodism in Canberra from the very earliest days to 1974. Much is also known from Don Whitbread's own book

covering four generations of the Whitbread family, *Can you hear any singing?* Living Stones recalls that:

*The history of close cooperation among Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches in Canberra goes back to the opening of Federal Parliament in Canberra. Informal conversations took place between denominational leaders in Sydney towards the end of 1927 and early in 1928.*

*These discussions resulted in the preparation of a memorandum by a representative delegation from Sydney to the members of the three churches in Canberra. This was considered at a local conference of each church, meeting separately, in 1928. A combined meeting of the three churches was held on 13 March 1928. The recommendations of this consultation are contained in a paper titled, Conversations concerning Co-operation at Canberra (Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational Churches). The section headed, Guiding Principles, reflected clearly the thinking of the three Churches at this time.*

In 1928, the Canberra Co-operative Council agreed that the Presbyterians' erection of their Central Church be approved, on the understanding that it be used for Sunday and other services by the three denominations. It was also agreed that the Methodists build a hall for Sunday School and other community purposes on their Central Site.

In 1929, the School Hall on the Central Site was commenced and the Central Methodist Hall was opened on 3 May 1930 by Methodist President-General, Reverend Frank Lade.

The three denominations, by now called The United Church of Canberra, continued using the Methodist Central Hall until St Andrew's was opened on 22 September 1934. However, in March of that year, the local Council for Co-operation was informed that the Canberra Committee of General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Australia was preparing to open the Church of St Andrew and that the regular use of that 'Cathedral' Church, would involve

certain conditions as to preaching appointments and finance.

These conditions proved unacceptable to the local Council. They had completely changed the basis of cooperation on which the three Canberra churches had been agreed for six years.

The local Council carried the following motion: "That this meeting is of the opinion that, in the present circumstances, the existing limited scheme should be discontinued from the date of the opening of St Andrew's Church" (*Living Stones* pp91-92). This had a major impact on both Methodist and Congregational Churches and plans had to be changed.

The *Canberra Times* carried the story on the front page on 23 August 1934 in bold type.

Canberra's population slumped during the 1930s. Unemployment in Canberra became worse as the Depression spread across Australia and the transfer of public servants from Melbourne was slowed.

Jim Udy's book details the decisions taken locally to progress development on the Wesley site. In July 1937, plans to build a new Parsonage were approved by the Quarterly Meeting; it was opened on 10 December 1937. On the next day, Sunday, 11 December, the Reverend WH Jones as Secretary-General, acting on behalf of the General Conference, renamed the 'Central Church' as Wesley Church.

Then World War II broke out. Many young men, and some older, enlisted for military service, some not to return. The end of the War brought new life to Canberra. The Government renewed its movement of departments to Canberra and the population increased. Plans were once again raised with the Canberra Consultative Council about building a new church next to Wesley Hall.

The costs of building in Canberra in 1946 were abnormally high and materials in short supply, so the Canberra Consultative Council asked the Wesley Trustees to prepare a plan for future building operations.

During the NSW Methodist General Conference in Sydney in 1948, the laymen indicated they were inviting Don Whitbread's father to Canberra the next year.

The family arrived in Canberra just before Easter 1949. The population was around 17,000. The family were very impressed with the 1937 Parsonage, a single-storey, red-brick structure with a slate roof.



*Don Whitbread (right) with Alpha Gregory at the 50th birthday celebration for the Woden Valley Choir he founded with his wife, Barbara*  
Photograph: [The Riotact, 2019](#)

Don's father started his ministry immediately, with meetings of all church groups and a special Quarterly Meeting 'to prepare a blueprint for Methodist advance in Canberra'. Out of these discussions, a Circuit Development Committee was formed and a master plan developed. Apart from the development of Methodist sites at Forrest and Reid, it was agreed that new causes

should be commenced at Yarralumla-Deakin and Ainslie-Lyneham. The latter was changed to the O'Connor area.

The Whitbread family work at Wesley expanded with the beyond the morning and afternoon services, Sunday School, Church Trust, Order of Knights, Girls' Comrades, Christian Endeavour, Men's Brotherhoods, Ladies' Church Aid, Junior and Senior Choirs. A Boy's Club and Rays, a club for younger girls, were added. There was also a monthly Fellowship Tea for the young people and a Brotherhood Tea for men. People would bring a plate and there would be a speaker or debate or perhaps a slide show before the evening service.

After Don's talk, the audience toured significant memorials in the Church with help from our Vice-President, Esther Davies.

Don left Canberra in the 1950s to train as a teacher. He then graduated from the University of NSW in 1967 with a Bachelor of Economics. He returned to Canberra in 1968 to work for the National Capital Development Commission.

In 1970 he was Secretary to the Senate Select Committee on Securities and Exchange, then a Senior Advisor in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet before becoming Assistant Director at the National Film and Sound Archive on its establishment in 1984.

In 1990 he set up his own company, Music Co-ordination Australia, which became part of an international body that organised tours for bands, choirs and orchestras into and out of Australia.

After a second retirement in 2001, Don has worked freelance as a conductor of choirs, an adjudicator at eisteddfods and as a judge for the CAT (Canberra Area Theatre) Awards, as well as for the Wesley Music Foundation. He also presents workshops on conducting and choral technique.

In 1997 he was Canberra's Citizen of the Year.

*Marilyn Truscott*



## ***Spotlight: A Gift from the Government***

*by Frances McGee*

Do you still have photograph albums? In the pre-digital past, almost every home had at least one.

The CDHS collection includes a photograph album containing 31 black and white pictures of Canberra buildings. The leather-bound album features the Australian Coat of Arms and the word 'Canberra' embossed in gold on the front cover. The photos are glued on to the pages, with their captions printed. It's clearly more than a collection of holiday snaps.

To whom did the album belong? What was its purpose? Who took the photos, and when?

The album was presented to the CDHS in October 1981, but neither the donor's name nor how the album was acquired were recorded.

The album itself is identical to two presentation albums in the National Library of Australia (NLA), containing 25 photos of Canberra buildings.

Both albums were presented as gifts. One was presented to Gregory Mathews at an afternoon tea in 1940. Gregory, a noted ornithologist, donated his personal library of over 5,000 books on Australian birds, valued at £30,000, to the NLA.

The other was presented to Lord Addison in 1947 and signed by Prime Minister Joseph Chifley. Lord Addison, British Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, was visiting Australia at the time.

The photos were taken by Richard Strangman during the 1930s. Richard was a commercial photographer in Canberra for over 30 years following the 1927 opening of Parliament House.

The CDHS album is not, as initially thought, a promotional album kept in the

London office of the Australian National University (ANU) during in the late 1940s-early 1950s to attract academic staff. The ANU albums probably were aimed at the academics' wives, showing their potential home on the other side of the world as an established city suitable for families.

Three of the CDHS photos are identical to those in the ANU's albums. They were stamped 'Australian Official Photograph Dept of Information' on the back and with a National Archives of Australia (NAA) reference number.

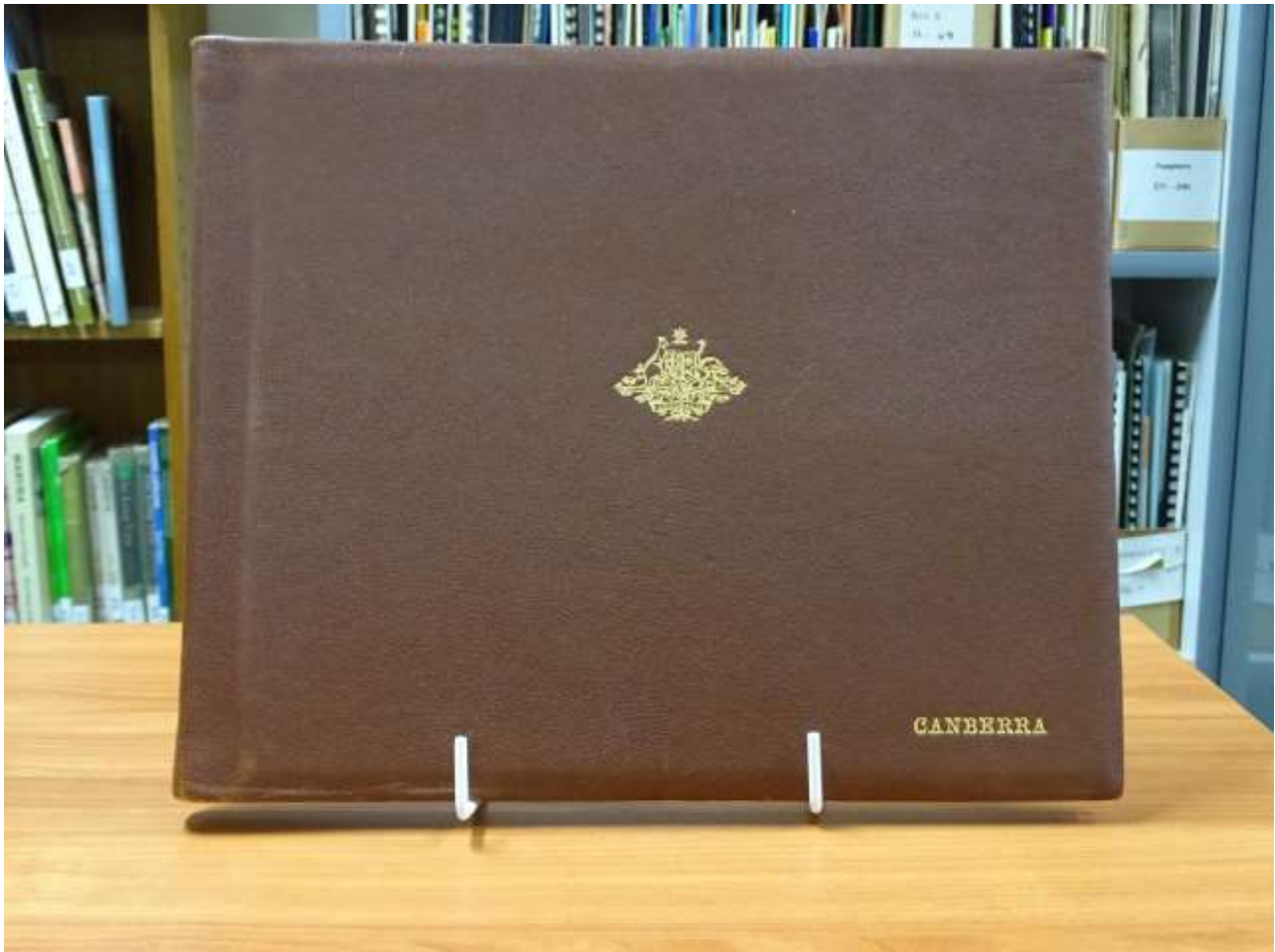
The Department of Information was established in 1939 to assist the war effort. Post-war, it focused on 'national publicity', mainly to encourage migration but also to promote all aspects of Australian life.

At least seven photos in the CDHS album are held in the NAA, taken by Frederick Fisher in 1947-48. Frederick, a professional photographer who served in the RAAF, continued his career after the war, probably as an employee of the Department. He lived in Braddon with his wife, Ida.

Putting all these clues together, it's likely that our album was one of a number of presentation albums, produced by the Government and intended to be used as official gifts to VIPs. The photos were taken in the late 1940s by professional photographers employed by the Department of Information. Our album bears no inscription, so maybe it was kept in stock until required. Perhaps a CDHS member knows?

Every object tells a story. The presentation album hints at Government practices in times gone by.

Why don't you come in to have a look?



*A gift from the Government: Frances McGee's article on the previous page explores the possible source of this photograph album in our collection*

*Photograph: Frances McGee*

### ***Membership Matters***

We are delighted to welcome twelve new members: Mr and Mrs William Burke of Yarralumla, David Tynan of Queanbeyan, Wendy Limbrick, from Monash, Kelly Paxman from Lyneham, Don Coutts of Braddon, Maryanne and Marijan Rupcic of Weetangera, Cheryl Peters, Dunlop, Mr and Mrs Leigh Condon, Chisholm, and Brian Mullens, in Ballina, NSW. We welcome also Don Whitbread, Mawson, the speaker at our April Members' Meeting, who has rejoined.

Welcome financial donations have come from Dawn Richardson, Rosemary Curry, Julia Ryan, Alan Hawke, Gary Kent and Sarah Ryan.

Now that we are asking members to donate at each meeting towards the cost of the Vercoe Room hire, we are getting more than ninety per cent of that cost, a great help.

Robert Campbell has donated seven copies of his *The Early Story of St John's School House from 1825*. Helen Flaherty donated four photographs of the early development of Kaleen, taken about 1977, complete with detailed notes.

Thank you all!

*Helen Digan and Ann Tündern-Smith*

## ***The McDougall VC Memorial at Norwood Park***

*by Michael Hall*

On the Ex-Services Wall at the Norwood Park Crematorium in Mitchell is a plaque commemorating SR McDougall VC MM. McDougall was a Tasmanian and a Victoria Cross recipient who, outside his service in World War I and attendance at commemorative services on the mainland, did not leave his home state. Are McDougall's ashes interred at Norwood Park and, if not, why is there a commemorative plaque on a wall at a private crematorium in far-off Canberra?



*Stanley Robert McDougall*

*Photograph: AWM A05155*

Stanley Robert McDougall was born on 23 July 1889 at Recherche in Tasmania, the son of John (a sawmiller) and Susannah (Anne) McDougall. Recherche is about as far south as you can travel by road in Tasmania and not far from South East Cape, the most southerly tip of continental Australia. It was there that McDougall was educated and began work as a blacksmith. Described as an excellent horseman, marksman, bushman and amateur boxer, McDougall was still living at Recherche when he enlisted in the AIF on

31 August 1915 at Claremont, near Hobart, as a private with the 12th reinforcements to the 15th Battalion.

In March 1916, McDougall was posted to the 47th Battalion (part of the 4th Division) and served with them on the Western Front in battles at Pozières, Messines (where his brother Wallace was killed in action) and Passchendaele. By the beginning of 1918 he had been promoted to sergeant. In March that year, the Germans launched a major offensive and on 28 March attacked the AIF positions at Dernancourt in the Somme. It was there that McDougall earned the Victoria Cross when, after the first wave of Germans had breached the Australians' flank, he "at once charged the enemy's second wave single handed with rifle and bayonet killing seven and capturing a machine gun". He turned the machine gun on to the Germans and firing from the hip routed the wave of attackers. After running out of ammunition, McDougall seized a bayonet and charged again, killing three men and an enemy officer before grabbing a Lewis gun to enable the capture of 33 prisoners.

He earned the Military Medal when the Germans again attacked at Dernancourt, on 5 April. McDougall "took a Lewis Gun to a very exposed position where he could enfilade enemy at close quarters up to 30 yards." He maintained his gun until it was pierced by a bullet, then crawled 300 yards, got another gun and returned to his post in "No Man's Land" where he was responsible for many dead. Later during a counter-attack he organised a platoon after the officer was killed and led them in the attack.<sup>1</sup>

McDougall was invested with the Victoria Cross by King George V at Windsor Castle on 19 August 1918 and returned to Australia for discharge on 15 December 1918. He joined the Tasmanian Forestry Department in the early 1920s and in 1926

<sup>1</sup> 'McDougall, Stanley Robert (1889–1968)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mcdougall-stanley-robert-7347/text12759>, published first in hardcopy 1986, accessed online 21 September 2021.

he married Martha Florence Anderson-Harrison.<sup>2</sup> By the late 1930s he had been posted to Scottsdale, in the north east of the state, where he lived for the remainder of his life. McDougall died at the North East Soldiers' Memorial Hospital in Scottsdale on 7 July 1968 and, after a funeral with full military honours at Holy Trinity Church in Hobart, he was cremated at nearby Cornelian Bay Cemetery.<sup>3</sup> While the cemetery has a record of his cremation, they do not have a record of the location of his ashes.<sup>4</sup>

He and his wife did not have children and, when she died in December 1974, she too was cremated at Cornelian Bay where her ashes are interred. The only report of McDougall visiting Canberra was in 1964 when he, and seventeen other VC recipients, attended a ceremony at the Australian War Memorial for the dedication of VC Corner.<sup>5</sup>

According to Norwood Park the plaque was placed by the "Australian War Graves Commission in his memory". They confirmed that his body was not cremated there and that "no ashes were interred with the plaque".<sup>6</sup> The records of the Office of Australian War Graves (OAWG) confirm that McDougall was cremated at Cornelian Bay but they understood that the ashes were placed at Norwood Park. However, they also stated that the location for official commemoration is chosen by the family.<sup>7</sup>

The National Archives hold the War Graves record cards. McDougall's record states that his ashes were firstly held by Clark(e) Bros (funeral directors in Hobart) from 13 September 1968 and then by Norwood Park from 6 November 1968. It also states that the ashes were "placed" on 23 December 1968, although what that exactly

means is unclear because it does not give the position where the ashes were placed.<sup>8</sup>



*The McDougall memorial in Norwood Park*

*Photograph: Michael Hall*

Since its opening in 1966 Norwood Park has always been a privately run facility so why was it chosen as the site for the commemorative plaque? The year before McDougall's death in 1968, John Armstrong England, the member for Calare in the House of Representatives and a veteran of World War II, suggested that a national cemetery, like Arlington in the USA, be established in Canberra.<sup>9</sup> The proposal failed to get off the ground but it may have influenced the decision to commemorate McDougall in Canberra.

However, it still leaves the basic question unanswered – where are the ashes of Stan McDougall?

<sup>2</sup> *The Examiner* (Launceston), 20 March 1924, p 3; *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry.

<sup>3</sup> *The North Eastern Advertiser*, 9 July 1968, p 2.

<sup>4</sup> Southern Cemeteries Website

[https://server2.admin.millingtons.com.au:81/ASP/search\\_details.asp?RecordID=78003](https://server2.admin.millingtons.com.au:81/ASP/search_details.asp?RecordID=78003), accessed 7 May 2022.

<sup>5</sup> *The Canberra Times*, 13 November 1964, p 1. Also present was Charles Groves Anderson VC, who died at his Canberra home on 11 November 1988 and whose ashes are interred at Norwood Park.

<sup>6</sup> Personal email from the Administration Officer, Norwood Park, 18 August 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Personal email from OAWG, 21 August 2020.

<sup>8</sup> NAA SA8233, MCDUGALL Stanley Robert - 4061 AIF; 1968; Crematorium - Norwood Park ACT.

<sup>9</sup> *The Canberra Times*, 6 October 1967, p 2.



***“Nissen” Huts:***  
***CDHS and CRHR Co-operate with Interesting Results!***  
*by Graham Hannaford*

Nick Swain, our Secretary, was asked if he could provide more information on aerial photos of “three Nissen huts linked by a one and two storey brick building on the site now occupied by the National Gallery.” Nick also is a member of the Canberra Region Heritage Researchers (CRHR), so he referred the photos to CRHR sleuths.<sup>1</sup>

Emails then flew thick and fast between CRHR members. Ann Tünder-Smith was first to respond, pointing out that she was told on a tour of the remains of one of Australia's migrant reception centres, that not all huts with rounded, galvanised iron roofs are Nissen Huts. So, what were they? Tony Maple added a lot of information from multiple sources into the mix.

One theory was that they were among 3,000 Quonset huts to be brought from Manus Island after WWII to be used to accommodate workmen and their families working on the then-planned Snowy Scheme. Other huts would provide accommodation for British and European migrants in industrial areas in other parts of the Commonwealth. The transfer of buildings from Manus had been ordered by the Works Minister, Mr Lemmon, following discussions with Prime Minister Chifley, Immigration Minister Calwell, and Navy Minister Riordan.

The Quonset huts were originally intended for service in Alaska and were said to be insulated against cold and heat.<sup>2</sup> A file of 238 pages in the National Archives goes down into the literal nuts and bolts of

hemispherical huts. Much of the detail is on the salvaging of Quonset huts from Manus Island, and their transport to Australia and their use in various parts of the country for accommodation and other projects. Romney and Nissen huts are mentioned as well, and they seem to have been imported from the UK post-WWII.<sup>3</sup>



*Our mystery photo: a larger version is  
on the front cover of this issue  
Photograph NAA: A1200, L36013*

The last word, however, goes to Tony with the explanation that, “ ... of most definite help in identifying the exact type of hut used is a 1950 plan ... which states that No. 6 Romney huts were used. It also seems the cross-building that linked them was a Bristol pre-fabricated unit.”<sup>4</sup>

The buildings were used to house Commonwealth archival records. Tenders were called in February 1952 for the erection of a National Library annexe to bring under one roof valuable, and often irreplaceable, records which were then

<sup>1</sup> For CRHR, see *Canberra and Region Heritage Researchers, A Brief History*, by Trevor Lipscombe and Tony Maple in the December 2021 issue of this newsletter.

<sup>2</sup> *The Sun* (Sydney), p. 5 (Late Final Extra). Retrieved August 29, 2021, from <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/230238196>.

<sup>3</sup> National Archives of Australia: Director of Works, South Australia; D156, Correspondence files, annual single number series, 1932-97; 1955/277, Prefabricated huts - provision of Quonset & other type huts for new Australians & storage purposes - [blueprints showing Quonset hut type C ex US assets, Manus Island 1/3/1949 QA216, & type B 1/3/1949 QA251, etc], 1949-55, and

<sup>4</sup> National Archives of Australia: Works Director, ACT; A2617, Architectural plans of Canberra, single number series, 1932-59; SECTION 24/19911, National Library - temporary annexe - consisting of number 6 Romney huts and a 'Bristol' pre-fabricated unit, 1950-50.

scattered throughout Canberra — in basements of departmental buildings, stores, and at the old hospital block. The annexe was intended to relieve existing cramped conditions of the National Library, which at the time was said to have one of the worst housed collections in the world. Ten weeks later, on 13 May 1952, the *Canberra Times* reported that construction of the “temporary annexe” for the library, costing £69,877, was to start on 19 May 1952 with the work to be carried out by DC Smith Pty Ltd of Forrest.<sup>5</sup>



*No 6 Romney huts being assembled  
Photograph courtesy ACT Heritage Library,  
image 009591, Department of Capital Territory  
Pictorial Record of Canberra 1951-1953*

The National Library had taken over more than 50,000 cubic feet of material from the fifty-two departments which had been created or recreated since 1901, with material having been stored in low rental areas.<sup>6</sup> It was time for a more professional approach to management of those records.

If the identification of the origins and construction of the huts might seem as dull

as ditch water, events at the huts involving ditch water were probably far from dull.

Robert French recalled that the huts weren't liable to flooding other than the disgusting toilets that occasionally overflowed. There was an occasion in 1976, however, when it was feared that the Googong Dam might overflow, and a call went out via ABC radio on a Saturday for all hands to help clear the bottom shelves of the compactus.



*Aerial view of Kings Avenue Bridge and the Archives  
buildings, 22 October 1965  
Photograph NAA: A7973, INT863/1*

In 1977, the *Canberra Times* on 23 February reported how “when southeasterly rain lashes over Canberra's Kings Avenue Bridge, the main records of modern history in Australia stand a good chance of being drenched ... sewage usually backs up to form a moat around the men's lavatory ... The sources said that ‘in recent times we had pink paper flooding rooms around the lavatory area’.

Other sources said the problem appeared to be that the building's lavatories

<sup>5</sup> A need to protect WWII records had paved the way for archiving all Commonwealth records. First created as a part of the National Library of Australia, the National Archives developed into an independent agency in 1961 and its functions were passed into law in 1983. In the early 1970s, another Commonwealth Archives Office was located above a hardware store in Kingston.

<sup>6</sup> On 4 May 1968 when reporting on the new National Library building the *Canberra Times* noted that the collection had been housed in locations such as nurses' quarters, a laundry and supervisor's cottage at the old hospital; the basement of the Institute of Anatomy; Riverside huts at Barton and others (by then demolished near the railway station); rented store space in Queanbeyan; as well as the huts in Parkes. Two rather bizarre stores were the explosives vault at the Mugga quarry which housed inflammable films, and the former morgue which was full of maps. By this time, the Library's collection had been concentrated in the subbasement and part of the basement of the main Administrative building (now the John Gorton Building) at Parkes, a former bank at Civic, the old Government Printing Office and three converted warehouses on Wentworth Avenue, Kingston.

were not connected correctly to the main sewerage system in the area. “(The) archives were (sometimes) besieged with field mice, cockroaches, and rats ... When the Googong dam threatened to burst last year ... boys from a nearby high school came in to help shift important reference files to a transport depot several kilometres away.”<sup>7</sup>

Jim Stokes recalled copying in the Archives for the DFAT project. “It was a strange place, full of odd corners and a few strange people to match. The tea room was socially stratified, the Fourth Division went first, then the Third Division (reference and access staff), but in fairness this was due to the lack of space in the tea room.”

Over one week at the end of August, Nick was likely to have been flooded with a wealth of information about the original

enquiry — far too much to reproduce here. In addition to a large quantity from Tony Maple, it came from Ann Tündern-Smith, Jim Stokes, Mark Butz, Robert French and Steve Stuckey.<sup>8</sup> A lot of what they shared came from the reporters, photographers and staff of the *Canberra Times*, which has been documenting the growth of Canberra for ninety-five years.

We summarise the exercise here to show what can be unearthed when a team of researchers, linked by email and burrowing into digitised and indexed sources, get a question which seems puzzling on the surface. The CRHR offers such a team, so it is a welcome addition to the study of the heritage and history of our city and its region.

### ***John Curtin and others!***

Did you know that the dining room in the Statesman Hotel in Curtin (near our premises) has a number of wooden panels featuring Australian prime ministers, politicians and other identities?

Have a look next time you visit! Does anyone know who the artist was?



*Jan Hutchison (text) and Peter Kain (photograph), Curtin residents*

<sup>7</sup> The high school was probably Telopea Park School, approximately 1.5 km away.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Butz deserves a special acknowledgement for help with images.



***The Story of Non-Binary Mary/Tommy McTavish  
and the Value of Samuel Shumack***  
*by James McDonald*

There is a dearth of information on LGBTQI+ individuals in our district in the mid-1800s. It is usually found in highly charged circumstances such as court action. For example, an incident at Braidwood in 1858, for which George Gray was charged with 'indecently' assaulting Henry Stout, a teamster, who had camped under his dray for the night is the only newspaper report I can find within the broader district before 1860.<sup>1,2</sup>

Fortunately for Canberra's historians, Samuel Shumack had a close personal interest in social history. Without him, we would have had very little information on the district's midwives (e.g. Julia Webb, Mary Ann Mayo, Louisa McKenzie and Catherine Palmer), the stand-in female preacher at Christ Church (Harriet Connelly), the migration tales of single women (e.g. the Warren sisters), the escape from an arranged marriage by Margaret O'Keefe, or the sexual crimes committed by naval officials reported by Margaret Magarahan.<sup>3</sup> He also recorded information on a range of Irish rebels in an age when there was little sympathy for that nation's independence struggle. Moreover, he handled these topics relatively sensitively for a Protestant of his times.<sup>4</sup> Canberra's history would be so much poorer without his manuscript, despite its many foibles.

Shumack also preserved the story of a likely non-binary (or perhaps, gender-fluid) person, reported in John Gale's 1927 publication, *Canberra*, and then in a modified version in the posthumous manuscript published in abridged form by his family in 1967.<sup>5</sup>

The biographical facts that we know about the individual born Mary McTavish are these.<sup>6</sup> Mary was born in 1834 in Glengarry, Scotland to Presbyterians, James McTavish (1794-1866) and Ann, nee Cameron (1806-1866). The couple migrated to work for the Campbells at Duntroon in 1836 with infant Mary and an older son. In 1855 Mary married Peter Phillips, a bullocky and shepherd from the Cooma district. They lived at various locations on the Monaro, but mainly near Cooma. Mary bore eight children from 1856 to 1870.<sup>7</sup>

The 1927 version of Shumack's story – conveyed to him by his mother-in-law, Jemima Winter (nee McPherson) – reads as follows.

*Once this girl had received a most unmerciful beating for riding a horse astride, and for several weeks she was confined to her bed because of this inhuman treatment. On her recovery she fled to the camp of the local tribe of blacks, where she remained for about a month. She was discovered and brought back by her father, who burnt the soles of her feet*

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks are due to Jen Cloher for feedback on the article and advice about the respectful representation of gender-fluid or non-binary individuals.

<sup>2</sup> *Goulburn Herald and County of Argyle Advertiser*, 2 October 1858, p 2.

<sup>3</sup> The midwife/nurse references are found at Samuel Shumack (ed. JE and S Shumack), *An Autobiography, or, Tales and Legends of Canberra Pioneers*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1967, pp 7, 14-15, 28, 64, 91, 95. For the others, see p 25 (Connelly), p 75 (the Warrens), p 98 (O'Keefe), p 61 (Magarahan). For the latter, see John Gale, *Canberra, History of and Legends Relating to the Federal Capital Territory of the Commonwealth of Australia*, Fallick and Sons, Queanbeyan, 1927, p 116.

<sup>4</sup> In Gale, *Canberra*, pp 115-19; Shumack, *An Autobiography*, passim. In the introduction, Laurie Fitzhardinge (*An Autobiography*, p x) even says that some of the Irish material was excised from the 1967 manuscript.

<sup>5</sup> In Gale, *Canberra*, pp 118-19; Shumack, *An Autobiography*, pp 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> I have used non-binary pronouns.

<sup>7</sup> See Peter Procter (ed.), *Biographical Register of Canberra and Queanbeyan: from the District to the Australian Capital Territory, 1820-1930*, privately published, Canberra, 2001, p 219.



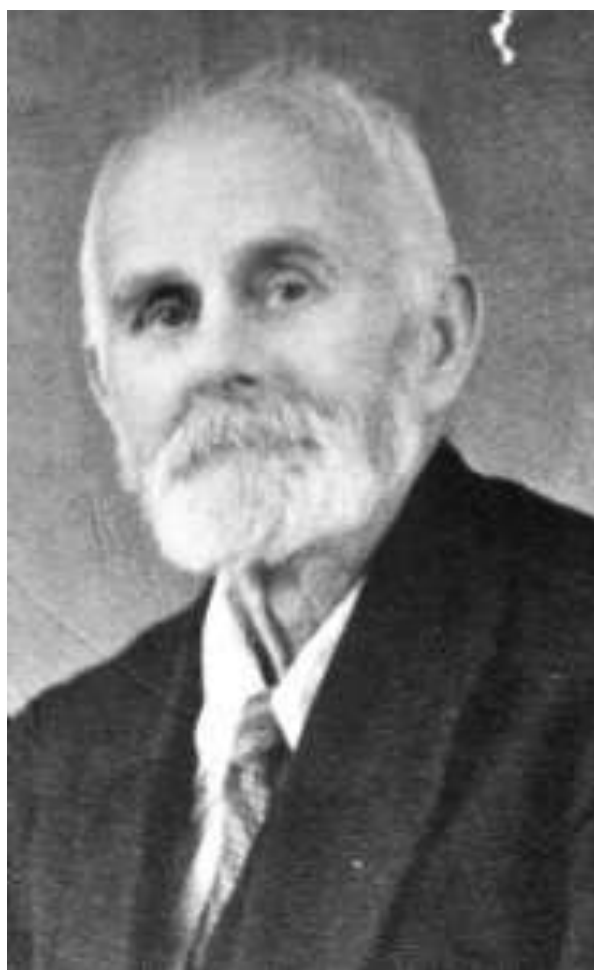
*with a hot iron to prevent a further running away on her part. It was her recovery from this last act of parental inhumanity that she resolved upon and effected a final escape from her father's brutality, by assuming male attire.*<sup>8</sup>

After leaving home, Mary McTavish lived openly as a man named 'Tommy', who was a teamster and horse-breaker, before resuming a female identity some years later and marrying Peter Phillips.

Although Shumack's dates are awry, his tale finds corroboration in a newspaper account of 1849.<sup>9</sup> However, the newspaper presents a saddened father and a rebellious child. As we can see, Shumack, in contrast, described a cruel father and an abused child, who may well have been experiencing gender dysphoria. The newspaper report says that a second escape occurred in which Mary stole a horse and hid at Jingera in late 1849 with 'Dick the Tailor', another liminal character, who only seems to appear in a press report a few years earlier as the victim in a 'bloodthirsty assault' with a spade in the Hunter Valley.<sup>10</sup> He and McTavish seem to have leant on each other for support on the frontier in this period. It seems to be in the early 1850s, that Tommy worked as a teamster in the Ginninderra district. Some of the men who travelled with McTavish, according to Shumack, had no idea they had been born 'Mary', so successful was the gender transition.

Shumack's story is also important evidence in showing the cultural maturity of the Uriarra Aboriginal band in offering refuge to a vulnerable individual, when the Europeans were struggling. But it also shows the compassion of the Duntroon shepherd families. Many were conservative yet found it in their hearts to support Mary/Tommy over James McTavish. Their outrage led to the spurning and exile of the father to Jeir. In this way, Shumack has preserved a remarkable story demonstrating the inspiring courage of a non-binary child in asserting themselves and then in the community in standing by them; be it the Aboriginal people who gave them

refuge, or the Europeans at Duntroon who supported the child on their return.



Samuel Schumack

Photograph: [Hall Museum](#)

Tommy lived a successful life as a teamster in charge of horse and bullock teams plying the route between Canberra and Sydney in the early 1850s, before securing work as a wrangler. At some stage before 1855, Mary/Tommy suffered a bad accident when breaking in a wild horse. Shumack says that the medical treatment 'revealed' a female identity and that when recovered, McTavish assumed female life again and married Peter Phillips.

The trouble with Shumack's account is that it has a flawed chronology as well as inconsistency between the earlier version (included by Gale) and the edited 1967 edition. In his revised account, Shumack:

- corrects the name from Margaret to Mary;

<sup>8</sup> In Gale, *Canberra*, pp 118-19.

<sup>9</sup> *Goulburn Herald and County of Argyle Advertiser*, 2 June 1849, p 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 5 March 1845, p 3.

- misreports James McTavish's status as widower (he and his wife both died in 1866, well after the events);
- brings the date of the first escape forward a year, but it is still too late, by about four years;
- located the band of Aboriginal people at Uriarra;
- reveals his source as his mother-in-law, Jemima Winter, who was a friend of Mary;
- locates the station where Tommy was horse breaking as 'south of Queanbeyan'; and
- botches the date of Mary's marriage (claiming 1869, when it was 1855).

The account of Mary McTavish's escape, as reported in the press in June 1849, at which time they were aged thirteen, is also different to Shumack. The press report is more intrigued by the scandal of their non-binary or gender-fluid life and does not question the father's actions. It is written by an anonymous Monaro correspondent, who revels in

demonstrating his/her florid literary style and knowledge of the area but does not seem to have known the Duntroon community and Shumack's account of the spurning of James McTavish for his cruelty to his child.<sup>11</sup>

I accept that Shumack is a flawed chronicler, botching dates and can be gullible, but his critical strength – and it is a rare quality indeed – is that he was genuinely interested in the underclasses and the stories which played out beyond the drawing rooms of the elite (or the 'snobbocracy' as he specifically called it).<sup>12</sup> More often than not, he conveyed extraordinary stories of ordinary individuals. McTavish is the prime example. He also had a rare interest in the lives of women. Compare William Davis Wright, for example. Hardly a woman appears in his book of 1923, dominated as it was by the 'sketches' of 26 or so prominent individuals of the district, all of them men.<sup>13</sup> If we are prepared to work through Shumack's problems in dates and detail, he proves to be one of the most valuable sources we have for the social history of nineteenth-century Canberra.



*While McTavish Street in Googong is named after Mary-Tommy, the homes there bear no resemblance to the simple dwellings they would have known*

*Photograph: [Real Estate View](#)*

<sup>11</sup> *Goulburn Herald and County of Argyle Advertiser*, 2 June 1849, p 6.

<sup>12</sup> Shumack, *An Autobiography*, p 88.

<sup>13</sup> See the criticism of him by Gale (*Canberra*, p vii).

### **Canberra Southern Cross Club Community Rewards Program**

The Southern Cross Club pays 7.5% of any amount paid for drinks and food at the Club to CDHS, if a Club member has told the Club that our Society is their favoured recipient.

Recently we received a quarterly payment of \$185 from the Community Rewards Program. Multiplying that by four shows that it is a major source of income for our Society.

If you are a member of the Southern Cross Club, please nominate us as your preferred Community Rewards recipient. Presenting your membership card when you buy food and drink at the Club will give you members' prices, and a sizeable donation to our Society.

If you are not a member, please consider joining.

*Helen Digan and Ann Tündern-Smith*

### **Canberra and Region Heritage Festival 9 April to 1 May 2022**

This year's Heritage Festival theme was Curiosity. We were able to run two events. The first was a history and heritage book sale. The sale included a special preview for CDHS members, followed by a public sale the next day. Sales like this one constitute a valuable source of fundraising.

Also, we put together a small exhibition featuring some of the more curious items in our collection. Space in our current premises imposes a severe restriction on mounting all but the most modest exhibitions. Nevertheless it's surprising where items can be displayed and how many visitors come to see them.

*Esther Davies*

### **Conservation Workshop Fully Booked!**

On Thursday, 26 May, Kim Morris from Art & Archival conducted a one day workshop to assist in the conservation of the Pat Wardle Collection. The workshop was fully booked a fortnight beforehand.

CDHS members assembled in the Alexander Room at Curtin to learn the basics of conservation from a professional. The workshop, funded by a National Library of Australia Heritage Grant, provided a useful service to members and the Society's collections.

*Julia Ryan*

### **Outreach**

Have you written an article, presented a talk or given an interview as a CDHS member since 1 July 2021? We would like to acknowledge your efforts in the Annual Report. Please advise details of your Outreach activities to [admin@canberrahistory.org.au](mailto:admin@canberrahistory.org.au).

*Frances McGee*



*Wesley Uniting Church, 2011  
Photograph, [Bidgee, Wikimedia Commons](#)*

### ***So Many Ways YOU Can Help!***

One hour of your time each month donated to your Historical Society would make so much difference for existing volunteers and the backlogs they face! One hour a fortnight or one hour a week would be even better!

Your Society is a purely volunteer body. If it gets government grants, they are solely for the purpose being funded. Keeping the Society afloat depends on those who have volunteered for the Council, who often undertake other tasks for the Society, plus a small number of others. That's why we have a backlog which can be broken down easily into little chunks with which you can help.

Please offer an hour of your time:

- ⇒ to edit or format this newsletter — it's your chance to follow in some famous footsteps;
- ⇒ to assist Julia as Treasurer, a role in which she is doing an amazing job, but no-one can go on for ever;
- ⇒ to review a book or books for the *Canberra Historical Journal*;
- ⇒ to write a short article on your own historical research for *The Canberra Times*, making sure that you mention your membership of our Society for wider publicity;
- ⇒ to help interview people who would like to provide an oral history;
- ⇒ to participate in filing a growing pile of press clippings about Canberra and its history, an excellent way to learn more about the Society's resources;
- ⇒ to look through the photographs on our Website to see if you can provide more information about any of them.

Existing volunteers look forward to discussing the possibilities with you!

### ***Note to Contributors***

*Canberra History News* welcomes article up to 1500 words in length about your research into the history of Canberra and the broader district or your memories. Longer articles should be offered to our sister publication, the *Canberra History Journal*. Priority is given to articles from CDHS members.

On matters of writing style, our authority is the 7th edition of the *Style Manual*, now online only at <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/>.

The *News* can cope with most word-processing outputs, but not PDF. A PDF file will be accepted for publication only in exceptional circumstances, such as advertising. Photographs should be in the JPEG format, although GIFs are acceptable for simpler images.

This is not an academic journal but, as the CDHS takes copyright law seriously, all sources used should be cited, even if not previously published—for example, personal communications and manuscripts.

The *News* uses the documentary-note system of referencing, as set out in <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/style-rules-and-conventions/referencing-and-attribution/documentary-note>. Credits must be supplied for all photographs, including those taken by the author.

Please send your contributions to the Society's office using one of the addresses on [page 2](#).

***Deadline for the September issue is the first Tuesday in August,  
2 August 2022***





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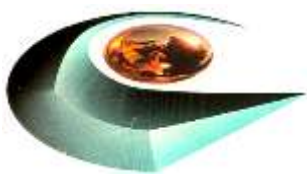
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Historical Society Inc.

FOUNDED 10 December 1953

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The Treasurer  
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