



## MACLEAY RIVER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# NEWSLETTER

February, 2016

Number 14

### President's Report

The shelving for the library in the new shed has been completed and books, newspapers and Gazettes moved into it. We still need shelving for the rest of the shed. Genealogist Terry Eakin, who donated most of the books, has agreed for us to call it the Kempsey Genealogical Library which is the name he first proposed when he gave us the books years ago.

The four cupboards housing the Port Macquarie Pastures Protection Board Archives have been moved into the new shed, freeing up more space at the western end of the Museum.

We were unsuccessful with our Community Business Partnership Grant application for security fencing around the cottage and new shed, we will have look elsewhere for the \$8,000 or so to fund this.

We have started three new volunteers so far this year, Barbara, Pauline and Terry. Both Pauline and Terry will be working in Research after an initial period on the desk. Last year we attracted six new volunteers but due to changes in their circumstances, three of these no longer volunteer. So we still need a lot more volunteers. I would ask that all current volunteers try to attract new volunteers – I have had my daughter, granddaughter and cousin volunteering here and they don't even live in Kempsey. If you go away, try to get someone to volunteer in your place.

This February Newsletter has been edited by Noeline Kyle for the first time and will also contain articles contributed by Noeline. The Journal is about the McLeay River in 1852 written by Dianne. This will be a valuable contribution to a period in local history that has not had much written about it. Together this will make a great start to our publishing programme for the year.

I would like to thank Noeline for her considerable time and effort in nominating me for the 2016 Kempsey Citizen of the Year Award. Although I didn't win it, I did make the shortlist of five which is an honour in itself.

Phil Lee  
President

### Research Report

The Research Team were very much saddened to hear of the passing of Mrs Billie Crawford, who for decades had led the research effort for the Macleay River Historical Society (MRHS). Billie will be remembered for her pleasant nature and her dedication to the mission of MRHS at Kempsey Museum. Our thanks and prayers go with you Billie.

Research has been done for the following: Family names; Locations; and Topics.

Brock, O'Brien, Smith, Druitt, Cheers, Kelly, Lyons, Woods, Cavanaghs, Riggs, Elliott, Macklin, Verge, Soares and Huxley.

Yarrabandinni, and Connection Creek, Melville High School, South Kempsey Bus Crash, King Gee Closure, Kempsey Museum, Boxing, Kempsey Rifle Club, Jack and Jill School and Kempsey Aid Retarded Persons (KARP).

Last year, we assisted a student John Rowley, with information on Trial Bay Internment Camp for a major research project he was working on as part of his History major at the University of Sydney. He has forwarded a copy of his finished work which I will place in our files, if anyone would like to see a copy please contact Phil Lee.

Thank you to the researchers for their diligent work.

Dianne Nolan  
MRHS Research Manager

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## Valedictory Mrs Billie Crawford

Members and volunteers of the Society and members of the wider community are deeply saddened by the recent loss of Historical Society patron and Life member, Mrs Billie Crawford.

Whilst I have only been with the Society and Kempsey Museum, in which Billie was so deeply involved, for seven years this has been enough time to appreciate the enormity and importance of Billie Crawford's contribution to our Society in particular and to the historical heritage of the Macleay Valley in general.

Billie was encouraged to join the Historical Society in 1983 by the late Gwen Kemp. This was the year we finally opened our new Museum at South Kempsey after being without a Museum building since 1970. Billie thought she needed more qualifications so began a Diploma in Local and Applied History at the University of New England, graduating in 1987. Billie then attended courses in Museum management with Museums Australia and the then Powerhouse Museum. She applied much of what she had learned in organising and guiding our new Museum, so that it became, and still is one of the best Museums in Regional New South Wales. This was confirmed in 2014 when we completed the Museums & Galleries NSW Standards Programme with flying colours.

Billie's contributions were recognised by the award



of Australia Day Citizen of the Year in 2004, and a NSW Government Heritage Award in 2006, but further accolades such as an Order of Australia Medal were discouraged by this self-effacing and gracious lady.

Fortunately we have in our Museum an enduring legacy of Billie's writings, research and examples of her organisational skills. Billie will be long remembered.

Our deepest commiserations to daughters Jennie and Jo, and to Billie's extended family.

Phil Lee

## Photography Report



*The three sisters of the late John Mawson with the plaque and award for the Mawson Layback. (Photo: Macleay Argus)*

Debbie is still scanning Angus McNeil negatives madly and I am ready to start cataloguing a new batch of negatives when she gives me the word.

We received an interesting email and photograph from Maralyn in Northern Ireland concerning the Bryson family, ancestors of her husband Sam. The photograph was of the Reverend John Taylor and elders of the Presbyterian Church including John Bryson. It would have been taken in 1903 on the occasion of John's ordainment along with James Campbell and J L Grant.

John Bryson was born in Ballynahinch, County Down, Ireland around 1853 and came to the Macleay in 1880 where he set up a store in Frederickton. Moving into Kempsey a few years later, he built the Federal Store which became one



*Macleay River Historical Society display at "A Different Kettle of Fish" exhibition.*

of the most successful establishments of its type in country New South Wales. John passed away in Sydney in 1924, his wife Margaret having predeceased him three years earlier. There were two daughters of the marriage, Madge and Jennie.

Kempsey Shire Council enquired via the Macleay Argus if we had any information on the Mawson Layback. There was a plaque relocated from the recent Smith Street reconstruction. Given the date, we searched our Macleay Argus files and came up with some photographs and an article in the Macleay Argus of 3 December 1999 which we passed on. John Mawson was the chairperson of the Kempsey Shire Council Access Committee, who shared his wealth of access issues with the wider community and designed this ramp which enabled the disabled and elderly an easy way to get from the road up to the footpath. The Mawson Layback was on the eastern side of Smith Street near the Forth Street intersection.

Our participation in the photographic exhibition "A Different Kettle of Fish" by the South West Rocks Arts Council on 22-23 January at the Surf Club, SWR was a resounding success. We raised around \$200 in sales and were promised a lot of donations of photographs. Thanks to Phil, Barb, Sue and Garry for giving up valuable weekend time to help out.

On Saturday 20 January, Phil and Dianne set up a photography display featuring Kempsey floods at the Flood Workshop held at Belmore River Hall. The display featured still photographs of the 1949, 1963 and 2001 floods, plus rare archival film of the 1949 flood plus maps and documents, and created much interest. Our thanks go to the NSW State Emergency services for the invitation to participate.

Judy Waters  
Manager Photographics

## Museum Report

Items donated recently included an ermine stole, a three mink scarf, driftwood beige rotary dial wallfone, framed and hand-coloured portrait of Alice Ramsay and child circa 1899, photograph of Mary Nance and baby at Euroka,

Thanks to all the volunteers who worked over the holidays, we managed to keep the doors open through a very lean period for staffing.

We set up a shop front in the Arcade over Christmas thanks to the generosity of the property owners, IGA. Garry, Sue and other volunteers staffed the shop at various times and sold books and fielded enquiries about our Society.

The Visitor Information Centre (VIC) have begun moving shelving and brochures to the Slim Dusty Centre. There will be a transition period with the VIC open at both locations and we will be informed by Council when the final closure will be.

Stephanie finished typing the nine parts of Bob Shanney's history of the United Aborigines Mission in Kempsey and scanning the magazine cuttings from his scrapbooks. The history covers the period from 1890 to 2000, and Bob has agreed for us to keep a copy of the digitised records in our Research section.

Phil Lee

## Recent Additions to our Library

Archive CD Books "NSW Commonwealth Electoral Rolls 1939" (CD-ROM)

Paine, Justin "My Kempsey 1934-1957" 2015

Harden, Bob "European Settlement and Pastoralism at Kunderang" 2015

Wilson, Roger "A Brief History of Willesbro"

Wilson, Roger "The Andrews of Coleraine and the Wilsons of Willesbro" (CD-ROM)

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE MACLEAY RIVER HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

Members of the Macleay River Historical Society will be held on Tuesday, March 15 at 3pm. Please contact the Secretary for information forms or call at the museum.

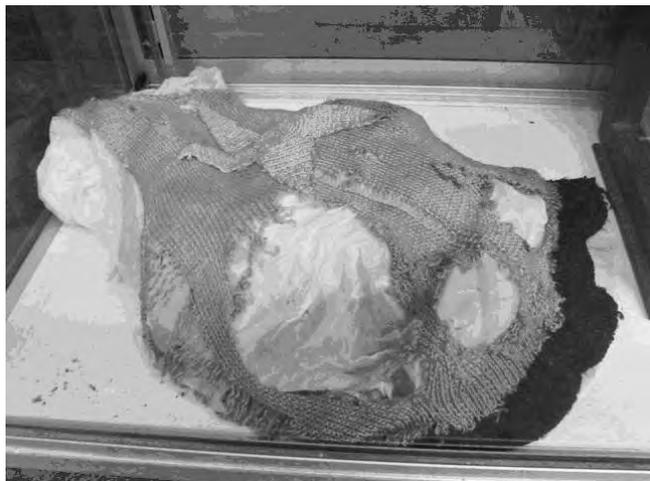
Ruth Woodward  
Honorary Secretary

## Exploring Our Collection

### Tom Saul's racing vest

Tom Saul was a farmer from Bellimbopinni who became a champion rower winning many local competitions; including the 1924 Australian Heavyweight sculling title and the New South Wales Lightweight sculling championship.<sup>1</sup> As Debbie Sommers outlined in her draft report for the Kempsey Museum, the historic significance of Tom Saul's vest lay in the rarity of a hand knitted vest of its type, its representativeness of hand knitted sporting garments of the 1920s, its high interpretative potential and its relevance to the collection of the Macleay River Historical Society Museum.<sup>2</sup> The vest was donated to the Kempsey Museum in 1991 by Tom Saul's wife Ruby and family together with Tom's rowing scull, trophies and sashes.<sup>3</sup> The vest was in poor condition when it was obtained by the Museum. However, its value as an illustration of past sporting activities such as rowing regattas, sculling competitions, and sailing along the Macleay River was readily acknowledged. Indeed with the addition of Tom Saul's trophies, sashes, rowing scull and an illuminated address also in the Kempsey Museum it is a display that will continue to remind and engender pride in a past when the Macleay River and other mid north coast rivers were the centre of social, leisure and sporting life.

It was with all of this history in mind and a desire to keep the rowing vest and preserve it that our President Phil Lee set out to obtain funding for restoration and was successful in obtaining a Community Heritage Grant to preserve the rowing vest. The restoration was carried out in 2015 by Heritage Heights Conservation of Sydney. The results of the preservation are an amazing transformation from the aged and damaged piece of material that was donated to the Museum to a charming knitted rowing vest with its own distinct shape



*The condition of the vest is poor. There is...insect debris visible...there is a large hole in the front...'*

*Source: Debbie Sommers, Knitted vest worn by Tom Saul, c1923, history and provenance, based on research by Garry Munday.*



*The restored vest, probably knitted by Tom Saul's mother, in a purple/mauve yarn for the body and black yarn for the lower band. A decorative crocheted star in cream yarn is sewn to the front,*

*Source: Debbie Sommers, Knitted vest worn by Tom Saul, c1923, history and provenance, based on research by Garry Munday.*

and with its purple and black colours very discernible to the eye.

This project to restore the Tom Saul vest would not have been done without the foresight of our President Phil Lee, Debbie Summer's work on its significance and provenance, and the research efforts of Garry Munday. The rowing vest, trophies, sashes, rowing scull and illuminated address are on display at the Kempsey Museum and we invite the Kempsey community to visit. Tom Saul was an unassuming man who made his mark in an age when the tough resolve to achieve success in one man was not only much admired but was also seen as a great achievement. As he himself said, 'If a man makes a success of his life that's something isn't it?'<sup>4</sup>

Dr Noeline J Kyle

<sup>1</sup> Debbie Sommers, *Knitted vest worn by Tom Saul, c1923, history and provenance*, a draft written for the Kempsey Museum, 8 March 2015.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Accession records, Kempsey Museum.

<sup>4</sup> *Macleay Argus*, 9 November 1974.

## The threads of women's lives: Moira Hodgson and the textile collection at Kempsey Museum

When Moira Hodgson was a girl her grandmother taught her many of the crafts that led Moira to a lifetime of caring for and working in this field. Her grandmother was an accomplished needlewoman who could make the most 'beautiful' handicrafts.<sup>1</sup> She taught Moira to knit and crochet. Moira went on to teach others and to learn much more: spinning, tatting, patchwork, quilting and needlework as she grew up and she became a passionate advocate of the crafts of women. Moira became especially interested in spinning and weaving, and taught these for many years.

Now in her 90s, Moira's childhood was spent in Rockhampton and Clermont in central highlands Queensland, and she grew up at a time when times were tough. Her mother, a Scottish lass with her own strong ideas on caring for animals and the daily regime on the cattle property worked the property after Moira's father died in 1931. But Moira had a happy childhood and went to boarding school in Rockhampton where she spent weekends with and learnt from her grandmother, many of the arts and crafts of women's lives.

A long time volunteer at the Kempsey Museum it was Moira's forethought and creative energy that helped to further progress the Kempsey Museum's collection of women's handicrafts. In November 1995 Moira wrote to Rosemary Shepherd, Curator of Lace at the Powerhouse Museum to ask if the Kempsey Museum could borrow lace from their collection to make a special feature in a planned lace exhibition at Kempsey. Moira had completed a 12 month distance learning lace making course with Rosemary and knew her well and thus began an important initiative for the collection of women's work on the Macleay.

The subsequent Lace Display proved a great success attracting visitors from overseas as well as from the local area. A report in the *Macleay Argus* was effusive in its praise:

*Rare and valuable 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century lace from the Sydney Powerhouse Museum collection is a feature of the lace exhibition which opened at the South Kempsey museum this month.*

*On display is lace from the Angus McNeil glass plate negative period of 1897-1944 and gros point fragment buratto embroidered woven lace up to the more modern cluny lace.*

*A wide variety of lace from the Kempsey museum collection is also on display.*

*Sketches of the way early dressmakers used lace on clothes and a book for visitors to look up information on the display items complements the educational aspect of the exhibition.*



Moira Hodgson

Source: Noeline Kyle, 9 December 2015

*The cluny lace has been specially set up for study and it is important that people who wish to study the lace make an appointment.*

*'A researcher has to be on duty to hand out magnifying glasses and information books,' said Macleay River Historical Society textile conservationist Moira Hodgson<sup>2</sup>*

And from this came the impetus for a textile collection at Kempsey Museum. As Moira told me:

*Well, to me, right from the start, when I started teaching craft I could see that our women, no matter who they were, what level of life they came from, they were creative and imaginative and I thought it was such a shame that this was being wasted....<sup>3</sup>*

The textile collection holds many significant pieces including Tom Saul's rowing vest which has been restored through a Community Heritage Grant, samplers dating from 1876, costumes, fans, doilies, Teneriffe and Paraguayan lace, Tussore silk, Irish crochet, various needlework techniques and a World War 1 souvenir table centre sent by Roy Mowle of the 6<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment, Egypt, to his mother. The Museum also has early editions of books and pamphlets on women's handicrafts including *Handicrafts for*



Moira Hodgson demonstrating 'the skilful craft of spinning' at the Kempsey Museum  
Source: Macleay Argus, 20 April 1989

*Countrywomen* (1939) which gave women advice on Assisi embroidery, candlewick quilting, double running embroidery, Italian quilting, leather embossing, organdie flowers, raffia hat making, and twine seating along with a list of more than thirty fascinating women's handicrafts.

The following descriptions were written by Moira and Mary Yabsley. Moira would carefully study the textiles and Mary would listen, improve on and then write down the descriptions used to accompany the valuable items. Reading these words and the many others that accompany the

Museum's textile collection demonstrates the incalculable value of Moira's and Mary's remarkable skill, knowledge and understanding of them:

Handwoven evening purse, pale mauve crochet cotton in the warp. Dark red and royal blue "bead" yarn in the weft, lined with pale mauve, pale mauve fringe.

Bodice, part of a dress, very fine cream net with red and cream very fine machine lace trim (filet). Elbow length sleeves, V neck, hooks and eyes on back of bodice, pin tucks.

Sample, 15cms Solomons knots, shell and fan stitch – solomons knots 3cm edging.

Slip – half, heavy embroidered Anglaise (9") with 1.5" ribbon insertion. Broderie anglaise at hipline.

The textile collection is now an integral feature and precious part of the Kempsey Museum, and its progress and continuing development owes much, in the first instance, to the enthusiasm and expertise of Moira Hodgson and other volunteers such as Judy Waters and Mary Milligan, and to the many other volunteers who have continued their work and followed in their footsteps since.

Dr Noeline J Kyle

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Moira Hodgson, 9 December 2015, Macksville, New South Wales.

<sup>2</sup> *Macleay Argus*, 12 July 1996.

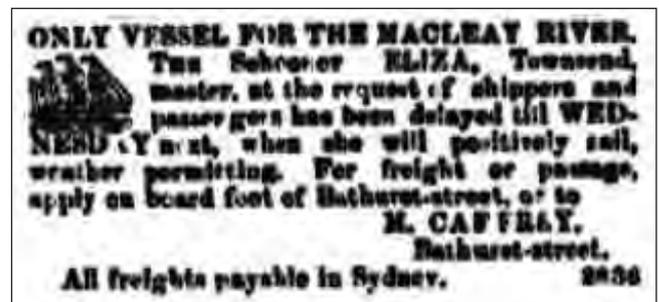
<sup>3</sup> op cit.

## The Wreck of the *Eliza*

The perils of nineteenth century sea travel are vividly illustrated by the story of a shipwreck in 1855, affecting at least three of our pioneering families.

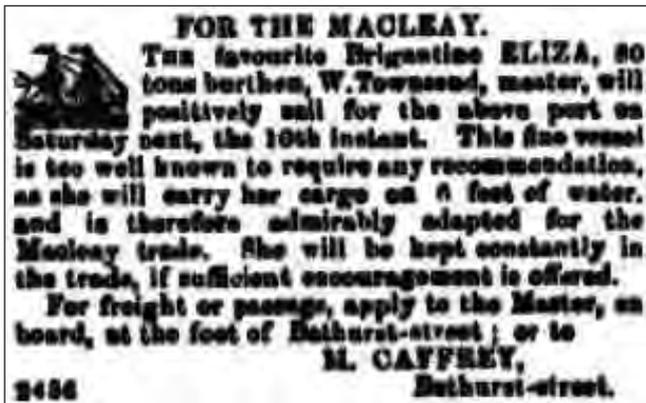
Mr William Griffess Trees was born in Kent England and was brought to Australia by his parents at the age of four. His father had the first bootshop in Sydney. While working in his father's shop, young Trees learnt of the prospects of the McLeay (Macleay) and acquired scrub land at Eureka. His father decided to sell his business and move to the Macleay with his son, wife and daughter-in-law. The journey took six weeks by sailing ship and the young Trees was twenty-two years old when he arrived. His furniture and tent was due to come to the Macleay by the next boat.

This was the *Eliza*, which was advertised as the only vessel for the McLeay River. This boat was said to be able to carry her cargo on six feet of water and was claimed to be admirably suitable for the McLeay.



*The Empire*, 9 February, 1855

Thomas and Elizabeth Nance had emigrated to New South Wales from Penzance, Cornwall in late 1843. They settled in Sydney where their two daughters, Elizabeth and Mary, married two Lane brothers, John and Edwin in a double wedding ceremony at St Lawrence's Church of England in 1855. By this time Thomas and Elizabeth had moved to the



*The Empire, 14 February, 1855*

Macleay and the young couples prepared to follow them, applying for passage on the *Eliza*.

The vessel however, was wrecked off Hannah (Anna) Bay in February 1855 when it struck on rocks but the passengers were saved by the use of a basket which was passed from shore to ship. All cargo was lost in the catastrophe however, including the furniture, tent and other belongings of the hopeful young Trees. Some of the passengers then walked twenty miles south along the beach where they were met by a rescue party near Newcastle. The Lane brothers and their wives lost all their belongings as well including twelve months' provisions.

Undaunted by this catastrophe, the Lane families made a fresh start and landed safely on the Macleay. Edwin Whitelaw and Mary Lane were said to be the first to take up a land selection at Euroka and were pioneers of this district. Their son Henry

Ivey Lane became the first schoolteacher at Macksville in 1881. Edwin passed away in 1880 whilst Mary lived on until 1922.

John Lane and his wife Elizabeth carried on farming pursuits for a number of years and later ran a store at West Kempsey. John Lane was a devoted member of the Methodist Church and for a long time was superintendent of the West Kempsey Sunday School. Elizabeth passed away in 1900 and Thomas in 1907. Their six children were as follows: Mrs George Hodgson, Mr John Lane, Mr F W Lane, Mrs E A Watson, Mr E A Lane and Mr Victor Lane.

A third Lane brother, Thomas, married yet another Nance sister, Christiana, in 1863.

William Griffess Trees had married Eliza Hilder in 1853 and the couple had thirteen children on the Macleay. Following Eliza's death in 1903, William remarried Rosina Knauer. One of the first alderman elected to the Council, he was mayor of Kempsey during 1899-1900. William was an excellent maize-grower and market gardener and served several terms as president of the local Agricultural Society.

Phil Lee

References:

Loney, J K 1980 *Australian shipwrecks Vol. 2 1851-1871*

Macleay Argus files

Macleay Chronicle files

MRHS files

Research of John Nance

Trove

## The theatre of the absurd

On 3 May 1933 you only had to be woman and bring 'your handkerchief' with you to the Mayfair Theatre to be admitted to see *Back Street* a movie based on the novel by Fannie Hurst. The movie version starred Irene Dunn and John Boles (does anyone remember this man?). This wasn't the first time the owners of the Mayfair were a little out there with their advertisements for the new cinema. Opened in April that year the report of the official opening told the residents of Kempsey that the theatre had been built at a cost of £17000 using fifty thousand feet of hardwood, fibro plaster of course, bricks, and 'a whole lot of galvanised iron and builders hardware from Schroder's Limited.' That evening the 'large' audience was offered 'a long and diversified programme, the principal feature of which *'Trouble in Paradise,'* starring Herbert Marshall, the famous British actor, with Kay Francis and Miriam Hopkins, and *'Guilty as Charged,'* a 'serio-comedy in which Edmund Lowe and Victor McLaglen combine in an unusual drama.' The event was billed as the 'Greatest Event in Kempsey's History', a grand gala opening where the audience would see Paramount's cleverest and



most amusing film.' The cost of a seat? Dress circle 2/7, Stalls 1/6 and 2/-, Matinees were cheaper, Adults 1/6 & 1/-, and for children 6d & 9d. And the two full pages of advertisement in the Macleay Argus finished with the following introduction to a full description of all of the cinema's many charms:

In a week the Mayfair, Kempsey's New Wonder Theatre, will emerge from the hands of the workmen who have made it the splendid thing it is. It will emerge – YOURS. Yours for your enchantment, yours, because you, as citizens of the more progressive town on the North coast, are worthy of it in all its splendour. Below are enumerated a few of the features of the new Mayfair presenting to the people of Kempsey the ultimate in theatre construction.

No wonder the crowds turned up. A pity of course that it is no longer there.

Dr Noeline Kyle

Editor: Dr Noeline Kyle  
Design: Gary Marshall

## Benefits of Membership

Membership Applications and Renewals start from February in the New Year. Members of the Macleay River Historical Society now enjoy the following benefits:

- Quarterly Journal (posted or pick up from Museum)
- Quarterly Newsletter (posted, emailed or pick up from Museum)
- Discount on basic Research Fee (\$25.00 instead of \$30.00 per subject)
- Discount of 10% on Photograph orders (excluding postage)

## Our Affiliations

Australasian Federation of Family History Organisations  
Australasian Telephone Collector's Society Inc  
Australian National Maritime Museum  
Historic Houses Trust  
Macleay Valley Coast Tourism  
Museums Australia  
Museums and Galleries NSW  
Royal Australian Historical Society



## Macleay River Historical Society

### *Office Bearers:*

**President**  
Phil Lee

**Vice Presidents**  
Garry Munday  
Tom Plunkett

**Secretary & Public Officer**  
Ruth Woodward

**Treasurer**  
Barbara Coughran

**Patrons**  
Terry Eakin  
Geraldine Yabsley  
Ald. Liz Campbell

**Postal Address**  
P.O. Box 390, Kempsey, NSW 2440

**Phone: (02) 6562 7572**  
**Email: mrhs5@bigpond.com**  
**Website: www.kempseymuseum.org**

**Membership**  
\$18.00 single  
\$23.00 plus journal and postage

**Committee Meetings**  
Meetings are held at 3pm  
every third Tuesday of the month

**Research**  
**Tuesday:** Desley Nunn, Leah Taylor  
**Wednesday:** Dianne Nolan  
**Thursday:** Garry Munday

**Photographic**  
**Friday:** Judy Waters, Debbie Reynolds, Phil Lee

**MUSEUM OPEN**  
10.00 am to 4.00 pm daily except  
Good Friday and Christmas day