

THE MILLSTONE

KURRAJONG ~ COMLERROY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Kurrajong ~ Comleroy Historical Society is dedicated to researching, recording, preserving and promoting the growth of interest in the history of the Kurrajong district, the area west of the Hawkesbury River bounded by Bilpin and the Grose and Colo rivers

1817-2017: A COMMEMORATION OF FORGOTTEN EXPLORATION BY A LARGELY FORGOTTEN MAN

K-CHS TOUR OCTOBER 21st 2017- by FRANK HOLLAND

Until we moved to Kurrajong in 2000 I had never heard of Ben Singleton or known of his contribution to the growing colony of NSW. Over the years his story has intrigued me. It began with Les Dollin's tours of the old water mill sites on Little Wheeny Creek. An introduction to Andy Macqueen and his book *Somewhat Perilous* added impetus to the desire to know more about this man.

Work has been progressing on researching the story of the mills built by Ben Singleton and his brothers at Kurrajong. This task has been enhanced by a number of excursions to the sites where it seems each trip has uncovered more of this early site. Some have suggested that the remnants on the site could be the oldest unspoilt site of a water mill in the Sydney area. However that is another story.

This commemoration tour to St Albans was to recognise the importance of the two expeditions that Ben Singleton undertook 200 years ago (1817 and 1818), just 30 years after the first European settlement.

Ben was born in England, the second son of William and Hannah Singleton. William was convicted of theft and sentenced to seven years (1791). He was transported to Port Jackson where he arrived with his wife, Ben and younger brother Joseph (1792). An older brother, James (aged 14) had remained in England. In 1795, William received an absolute pardon and in 1797 was granted 90 acres at Mulgrave Place (near Wilberforce).

All went well for a number of years with the family working the land, which by 1806 covered 232 acres. A series of floods and insect infestations struck and William borrowed money from Robert Campbell, and others, to re-stock and re-build. Part of the property was lost when the debt could not be repaid.

1809 saw the three Singleton brothers reunited, with the arrival of James. Each received a grant of 50 acres at Richmond Hill (near Duffy's corner on Grose Vale Road). Benjamin married Mary Sharling in 1811 and somewhere around this time commenced work on the first of his water mills on Little Wheeny Creek. Later another mill was built further downstream and the brothers milled wheat for the Government and local population. Later James moved to a tidal mill they built on the Hawkesbury River near Wiseman's Ferry.

In 1816 Ben experienced financial difficulty and the Provost Marshall advertised the mill for sale. Ben was able to forestall that action by renting the mill to John Town. Ben was not only resourceful but ambitious. He saw a future in grazing cattle, but where? Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson had found a way across the Blue Mountains to the western plains - perhaps he could find another way by going north and then west.



Settlers Arms Inn built 1836 - St Albans in the McDonald Valley

In September of 1817 it appears he financed a private expedition to search for a possible route. There is no documentation of this journey apart from a notation on a map later drawn by William Parr. That map shows a route going to the north and is marked 'Singleton's route 1817'. If the route is plotted on a current map it indicates that Ben made his way from his mill to cross the Colo River and then to the Macdonald Valley.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Our recent AGM saw a significant reshuffle of the existing committee and the very welcome addition of a new committee member, Terry Murray, who is a genuine born-in-Kurrajong local to boot! Our thanks to Airdrie Martin for many years of service as she steps down from the committee. Suzanne Smith has stepped down from the Secretary role but stays on the committee. We all appreciate the mammoth effort Suzanne put in to this job. Marguerite Wyborn has put up her hand to take over as Secretary, and hopefully we can spread the load a bit. Thankfully Pat O'Toole was willing to persevere as our Treasurer. I was honoured to be made the President, with Steve Rawling becoming Vice President. I hope I can fill the large shoes of my eminent predecessors. I will certainly give it a hardy go and try not to tread on too many toes in the process. Thanks to all the committee members for the time and effort they have put into keeping the Society ticking.

2017 has been a big year for the society and I think by any measure a very successful one. We have had a new book launched, several initiatives to broaden the visibility of the society, including a letter box drop and our successful street stalls, the most recent at Bilpin Flower Show (reported in full elsewhere), as well as several well patronised events and excursions.

The street stalls serve several purposes: making people aware of our activities, receiving valuable information and contacts from people and selling our books. Any member is welcome to volunteer to spend an hour or two manning a stall and meeting the public. Drop me an email if you are interested.

We have also had a big year with excursions and events, with a Hawkesbury River Cruise, two sold out Pansy Line Tours and a wonderful Mid-Winter Dinner, not to mention other smaller excursions. Come to think of it, the Nepean Hawkesbury Cruise brought the wettest day of the year, so maybe we need to organise another one urgently to break the drought!

There were several improvements to our website, including online booking of our events, online membership renewals and ordering of our publications, with the option of paying with PayPal or credit cards. The online facilities ease the workload for the treasurer and others, so we encourage everyone to use this method of interacting with the society if possible.

With the change of Secretary, we are taking the opportunity to ask members their wishes as far as which emails they would like to receive. Look out for an email soon on this subject. We also encourage all members to provide an email address if they can, so we can keep you fully in touch with activities. Anyone who doesn't have email and has been thinking about it, can feel free to give me a call to discuss what is involved.

The challenge now is to keep up the momentum into 2018. The committee is currently considering our events schedule for next year, so if you have any suggestions please get in touch, particularly if you would like to co-ordinate an outing or event!

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the Christmas Party on Saturday 9th December.

All members are welcome to get in touch with me at any time.
Please contact: president@kurrajonghistory.org.au
Phone: 02 4567 7993

David Griffiths

KURRAJONG – COMLEROY HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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secretary@kurrajonghistory.org.au

KCHS General Meeting and Annual General Meeting St David's Uniting Church Hall Kurrajong Heights

On Monday 25th September, twenty-one members attended both these meetings and there were 10 apologies recorded.

General Meeting

The President's Report covered events and activities since the previous GM on July 24th, including the August Pansy Tour, the Committee's discussion about new name badges for members, with suggestions from the group, management of the website and the online accounting system, and the Rex Stubbs history Symposium, attended by several Committee members.

Membership now stood at 106, and there had been several new members welcomed.

The treasurer presented a Profit and Loss Statement for the period from July 2017.

The main business of the meeting was the launch of the Society's new publication, *Built in the Kurrajong*, the third in the series, including many images from our online image archive, now containing over 5600 items. David Griffiths, convenor of the Book Committee, showed examples of the content, and introduced members of the Book Committee, each of whom was presented with a copy of the book, and thanked for their work on the publication.

Upcoming events, including the 21st October tour "Singleton and other Journeys North", the Christmas Party on December 9th, and the 150th Anniversary of St David's, were reviewed.

A word from the Secretary

Three weeks into the job and I find Suzanne's handling of the position a hard act to follow. However, with the help of Suzanne and President David I'm sure it will all work out. Several important dates coming up include the St David's Uniting Church Kurrajong Heights 150th Anniversary Service on 5th November, the Kurrajong-a-Buzz event in Kurrajong Village on 19th November and our Christmas Party on 9th December. Details of the events are on the back page of this publication. For any enquiries about these events please phone me on 4576 1371.

Marguerite Wyborn

Appreciation was expressed to Helen and Don Webster, who provided access to the Hall, and helped in the set-up for the meeting.

Annual General Meeting

The formal business of the AGM was conducted, including acceptance of the 2016 AGM Minutes and the 2016-2017 Annual Reports as printed in the previous issue of the Millstone.

Election of officer bearers for the 2017-2018 year was conducted by Returning Officer Frank Holland, with results as given in the President's Report in this issue. One Committee position remained vacant, and the new Committee will need to make appointments to the following positions: Millstone editor and publisher, webmaster, digital archivist, family history convenor, librarian/archivist, public officer, grants officer, Hon auditor.

Steve Rawling



Book Group: Paul Hulbert, Valerie Birch, Jennifer Griffiths, Airdrie Martin and David Griffiths

WELCOME to NEW MEMBERS

The Society would like to welcome new members

Christine Tracy

David McCann

Robyn Durie

bidwillii design

83 old bells line of road, kurrajong village
ph: 4573 0966 tuesday - sunday 9am - 5pm

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A Story of the last big cattle drive along Comleroy Road

The early 1950s marked the end of an era for the drovers of Comleroy Road. The exciting story of the long history of droving on the Comleroy Road is captured here in an interview by Les and Anne Dollin with Snowy and Joan Dubois in 2005.

For 130 years, drovers had herded mobs of cattle 150km along the original Comleroy Road that linked Kurrajong in the Hawkesbury with the huge agricultural district of Comleroy in the Hunter. Much of this road is now called Putty Road. In the 1950s motor vehicle traffic had increased to the stage where herding stock on foot along the road was no longer safe. So the historic day came in 1953 when Snowy Dubois and Bill Gosper drove the last mob of cattle along Comleroy Road.

Before taking a cattle drive along Comleroy Road, a special permit had to be obtained. Mrs Forgham issued these permits from the Upper Colo Post Office. Drovers were charged a certain fee for every 25 head of cattle in their mob. Snowy Dubois and Bill Gosper of Upper Colo had mustered 110 of Bill's cattle at 'The Gibba' near Putty. And then the drive was on!

Snowy and Bill set out on horseback with packhorses and about six faithful dogs, including Dusty, Nigger, Judy and Beau. Snowy remembers an earlier drive with 1000 cattle that ate out all the bracken fern and dried eucalyptus leaves on the rough track as they walked along. "They were just like vacuum cleaners!" said Snowy. If any beast died along the track, the drovers would collect the hide because the drovers would receive £1 for every hide they brought back. The cattle were driven only 10 miles per day.

Fleetwings, Snowy and Bill's first overnight camp was on a private property they called Fleetwings. After carefully counting the cattle into the Fleetwings yard, Snowy and Bill set up camp. While on the road the drovers usually slept under a tent fly or in a cave. They would make a drover's damper in the evening and enjoy dinner, a cup of tea and a bit of a yarn around the fire. **The horses** were hobbled at night, each with a bell on a strap around its neck. The drovers liked to be able



Snowy Dubois working cattle in a stockyard

to hear the bells all night – if they could not hear the bells drovers hurried to investigate, because that spelt trouble!

The next morning at 4 or 5 am, the fire was fanned up once again to make a breakfast of tinned meat, cheese and tea. The cattle were carefully mustered and counted once more as they left the yard. Then the men, cattle and dogs wound their way further south down the dirt road, managing to get to New Yard Stock Reserve before sunset.

Stampede at New Yard Stock Reserve. Snowy recalled a memorable night at New Yard Reserve on an earlier drive. Snowy and Bill did not know that timber-cutters had set up camp in the back corner of the reserve. During the night the cattle had wandered up towards the timber-cutters' camp. Unfortunately the timber-cutters had an Alsatian dog that barked madly and chased the cattle, causing the cattle to stampede down the fence line! At the other end of the fence line, Snowy and Bill had settled in for the night with the horses hobbled, their little bells tinkling and the fire crackling. Having fallen into a deep sleep, Snowy remembers being jolted awake by Bill who shouted at him to take cover behind a tree as the mob stampeded through the camp. Not much rest that night!

In the morning they were up before sunrise and back on the road heading for the next night's camp at **Upper Colo Reserve**. Snowy recalls that they used to drive mobs of 500 to 600 cattle from Howes Valley southwards, past Upper Colo Public School. It took from the children's morning play time until lunchtime for the bullocks to plod past the school and the noise from the drive was so intense that the children could not do their lessons! The route onwards took the mob to **Wheeny Creek Reserve** for another overnight camp.

Comleroy Road to The Slopes. The next day they would drive the cattle along Comleroy, turning down Slopes Road into Crooked Lane down to Bells Line of Road to avoid as much traffic as possible. On their last droving journey Snowy and Bill drove the cattle down Bells Line of Road, across the Pansy steam train line towards the North Richmond bridge.

Pansy, brakes on. Snowy recalls another time when he was driving a cow and calf near the Pansy steam train line. The calf got so frightened by the Pansy steam train puffing and bellowing steam that it ran across the railway line. The train driver slammed the brakes on, stopping the train. Cow and calf were reunited and Snowy went on his way.

North Richmond Bridge. The last big hurdle on this final Comleroy Road cattle drive was herding the cattle across the Hawkesbury River Bridge at North Richmond. What a sight that must have been! All 110 cattle bellowing as they shoved their way across this narrow bridge. You can only imagine the chaos such an event would cause today. **(cont. p 5)**

The drovers turned the mob south and followed the little lane leading up behind the University of Western Sydney (the then Hawkesbury Agricultural College), where they halted the cattle. After all the whip cracking and the barking of the cattle dogs had died away, and the dust had settled, they rested the cattle in the laneway overnight, with a drover camped at each end holding the cattle.

Riverstone yards. The next day, as it was the custom, the stockmen from the Riverstone meatworks rode across to meet them. In those days the western edge of the meatworks yards was only a stone's throw from the grounds of the college. So Snowy and Bill's hard work was over and the Riverstone stockmen took the cattle on from there. For Snowy and Bill this was the end of an era. As all the stockmen gathered around in the morning sun, the last big cattle drive from Putty along the Comleroy Road stock route was over.

Modern trucks have now taken over the jobs of Snowy and Bill and the like; but to the old timers, the rumbling of the cattle echoing down the valleys and the cracking of the drovers' stockwhips as they pushed the cattle forward, will stay in their memories as if it were yesterday.



Photos from the collection of Snowy and Joan Dubois above

Since the interview and publication of the above article in the **Millstone Newsletter Vol 4 Issue 2 - Jan-Feb 2006**, Snowy has passed away and Joan is now residing at Prestons. Mark Dubois, Snowy and Joan's son, is now a member of KCHS, so we look forward to more stories from the Wollemi, Singleton to Comleroy droving days.

Rex Stubbs Commemorative History Symposium

Members of the Committee attended the second annual Symposium in September. Held in the Deerubbin Centre, the Symposium brings together Hawkesbury groups involved in history and heritage areas to hear a variety of speakers, to share information about their activities and to display their products and services.

This year's event proved very worthwhile, with some of the speakers being extremely informative. Two in particular were relevant to KCHS concerns:

Dr Tanya Evans, of Macquarie University, a specialist in local history, talked about the relationship between local and family history, and described her program of placing students with community groups, not only to learn about methods in local and family history, but also to develop skills in working with local communities, and people in general, outside the academic context. She praised the level of interest amongst her students in local history.

Tanya has done considerable research in looking at records of Illegitimacy, especially amongst willing and unwilling immigrants to Australia, and in the community impact of mental health issues.

Christine Fernon, of the National Centre of Biography, at the Australian National University, talked most informatively about the work being done on the well-known Australian Dictionary of Biography, and on the lesser known associated works on two associated websites – People Australia and Obituaries Australia.

These latter are so little known that even professional historians present were surprised to hear about them.

Together they represent rich resources for, particularly, family history researchers. People Australia expands on the list of significant characters in the ADB, to include a wider variety of people, and importantly, to identify connections and family groups within the whole of the National Centre's Collection. It has subsets of Women Australia, Indigenous Australia, and Labour Australia.

Obituaries Australia records published obituaries of Australians from all walks of life, up until the present day. Together the sites add significantly to the overall record available online to those interested in the people who populate Australian history. [Go to ADB.anu.edu.au]

Other speakers included representatives of the Department of Veterans Affairs, The Royal Australian Historical Society, Museums & Galleries NSW, and Michelle Nichols, Hawkesbury Local History Librarian.

The KCHS stall displayed our publications (and sold some!) and enabled David Griffiths to demonstrate the online management system IDA to members of other societies. **Steve Rawling**

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The Colo country



the party, or perhaps he could see that the expedition would not succeed.

In April 1818 Ben set off again on another self-financed expedition (four Europeans and one Aborigine). This time he felt certain he could make it all the way and he very nearly did. This exploration terminated in the Hunter Ranges when they encountered hostile Aborigines.

When we read the Journal he forwarded to Governor Macquarie it is evident that he was assessing a route that would be suitable for both cattle and cart transportation. It seems to me that Ben suffered another disappointment for instead of being chosen to lead the next expedition the job was given to John Howe. This expedition reached Patricks Plains. Ben Singleton did not take part in that journey. Again the question why - was he too busy or disappointed at not being selected to lead the expedition?

In 1820 he joined Howe's second expedition that found a better route avoiding the most difficult parts of the terrain and taking a more direct line. Members of the party were rewarded with land grants. Ben received 200 acres for his efforts. He quickly established cattle holding yards and moved his family to the area. Many sought permission to move cattle to the new area and as his land which was close to a ford on the Hunter River, the permits issued to do so, refer to the area as 'Singletons'. A

township grew up which today we know as Singleton.

Our Journey to St Albans was to celebrate both expeditions of Benjamin Singleton, 1817 and 1818 that were so useful in the successful expedition that followed. I can think of no better place to remember those expeditions than in "The Forgotten Valley", to recognise the "forgotten expeditions" of a largely "forgotten man".

Frank Holland

A thank you to Frank Holland for his researched talk and a comfortable KCHS expedition including lunch at the historic Settlers Arms Inn at St Albans in the MacDonald Valley. Built from convict hewn sandstone, the Inn became a stopover for Cobb & Co. stagecoaches travelling between Sydney, the Hunter Valley and Newcastle in the 19th Century. The area is bounded on one side by Parr State Conservation Area and on the other by Yengo National Park. **The Colo Country MAP** above has been used with permission of Andy Macqueen, whose latest publication **Wayfaring in the Wollemi**, has been purchased by Frank & Valerie Holland for accession to the KCHS Members Library. It contains maps and stories of explorers, surveyors, cattlemen, developers, conservationists including explorations of Singleton, Parr, Howe and Everingham.

Benjamin Singleton Explorations (cont. from page 1)

By following the Macdonald River, it was then possible to follow the river all the way to the high ground north of Mount Yengo. The route then returns following the line of the now 'Putty Road' and thence back to the Colo River and Little Wheeny Creek at Kurrajong. Ben most probably was aware of stories of good land in an area known as Putty, possibly from settlers in the river valleys or aborigines.

William Parr was commissioned shortly after Ben's return to lead an expedition to find an overland route to the Hunter River, from which convicts had been escaping. He began his expedition in November 1817 commencing at Singleton's mill on Little Wheeny Creek and Ben was included in the party. It raises the question - why? It seems to me Ben must have reported the good grazing land he would have seen when in the Putty area and his knowledge of the area would have been invaluable.

Ben abandoned that expedition, again the question - why? Some suggest he did not like Parr or did not think Parr was a good leader. Maybe Ben did not wish to be in the area of a raging bushfire. Perhaps he would have preferred to have led



"Vince McMahon (Junior) transporting a water tank from 'Rosen Dhu' on Comleroy Road, to be set up at a new home with his wife Marcia at 'Millwood', 430 Comleroy Road, Kurrajong in early 1952."

Image 011007 from the KCHS Collection
www.kurrajonghistory.org.au

K-CHS at the Bilpin Flower Show

On the weekend of 7th and 8th of October, the Society held a stall with a Bilpin photo display from our image collection and a book sale.

Many people stopped by and we gained some interesting bits of information about Bilpin.

It was the first public sale of the new KCHS publication, *Built in The Kurrajong* and sales went well. A number of people who were new to the area were keen to learn about the local history.

Image: Jennifer Griffiths and Marguerite Wyborn
Saturday 7th October 2017



Q & A TRIVIA QUESTION

QUESTION: What were the previous names of Grose Vale?

ANSWER: Kurrajong South is the most common. Grose Wold North, according to Wikipedia - but with little supporting references. Trove has many references to "Grose Wold, North Richmond". The earliest references in Trove to "Grose Vale", around 1855, refer to it as "Grose Vale Estate" which appears to be an earlier farming subdivision. Anyone with more information, please get in touch.

Late Membership Renewal Reminder 2017-2018

Easy payment via
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Netbank Direct Debit BENDIGO BANK
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Our agents have forged strong relationships with the local community and have the knowledge and expertise to talk to buyers about a property's potential. You are welcome to contact us to have your property appraised.

Dates for Your DIARY



KURRAJONG-A-BUZZ 2017

Is a Kurrajong Community Forum Event

Supported by HCC, Bendigo Bank, WSU, Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens, HEN and other community groups

Kurrajong-Comleroy Historical Society
is supporting this event and will be holding a
Heritage Photographic Display in the CWA Hall

KCHS Members willing to assist with the display stall for
1 or 2 hours on the day would be welcome

Please contact David Griffiths 4567 8999

president@kurrajonghistory.org.au



CHRISTMAS IN AUSTRALIA
FROM THE PICTURE BY G. G. KILBURN

Kurrajong-Comleroy Historical Society 2017 CHRISTMAS GATHERING

will be held at the home of KCHS members

Deborah & Christopher Hallam

Goldfinders Inn Kurrajong

Saturday 9th December 2017

RSVP Marguerite Wyborn Ph: 4576 1371

Email: secretary@kurrajonghistory.org.au

The evening and food are free to members but
please supply your own drinks.

Friends of members welcome at \$5.00pp.

Tea & Coffee available

KURRAJONG-COMLEROY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Annual Australia Day Breakfast

Members & Friends please note in your diary

Friday 26th January 2017

Venue and details will be in the
January/February 2018 Newsletter

St David's Uniting Church Kurrajong Heights

(1867-2017)

150th Anniversary Service

2pm, 5th November 2017

Afternoon Tea following service

All welcome to attend- please RSVP Diane Williams:

diane.brianwilliams@bigpond.com



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