

THE MILLSTONE

KURRAJONG ~ COMLERoy HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Society is dedicated to researching, recording, preserving and promoting the history of the district. Covering the area west of the Hawkesbury River - North Richmond, Kurrajong, Berambing, Bilpin, Grose Vale, Bowen Mountain, Colo, Wilberforce, Ebenezer, Glossodia, Tennyson, Freemans Reach.

Kurmond Licensed Post Office (LPO) *by Jennifer Griffiths*

On September 26th, the Kurmond Post Office will close its doors after having served the local community for 100 years.

With the establishment of the Kurrajong Soldier Settlement in 1920 there was a need for both a post office and a school in the area known as Longleat, which was a property in the area. Reference is made to the Post Office in the "Hawkesbury Herald" of 13 December, 1923. The Postal Inspector asked for a name change that "would not be confused with existing offices at Longley and Longlea. Kurmond, being midway between Kurrajong and Richmond, seemed the most appropriate." A year later the name was officially changed to Kurmond by the Post Master General. Longleat Public School, which had opened in 1920, was also renamed Kurmond.



The Post Office and store in about 1950. Pictured on the right Biddy Armstrong's daughter Robyn. (Image 030700)

The Post Office also operated as the local store. Hugh Robertson, who sold in 1926, may have been the original owner.

Then, in 1934 Oswald Armstrong, who was the Principal of Kurmond Public School, purchased the Post Office and store. His son William ran it until 1942, when his father, who had retired from teaching, took over with the assistance of this daughter-in-law Edith, known as Biddy. Biddy Armstrong became the Postmistress in



The newly built Post Office in 1960 (Image 034000) and below in 2003 (Image 034000).



1951. The original Post Office and store was rebuilt in 1960. During the construction, business continued from the front window of her house next door. Biddy continued as Postmistress until 1976. Her daughter Robyn and husband Trevor Pratt then ran the Post Office until

2003. It had been in the Armstrong family for 70 years.



The last Postmaster was David Hegarty (left) who was the postmaster for 21 years.

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President's Report

Hello everyone,

Firstly, I would like to thank the several members who included a donation with their renewal. Much appreciated.

Our Mid Winter Lunch event went well with 27 attending. It almost turned into a disaster when a blackout occurred at 11:30. The club is fully equipped with solar panels, batteries and a diesel generator—all of which failed to provide power! Power was eventually restored and the club volunteers worked wonders to deliver wonderful meals on time. Our speaker, Michael Thomson, gave a very interesting talk on the Burley Griffins and their design for Canberra. None of us realised how significantly the Burley Griffin competition winning design was compromised.

At short notice, we decided to have a train trip to the Illawarra Museum on Sunday 11th August. See report on Page 5.

We will be having an Open Day at Blaxlands Ridge Schoolhouse on Sunday 22nd September. This is a rare opportunity to inspect the historic building that we rent and to stop by for a chat. The RFS will be having their Open Day on the same day, so kill two birds with the one stone. We will be there 10:00 to 15:00.

Our AGM is upon us again! We will meet at the usual venue, St David's Church, Kurrajong Heights at 19:00 (7pm). Nomination forms enclosed. Reports will be presented at the meeting. Our guest speaker will be Arthur Pearce from the Australian Maritime Museum and his topic will be *River Boats of the Murray River*. The museum is donating a Family Pass which will be a door prize.

We have received three copies of the highly sort-after out-of-print book by Vivienne Webb, *Kurrajong: An Early History*. We are making these available to members for the bargain price of \$20 each (plus postage), first come first served.

For our Christmas Party this year we are planning a lunch affair in 'The Hut' at Bowen Mountain Park. The date is Saturday 14th December. The hut is fully air conditioned if needed.

I mentioned in the previous Millstone that recent changes by the ATO will now mean we have to pay income tax. This is a very sad and backwards development for volunteer Not For Profit organisations. We are seeking a meeting with our federal member, Susan Templeton. This change will affect most small NFP groups, Garden Clubs, Camera Clubs for example, that cannot claim charity status.

You might have noticed that the bylines in the Millstone are somewhat repetitious. We need more contributors! If you have a topic that you would like to research, feel free to submit an article. The marvellous Trove is an invaluable source of informa-

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NEW PO BOX 111 KURRAJONG NSW 2758

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Committee

PresidentDavid Griffiths

Vice PresidentLesley Bobrige

SecretaryJennifer Griffiths

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Every effort is taken to ensure accuracy of articles.

If errors are found feedback is welcome.

secretary@kurrajonghistory.org.au

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tion, see my effort on Page 7.

With the unexpected closure of Kurmond LPO we were forced to hurriedly obtain a new box at Kurrajong. We were able to score Box 111. Not that we receive a lot of actual mail these days, but we still need to have a permanent address that is not dependant on a current office bearer.

David Griffiths

president@kurrajonghistory.org.au

Ph: 4567 8999 Mob: 0498 646 899

PECK AND WOODHILL SUBDIVISION, KURRAJONG HEIGHTS (Part 4) *by Deborah Hallam*

Following the death of James Comrie, the Windsor and Richmond Gazette of 14th February 1903 advertised the sale of *Northfield Estate*. There was little or no interest as on the 2nd March the newspaper noted that it had been passed in and a Miss Mackenzie was acting as caretaker.

Amusingly in early March the following year a reporter at the Gazette chose to mock a rumour that the property would be selling for £1500. Sometimes it pays to listen to rumour as the following week it was reported that Messrs Peck and Woodhill had purchased *Northfield* for £1500 and intended to subdivide. Plans for subdivision were undoubtedly simplified by a fire through the property in November of 1905 which destroyed the grounds, including Comrie's garden, although the house was saved.

Prior to the fire, advertisements for the Subdivision of the following Lots, adjoining the Homestead, had been advertised in the Sydney Morning Herald on 4th February, 1905.

Lot1 – House and 300 ac, £4/acre

Lot2 and Lot3 – 30 acres each lot, £10/acre

Lot4 and Lot5 – 23 acres each lot, £10/acre

Lot8 – 12ac, £8/acre

Lot9 – 21ac, £8/acre.

An interesting description of *Northfield* and the attitudes of the times comes from the Windsor and Richmond Gazette of 30th November, 1907.

“Another healthy result of cutting up large blocks of land is on the late Mr James Comrie's *Northfield* estate. While Mr Comrie lived it was his hobby to keep it in its natural state - in fact he did not like to have one tree felled if possible, but after his death it got into the hands of Mr. H. E. (Ted) Peck, who soon began to show, by hard and long hours of labour and considerable expense, that *Northfield* could be put to better use than as a natural fernery, and has now turned portion of it into a Garden of Eden. His passionfruit vineyard and citrus fruit trees are a perfect picture. If hard toil in the day time and deep thought at night will make a man get on in this world, Ted will be rich ere long. He has already reaped some benefits from thoughts, as this will show: As soon as he got the trees going in his portion of the estate, and men with money wanting to speculate saw how things were going, Mr Peck had no difficulty in selling the portion which he did not need for his own use at more than double its

cost. More power to him.”

Two of the above blocks had been sold to a Mr. George and the house block to George Alexander Wilson who was purchasing timber with the aim of building a mansion near the old house.

Tenders for the new house were advertised by architects Jossland and Vernon of Sydney, who were instrumental in popularising Federation Style homes, particularly in timber. Shortly thereafter Wilson advertised for staff with accommodation provided in the old cottage.

By January 1912 Wilson was advertising for private sale

HISTORIC NORTHFIELD. “345 ACRES GOOD LAND. 12 acres young orchard, extensive improvements”. Also, cottage and mansion dwelling and necessary outbuildings. Beautiful garden and Splendid timber. Photos available at the agents.

Big properties don't sell immediately and it was not until December, 1913 that the property was purchased by James Frederick (Eric) Fitzhardinge and his wife Florence Marion (Rutherford).

Perhaps building in timber at Kurrajong Heights had not been a good idea as in December, 1929 *Northfield* house was completely destroyed by a house fire within 20 minutes. Library, furniture and heirlooms were lost, with damage exceeding £3000. Fortunately, no-one was in residence at the time. The family moved into a new homestead in October, 1931.

Over the next years the gardens at *Northfield*, were regularly open for Charity fundraising following the tradition of the previous owners. Of particular interest were the azaleas.

Florence Fitzhardinge died at her residence, *Northfield*, on 14 March, 1942. “She was noted for her knowledge of horticulture, and flower lovers from near and far have been entertained in herb garden” (W&RG 1942). The property had been transferred to her and then to her daughter, Margaret who died at *Northfield* in September, 1947.

Leonard George and Mary Brocks, a keen gardener, purchased *Northfield* in November, 1949. Mary was instrumental in founding the Kurrajong Heights Garden Club. Over the following years the estate was gradually sold, eventually reducing to ten acres around the house.

Talk at May GM by Heritage Officer – Christopher Reeves, Hawkesbury City Council’s Strategic Planning Department

Summarised by Pat O’Toole



In 2021 Christopher was appointed as Hawkesbury City Council’s first permanent, internal heritage officer..

During the talk, Christopher provided some insight into the range of heritage tasks he can be involved with on a day-to-day basis.

Many (heritage related) emergencies arose following the damaging 2022 Hawkesbury River Floods e.g. the threatened collapse of a significant historic timber barn in Freemans Reach, following a river bank washout; the exposure of a likely convict built brick drain on a bank of South Creek at Windsor; and the flooding of heritage listed properties in Pitt Town Bottoms, are just a few examples of these type of urgent matters that the HCC heritage officer is required to address.

Council’s heritage officer is required to manage Council’s Local Heritage Assistance Fund every financial year. Examples of heritage listed properties that have benefited from assistance under this fund include: the former cinema in Old Bells Line of Road at Kurrajong; the Pitt Town Anglican Church; and an historic barn at St Albans.

When unauthorised work is undertaken to a heritage listed property Council’s heritage officer, is required to intervene in conjunction with Council’s compliance team. This work often requires careful negotiations with the property owners. If trees on heritage listed properties are a danger to the heritage item or people, he must manage the response in consultation with Council’s tree management officer.

All development applications on heritage listed properties or within the vicinity of heritage listed properties are required to be reviewed by Council’s heritage officer and at times with support from Council’s long term consultant heritage advisor. Council also has a free heritage advisory service which is facilitated by Council’s heritage officer and Council’s consultant heritage advisor. He spoke of some recent developments including the redevelopment of the St John of God Hospital site at North Richmond. This was a Major Projects Application to the state government, but Council’s heritage officer assisted with the heritage assessment and on the ground support following the approval of the redevelopment by the state government.

A city-wide study of Hawkesbury timber slab barns was completed in 2010. An update to this study was

undertaken in 2023. The report from the update is currently being reviewed by the heritage officer and should be available for public viewing later this year.

Christopher also spoke of some of the development pressures on our small historic villages – such as Kurrajong Heights village, which is protected by specific area controls within the Hawkesbury Development Control which specifically aim to retain the unique history and aesthetic character of this village. An example of the development pressure is the previously proposed demolition of ‘Allambie’ located at 1256 Bells Line of Road, Kurrajong Heights – see historic and a current image of ‘Allambie’ below. ‘Allambie’ is a former 1930s guesthouse that is both locally heritage listed and is on the heritage register of its current owner – Transport for NSW, despite it being located on land previously earmarked for a Bells Line of Road - road widening. The building has suffered from neglect for many years and the current owner, in recent years, has been seeking its demolition.

Saving ‘Allambie’ has become a community goal supported by Council. Christopher acknowledged in his talk the important work that is undertaken by local historical groups in the area, such as the K-CHS. Heritage management in the Hawkesbury area is a shared responsibility, which given the large challenges of this work, demands a unified response to make a difference e.g. Hawkesbury City Council in partnership with the community.



Allambie in 1930. Image 033204 Below—the rear in 2023.



Tour to Illawarra Historical Society by David Griffiths

The Illawarra Historical Society recently sent us a couple of Kurrajong related postcards that had come their way. This prompted us to look at their website and the seed of an idea for a tour was born. The society runs a museum which is open on Wednesday and Sunday afternoons, so we settled on a train trip on Sunday 11th August.

It was a long day, leaving Richmond at 07:35 and returning at 19:00, but pleasant company and scenic views on the South Coast Line made the time pass quickly. We could have changed trains at Redfern but we opted for Central for better refreshment options for morning tea.

On reaching Wollongong we took a scenic tour on the free 'Gong Loop Shuttle' bus which included the university and botanical gardens and delivered us to Belmore Basin. The weather was magnificent and the beach area was crawling with people, many of whom were walking dogs! We enjoyed a tasty seafood lunch from Levendi in the park.

A short walk up the hill took us to the Illawarra Museum which is housed in the 1865 Telegraph Office, later to become the Wollongong Post & Telegraph Office (1870-1892). The two storey building has an extensive display of furniture and other objects from the Wollongong region from 19th century till the present. In the backyard there is a blacksmith display and other larger items.



Class time. Brian, Valerie, Jenny and Lesley. Photo Frank Holland

The Museum Manager, John Shipp, introduced us to the society and their museum. John is related to the first Kurrajong Public School principal. One of the downstairs rooms displays a schoolroom and our keen students tried it out.



Lunch. David, Frank, Brian, Jenny, Valerie, Meradin, Lesley, & Jeremy. Photo Helen Wood.

Across the road from lunch was the Old Courthouse Museum which was hosting an art show, so we popped in for a look.

As it happened, the NSW Rail Museum was running a



double header steam train to Wollongong the same day. We were able to watch the steam train depart Wollongong for its

return trip to Sydney. The locos were 3265 and 3526 hauling 11 cars.

Fun fact: the train we caught from Richmond and also returned to Richmond in, has some notoriety. It was Waratah set A42, the train that tried to extend the line into Richmond Park in January 2018. You can't imagine the trouble I had to arrange that! ;-)



Old Courthouse Museum, Wollongong Photo by DG

In Passing - A Brief History of an 1840's Georgian Mansion in Richmond

by Suzanne Ballard-Smith

Benson House is a grand Georgian manor steeped in local history and is one of the finest examples of early Hawkesbury architecture. At No. 61 Francis Street Richmond, it is built well above the flood plain with commanding views across the Richmond lowlands and the Hawkesbury River, to the Terrace and the Kurrajong escarpment.



Benson House in 2012 Photo SBS

The original residence was known as 'Tycawina' and was built for William Murray Benson, a shipwright, and his wife Marion and their family, who arrived from Scotland in 1844. It later became the home of his son Alexander Benson who married Mary Anne Elizabeth Onus in 1858. Alexander Benson spent many years away from the Hawkesbury managing his properties in the Moree district.

Alexander and Mary's only child, Emma May Benson married Prosper Henry Ridge in 1884 and 'Tycawina' became their residence from about 1888. In the mid-1890s Prosper Ridge added the second storey to the building and in 1897 erected new stables and a coach house. Prosper Henry Ridge was very active in local affairs, serving as Mayor from 1892 – 1896. Henry was also President of the Richmond School of Arts. Emma's father, Alexander Benson, died at 'Tycawina' in 1903 aged 67 years. Her husband, Prosper Henry Ridge passed in July 1904 aged 61 years.

After many additions and restorations, *Benson House* retains many of the original details from the era, such as marble fireplaces, pressed metal ceilings and hand crafted Australian red cedar joinery. The property also retains a subterranean cellar and the original well.

A convict brick paved courtyard leads to a second historic residence formally, the servant's quarters and scullery. A private garden showcases a stone sculpture of Queen Victoria gifted to Prosper Ridge by Lord and

Lady Jersey who were distinguished guests at 'Tycawina' during their visit for the occasion of the turning on of the new water supply for Richmond in 1892. Jersey Street Richmond was named in honour of their visit to the district. The Benson family are commemorated in the naming of the nearby, Bensons Lane.

AN
IMPORTANT AUCTION SALE
will be held on
SATURDAY NEXT, NOVEMBER 11th.
AT 11 A.M.

UNDER instructions from R. B. RIDGE, ESQ., on account of having sold the property, **THE FURNITURE and HOUSEHOLD APPOINTMENTS** contained in the residence of "TYCAWINA," Francis-street, Richmond, right at the back of the Public School, including:—

THE COMPLETE FURNISHINGS OF DINING ROOM AND SIX BEDROOMS, in English Walnut, Walnut Finish and Richmond River Cedar, KITCHEN and LAUNDRY REQUISITES.

ON VIEW ON SATURDAY NEXT. PRIOR TO THE SALE AT 11 A.M. FROM 9 A.M.

TERMS:—All Accounts to be paid at the conclusion of the Sale.

W. A. LITTLE & McILVEEN,
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169 CASTLEREAGH-STREET (between Market and Park streets)
'PHONES: MA1227, UW9463.

Gazette advertisement for the sale of the contents of the residence known as 'Tycawina' to be held on 11th November 1933.

Of interest: A notice appeared in the Windsor and Richmond Gazette 19 February 1910 page 7, giving further insights into family connections with a Richmond family through marriage. The announcement of the *engagement of Brownie Ridge the daughter of Mrs. Ridge and the late Prosper H. Ridge of 'Tycawina', Francis Street, Richmond to Benjamin Richard Durham, eldest son of Mrs. Durham of 'Kamilaroi', Richmond.*

Also of interest is *Tara* on the corner of Francis and Jersey Streets. The land on which *Tara* stands was first purchased by Prosper Henry Ridge for thirty pounds at the sale of Crown Land in 1893. It then passed to Mrs Mary Ann Hibbert, Gatekeeper at Clarendon Station in September 1899. According to the Windsor & Richmond Gazette in June 1900, Mrs Hibbert's new brick cottage in Francis Street is almost complete, Messrs Mullinger Bros of Windsor have done a fine job of the brickwork. Mullinger and Cupitt the woodwork.

Acknowledgement: Much of the above information can be found in *Discover the Hawkesbury, Richmond Heritage Walk - The East Richmond Precinct* by Cathy McCardy for Hawkesbury City Council 2014. Also see Hawkesbury People & Places website.

A Murder in Kurrajong *by David Griffiths from Trove*

KURRAJONG MURDER CASE

FURTHER EVIDENCE.

When the trial of Cecil Farnsworth Charles, charged with the murder of his father, was resumed at the Central Criminal Court, Sydney, yesterday, James Davies said he had known the dead man for a number of years, and on one occasion he advised him to let his son (accused) collect his rents, as the tenants used to put the old man off. He said the accused did not want to collect the rents, adding: "Let father do it, it will keep him employed. When a man gives up business he does not live long."

Detective-Sergeant Quinn said he took the accused to a heap of leaves 14 feet 6 inches from the body and asked him who raked them up. The accused, continued witness, said: "The man who killed my father must have raked up those leaves."

"WHO COULD HAVE DONE THIS?"

ACCUSED PROTESTS HIS INNOCENCE.

Sydney, Friday.

When the trial was resumed to-day, Cecil Farnsworth Charles went into the witness-box and protested his innocence. He said he had never wished for his father's death, and had nothing to do with the crime. When he heard that his father had been murdered he said: "My poor father, who could have done this? It seems to be the act of a mad-man."

Singleton Argus Friday 20th June, 1930

KURRAJONG MURDER.

VERDICT OF GUILTY..

ACCUSED SENTENCED TO DEATH.

SYDNEY, June 20.—In the Criminal Court to-day Cecil Charles was found guilty of the murder of his father, John Charles (79) at East Kurrajong on April 14, and was sentenced to death.

Giving evidence, Charles said he never wished for his father's death. He had never had a serious argument with him, though they might have argued at times over politics.

At the close of the defence the Crown called evidence in reply to the statements by Charles, that the detectives had set to work to produce propaganda to secure his conviction.

*Daily Mercury (Mackay Qld)
Monday 23rd June, 1930*

DEATH SENTENCE.

Cecil F. Charles to Appeal

SYDNEY, Friday:—Cecil Farnsworth Charles (53), who was sentenced to death for the murder of his father, near East Kurrajong, has decided to appeal.

Tweed Daily 28th June, 1930

CECIL CHARLES ACQUITTED

VERDICT OF FIRST JURY REVERSED

SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE.

Five months ago, on a cold winter's evening, to the accompaniment of the tolling of a church bell, the jury returned a verdict of guilty of having murdered his father, against Cecil Farnsworth Charles and he was sentenced to death.

On Saturday, in bright sunshine, a second jury declared him not guilty, and he walked forth from the Criminal Court a free man.

There were cheers from the back of the Court when the jury announced its verdict.

Charles watched the jury file in without a flicker of emotion and turned his head to smile at his solicitor as the last man took his place. The verdict given, he sincerely thanked his counsel, Mr. Windeyer, K.C., and Mr. Hall, and was quickly mobbed by friends.

The drama that lies behind the acquittal was told to "The Sunday Sun" last night by Mr. D. R. Hall who, with Mr. Neville Cohen, prepared the case for Charles.

Gloucester Advocate Tues 11th November, 1930

The drama that lies behind the acquittal was told to "The Sunday Sun" last night by Mr. D. R. Hall who, with Mr. Neville Cohen, prepared the case for Charles.

After the first trial, Mr. Hall spoke to some of the jury and was told that one of the reasons for their verdict was that Charles did not hear his father's calls of distress, or go to his aid, though he was only 60 yards away, whereas his father's cries had been heard by the Harveys from a distance of 600 yards.

VOICE DID NOT CARRY.

This seemed conclusive, but later when an auction sale was being held at the farm, Charles's solicitor mentioned the facts to a young fellow whose father had previously owned the place. He said he had noticed that, while you could hear from the opposite hillside, it was impossible to get the voice to carry from the hut to the orchard or vice versa.

After the sale the solicitor sent four farmers to the Harveys' home and four to the orchard, where the accused man had been at work. He stood where the body had been and shouted. The farmers, at Harveys heard him and answered; those in the orchard heard nothing.

Major Edgar Booth, a physics lecturer at Sydney University. Major Booth took scientific sound-measuring instruments to the farm, and proved beyond doubt that the orchard was a "silent zone."

It was chiefly on this ground that the Full Court granted a new trial. The advocacy of Mr. Windeyer, K.C., with these facts at his command, resulted in the jury bringing in their verdict, and in Cecil Charles spending his Sunday in freedom.

"It is a tremendous relief," was all he would say, but it was learned that he intends to return to farming, though not in the Glossodia district.

Errata

In our previous Millstone on Page 4, it was mentioned that St David's Presbyterian Church was constructed in 1868. This was incorrect.

SMH on Sat 12th Oct, 1867, shows the church was officially opened on 10th October, 1867.

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Dates for Your **DIARY**

K-CHS AGM

MON 23RD SEPTEMBER 19:00 (7PM)
ST DAVID'S CHURCH,
KURRAJONG HEIGHTS

Arthur Pearce, Australian Maritime Museum.
Topic: River Boats of the Murray River

Blaxlands Ridge Schoolhouse

Open Day

Sunday 22nd September

10:00-15:00

Pop in to view inside this historic building
BR RFS is also having their open day next door

K-CHS Christmas Party

Saturday 14th December at Noon
'The Hut' in Bowen Mountain Park

Details in the next Millstone. 'The Hut' is air conditioned if needed.



The trader known as Ali Khan sold clothing, hats, braces, flour, sugar, tea and boots. He had this horse and cart for many years until he changed to a motor vehicle in the 1930s. He was still travelling around with his wares until he died in the early 1940s. This photo was taken on Bells Line of Road, near Hermitage Road, with an old shed opposite the McMahon property, "Luckenough". Image 010127



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