

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.

G M C BOWEN of Buralow

By Deborah Hallam



George Meares Countess Bowen was a complicated man. Never recorded as kind, he was known to be cruel to his convict servants but capable of sufficient charm to achieve the support of the Colony's elite despite a lack of finances.

Image Hawkesbury Library

The *Sydney Monitor* of 21 May 1828 refers to

Mr. land-not-measured Bowen, ... and a host of other worthy but very useless, expensive Gentlemen....

George Bowen arrived in the Colony 1827, on the *Midas*. At 24 years old and a well-connected graduate of Sandhurst, George was appointed Assistant Surveyor to the Surveyor-Generals Office until placed on half pay in November 1828.

The story of Bowen's large grant at Tomah is well known, but perhaps less so his complaints about his failure to make it successful.

Thus, I lost a large proportion of my capital and some of my best years...., the property was knocked down for a sum equal to One-third of the money I had expended in improvements.

Now boasting of having been the first person across the mountains via Tomah, accompanied only by a bull packed with blankets (stand aside Caley and Bell) George Bowen began planning a road on this route to Bathurst. He, of course, was to be both Surveyor and Constructor of the route which was to become the major Western Highway. Total cost was to be £1000 raised by subscription. Fortunately, or otherwise, the

funds never materialised and neither did this road. Although a cart track of sorts was being advertised as in use as far as Mount Tomah in 1846. Funding of £200 having been raised not by Bowen but rather by Bowman.

It's unclear when Bowen first conceived the idea for his Tomah Road which involved a route via Buralow. However, in 1834 George Bowen took possession of 100 acres on Buralow. This block is still shown as a lone, inaccessible block on Buralow Gorge.

In 1838 George Meares Countess Bowen was appointed Police Magistrate for Berrima, from where he proceeded to England. He returned to Richmond in 1846 where he rented the property *Rutherglen*.

In 1847 he purchased 303 acres of Buralow Swamp as a Government purchase and his plans for his road over the mountains firmed. It's unclear as to Bowen's intended use of the various blocks as he continued to live in Richmond until moving to Wollongong 6 years later and advertising the land for sale.

The sale advertisements of 1854 give us an idea of Bowen's plans for the region as included in the following, beginning with the description of Mount Tomah on Bells Line.

It is about 20 miles from the Richmond Ford, and 15 miles to the descent of the Vale of Clyde, in which Hartley is situated. There is a well frequented cattle road, which keeps the Mountain longer, and descends near Bowenfels.

The best line for any kind of road from Sydney to Bathurst, but especially a tramway is via Richmond through a gap in the Talburahgah (Tabarag) ridge, near the south Kurrajong across Buralow Swamp, round the north side of Mount Tomah, and inwards to the descent of Mr Andrew Brown's farm and steam-mills near Bowenfels; thence it should proceed by Piper's Flat, in order to avoid Mount Lambie.

Three further lots are advertised, 303 acres at Buralow Swamp, 100 acres on Buralow and a 40-acre grant at South Kurrajong.

About £200 was expended by the present proprietor in the construction of a road to connect the last three

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President's Report

Hello everyone,

Our birthday breakfast on Australia Day went well with a good attendance. Laurie Turtle gave a very interesting talk on his First Fleeter ancestor. See page 3.

Our March General Meeting will have Rebecca Turnbull from Hawkesbury Museum as our speaker. Her topic is 'What is in a museum collection?'. See page 8 for more info.

Our Southern Highlands Tour has been refined down to two days one night on Tuesday 3rd June & Wednesday 4th June. Being only one night reduces the cost and hopefully means more people can attend. We will include the highlights of Goulburn and Crookwell.

On 24th May we will be led by Les Dollin on a tour of the mill sites on Little Wheeny Creek. Many members have done this tour before, but Les and Anne have been doing more research since and have exposed many new objects.

On the ongoing topic of Not for Profit groups paying income tax, the only response we have had from the Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury, the Hon Dr Andrew Leigh, MP, is 'Why don't you register as a charity?'. After much discussion, our committee does not believe it is appropriate to claim charity status, despite other local historical societies having done so, so we have resolved to start paying the tax. We are due to submit a tax return for 2023/24 by 15th May. We are still trying to get our heads around the finer points of 'mutualisation'. If you have accounting expertise and would like to help, we would be delighted to hear from you.

I know this is a recurring theme, but we really do need more contributions for the Millstone. Any family story or research into a local person or place is welcome. We will be happy to assist with advice and help editing.

Did you take a look at the Wondabyne Quarry pictures?

<https://tinyurl.com/WondabynePics>

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Content does not necessarily represent or reflect the views or opinions of K-CHS, its committee and members.

Every effort is taken to ensure accuracy of articles.

If errors are found feedback is welcome.

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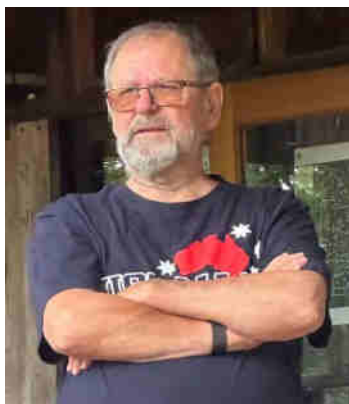
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Australia Day 2025

Australia Day Breakfast by the pictures. Photos by Peta Smith, Mal Bobrige, Suzanne Smith.



MAKING JUDGEMENTS – CHARLOTTE (HANDLEY) SHEENS *by Deborah Hallam*

In earlier days, men of influence and substance in the Colony of NSW were appointed as magistrates or Justices of the Peace. These men were able to arrest, take bail, bind to good behaviour and suppress and punish riots. They administered the police force and the convict system including convict assignment and granting of a Ticket of Leave and sat in court to pass judgement on minor matters.

The influence of these gentlemen means that it is not surprising that women were not eligible for the position; a situation that continued even after Australian women received full enfranchisement.

Imagine the kerfuffle when the passing of the *Women's Legal Status Act 1918* led to the appointment of 61 female Justices in 1921, although by this time the power of JPs had been curtailed.

One of these women was Charlotte Sheens, born in Kurrajong in 1870 to Sophia Barwick and Dennis Handley. As is common, very little is known of Charlotte's childhood other than that her mother regularly applied to the courts for protection of the family from an abusive husband.

In 1891 Charlotte married John Sheens, a widowed tradesman, working at the Riverstone meatworks.

Charlotte's appointment was unusual as neither her nor her husband's family were either wealthy or influential, however she went on to become the first female JP to sit on the bench in Australia.

All her cases were heard at Windsor Court House with the Police Magistrate, Thomas Clegg. Of the cohort of women appointed in 1921 she was the only one to sit

on the Bench for more than one case and, following her last case in October 1922, no other female served at any hearing in Australia until 1971.

Another first for Charlotte was that during one of her cases, the first time in NSW, a witness was assured they could say swear words on front of a female judicial officer when reporting a conversation. The words: *bloody bastard!*

Charlotte continued with other JP duties although moving away from the Hawkesbury with her family. Charlotte died on 8th August 1956 and is buried with her husband, John, in St. Matthews Catholic Cemetery, Windsor.

LADY ON THE BENCH AT WINDSOR

WINDSOR, Tuesday.—One of the recently-appointed women magistrates, Mrs. Charlotte Sheens, occupied a seat on the Bench at the Windsor Police Court yesterday, and adjudicated with the chairman, Mr. T. B. Clegg, P.M., and Mr. A. Matheson, J.P.

The list constituted a record at the local police court. Thirty persons were proceeded against for failing to send in State income tax returns within the prescribed time, and were each fined 40s, with 4s 6d costs. Two cases were withdrawn—one against a penniless old-age pensioner, 82 years of age, and the other against a man who was ill in hospital at the date due for sending in his return.

The Daily Telegraph Weds 29th Sept 1921

G M C BOWEN of Buralow *continued from Page 1*

named properties with each other and with the road across mill-ford of the Hawkesbury to Richmond by Yallamundi.

The connection of two of these three appears to be the line of the current fire trail. There's no indication at this stage of a constructed connection to Grose Vale Road. The road to the 100-acre lot has long disappeared.

The Buralow Swamp advertisement is worth noting as there is no suggestion of the frequently rumoured Rice Fields.

Consists of 303 acres. It includes the best part of the Buralow Valley and Swamp, and there runs through it a never-failing stream of water. The swampy part has been drained at a considerable expense, an embank-

ment and channels for irrigation have been partly made and left in an unfinished state. Several hundred pounds have been expended on this farm in clearing, fencing, draining and making channels for irrigation. The dwelling house has been destroyed by fire, but a large building, containing a granary for corn above, with a double row of pig-sties underneath, remain, as well as a good hut with rough stone fireplace.

The Buralow land was the only successful sale.

Also, in 1854 Bowen was appointed surveyor of Roads for Bathurst, another short-lived appointment followed by a move to Wollongong where he remained until at least 1860 after which time the family located to Bowen Mountain, the story of which is for a later date.

A McMahon Wedding *by Jenny Griffiths*



The happy couple Image 011716

At St. Matthew's R. C. Church at 6 a.m. on Wednesday, a marriage was solemnized in which Mr Stephen McMahon, son of the late Cornelius McMahon, of Tennyson, and Miss Mary Ann Vaughan, daughter of Mrs Vaughan, of Pitt Town Road, were the contracting parties. Rev. Father McDonnell celebrated the nuptials. The bride was attired in white silk trimmed with insertion, hat to match. Her sister, Miss K. Vaughan, was bridesmaid, and the bridegroom's brother, Mr A. McMahon, was best man. The bride was given away by her brother, Mr P. Vaughan. After the ceremony the young couple sat down to a repast at the Presbytery, and afterwards

caught the 7.26 train for Sydney, en route for the Blue Mountains for their honeymoon. They will reside at Tennyson.

Windsor and Richmond Gazette 16th April, 1910

Stephen McMahon's grandfather was John McMahon who, with his wife Mary (nee Higgins), had emigrated from Ireland in 1839 and settled at Kurrajong North on land given to Mary by her brother, Thomas Higgins. This became the property "Luckenough" on the corner of Bells Line of Road and Hermitage Road. Stephen's father, Cornelius McMahon was born in 1824 and settled at Tennyson, then known as Sally Bottoms. Cornelius and his wife, Elizabeth (nee Norris) both died from an influenza outbreak in September 1894. Stephen and his siblings survived and continued to live on the property.



The McMahons house, 'Eurolie' Image 190501

After their marriage, Stephen and Mary lived at Tennyson on a property called "Eurolie" which was an orchard.

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BENJAMIN RICHARDS (1818-1898) *by Suzanne Smith*



*Benjamin Richards
Riverstone & District Historical
Society*

Benjamin Richards was an entrepreneurial young man born in the early colony in Richmond on the 12th May 1818, the son of ex-convict James Richards and Mary Ann Eaton. In 1840 he married Elizabeth Williams at St Peters Church of England, Richmond. Their marriage produced 10 children

The story began in 1837, when Benjamin opened a butcher shop in Richmond.

Also around this time he founded *Edgeroi Station* on the Liverpool Plains, between Narrabri and Moree, along what is now the Newell Highway. The 150,000 acre station remained one of north-west New South Wales' largest stations from the early 1850s until just after World War II, when it was divided into soldier settler allotments.



The *Edgeroi* station's woolshed was once the largest in the southern hemisphere, with a 52-stand capacity. Remains of the old woolshed are visible on the left-hand side of the road, 4km north after leaving what is now the village of Edgeroi. *Image: Pinterest.com*

In 1847 Benjamin opened another butchery business in Sydney. Cattle came from the west and northwest, over Bells Line of Road or the old Bulga Road (Putty Road), and from the north through Wisemans Ferry. Ben would ride out to meet the drovers at North Richmond or Wisemans Ferry where the herds would change hands. It was during these years that the Bulga and Comleroy Roads became designated stock routes for both cattle and sheep. Along these routes the Government created many travelling stock reserves, usually no more than 10 miles apart, so the stock could rest and the drovers camp for the night.

Kurrajong played a pivotal role in those days, with the

intersection of Comleroy and Bells Line of Road. Drovers would lease areas in the Kurrajong for resting stock before heading on over the river at North Richmond. A Mr Whittaker who was an agent looking after the Kurrajong Lawson estate, leased grazing paddocks, and stated "... *with head to the ground you could hear the long-horned cattle rumbling along to the resting yards in The Kurrajong.*"

It was in 1878 that Benjamin Richards purchased 2,700 acres of land adjoining the railway at Riverstone and, along with his sons Robert and James, established the *Riverstone Meat Works*. The beef house was erected first and in 1879 the mutton house. In addition to the meatworks, Ben owned station properties of 8,000 acres on the Liverpool Plains, 4,000 acres at Moree and a leasehold on the Queensland border.

To add to the Richards' fortune, it was at this time that Thomas Mort began to finance experiments with refrigeration and cold storage as a possible solution to the transport of meat and dairy produce, both here in Australia and overseas.

Benjamin Richards went on to play an important role in the development of Australia's meat export trade. Pastoralists from all over NSW benefited greatly from Ben's contribution through his Riverstone Meat Works. The cattle arrived at Riverstone where extensive resting paddocks brought them back to top condition after their long overland journey. They were then slaughtered, frozen, distributed and/or exported. By the 1890s the Meat Works, the largest in NSW, was handling half a million sheep and 2,500 cattle yearly. Benjamin and his son, Robert provided Australia's first frozen meat and butter for export to England in 1880, thus laying the foundations of our export meat and butter trade, contributing greatly to Australia's overall trading wealth in the 19th and 20th centuries.

In 1893 Benjamin Richards built an imposing two storey brick Victorian mansion in Windsor Street Richmond, which he named *Kamilaroi*. The name held association



Kamilaroi Image 096500

with both the Kamilaroi region north to the Hunter and the Liverpool Plains where Ben owned extensive land holdings. It was also the name of one of his best-known racehorses. Benjamin died at his *Kamilaroi* home in 1898, and the mansion passed to his only surviving daughter Elvina, who was married to Charles Durham.

In 1926 *Kamilaroi* was purchased by the Department of Education for the establishment of the districts first secondary school – the Richmond District Rural School. The stately brick mansion sadly fell into disrepair through lack of maintenance and was demolished in 1956.

All that remains of this once grand home and Richmond



Rural school, are the imposing front gate posts with *Kamilaroi* 1893 carved into them and the wrought iron gate with 'BR' designed in them.

Image: Anne & Les Dollin

Following the passing of Benjamin Richards the business was formed into a joint stock company; the whole of the interests being held by the family of his son Robert Richards. In 1919 the entire company of Benjamin Richards & Co was purchased by Mr Angliss and the Riverstone Meat Work entered a new era. An English based family named Vestey (W Weddel and Co Ltd.) took over the works in 1934. During World War II frozen and canned meats and dehydrated eggs were produced for Australian forces serving overseas. Unfortunately, in 1970 there were two fires at the Riverstone Meatworks, one resulting in the death of six men. A new meat works complex was constructed in 1973. Smorgon Consolidated Industries bought the meatworks in 1992, but

operation ceased in 1994, and the area was sold.

Of interest:

- The Riverstone Meat Works had been a major employer in the Hawkesbury / Riverstone District until it closed in 1994.
- Robert (Bob) Gunton (1860-1940) was the first drover to be employed by Benjamin Richards when he opened his Meatworks in 1878. Bob was not only drover at the Meat Works, when required he drove cattle over BLOR from the west and from the Hunter Valley along the Comleroy. Bob was a renowned teller of yarns and the Windsor and Richmond Gazette occasionally printed some of these tales during the 1890s.



*Stockmen and their dogs at work at the Meat Yards.
Riverstone Historical Society*



Richards' family vault in St Peter's cemetery, Richmond



Steam train with cattle carriages in the 1900s unloading cattle at Riverstone Meat Works

Riverstone & District Historical Society

References:

- Windsor & Richmond Gazette Friday June 29, 1934. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/85800168#>
- Macquarie Country *A History of the Hawkesbury* by D.G. BOWD (Library of Australian History 1994)
- K-CHS Publications - The Millstone Sept/Oct 2020 & The Millstone May/June 2022.
- Riverstone & District Historical Society website
- Blacktown City Library website

Dates for Your DIARY

K-CHS MARCH GENERAL MEETING

The Hangar—Kingsford Smith Village

Monday March 24th 19:00 (7pm)

Guest speaker Rebecca Turnbull, Curator Hawkesbury Museum, her topic:

What is in a museum collection?

Museums are keeping places, not only for objects and artefacts but for the stories of people, places and events.

Objects give us a tangible link to the past ... and museums help preserve them for the future...

Rebecca is a direct descendant from both First Fleeters and the Hawkesbury Coromandel Settlers. An interest in all things historical at an early age led to her career as a Museum Curator and Advisor. After completing a Masters degree in Museum Studies, Rebecca has worked in a variety of museums, working with diverse collections, sharing and preserving objects and stories.

MILL SITE TOUR Saturday 24th May, 09:00

Meet at the Millstones in Memorial Park, 84 Old Bells Line of Road, Kurrajong.

In the first part of the tour, Les Dollin will give a talk at the Millstones. In the past year, Les and Anne have been doing in-depth research on Kurrajong's Singletons mills, and Les will present some of their exciting new discoveries.

In the second part of the Tour, Les will give a guided tour of the mill site and explain how it all worked.

Book online—Book online \$5 per person

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS TOUR

Join us for a self drive tour to Goulburn and Crookwell.

Tuesday 3rd and Wednesday 4th June. Contact the president for booking information.



A group of tents erected at "Diggers Hill" on the corner of Comleroy Road and Bells Line of Road, Kurrajong in about 1920. These were used to house the men who were working on the building of the Soldier Settlement properties in the area.

Image 040200



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