

Founded 1960

BERRIMA DISTRICT HISTORICAL & FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY INC

NEWSLETTER

No 476 September 2015

Located in the Wingecarribee Shire,
Southern Highlands of NSW

ABN 29 362 616 937

From the President's Desk

This month the Empire Theatre turns 100. Its long and chequered history reflects the culture and creativity of our movie industry as well as the dogged staying power of the cinema owners. Congratulations!

Growing up in good old Werris Creek during the war left me with a mixed impression of cinemas. Being a railway town everything was located within a whistle of the shunting sheds.

Living was *en plein* air. We slept on the verandah, school was mostly outside and of course there was Simmo's Open-Air Picture Show.

Built by the local Dodgy Bros. featuring natural cypress pine logs, corrugated iron walls and natural canvas seats of the continuous deck chair variety. A layer of ash usually settled on the seats. Mum always carried a spare towel to brush the soot off the canvas before we sat down. Perhaps that's why they called them the 'flicks'??

The floor was carpeted with dirt, naturally.

I reckon Simmo could have folded the seats away and used the area for a rodeo.



Bruce Moore, President

Continued on page 2

GENERAL MONTHLY MEETING

SEPTEMBER MEETING: Thursday 24 September at 2:00pm

VENUE: Society Research Centre, Old Council Chambers Building, Bowral Road, Mittagong

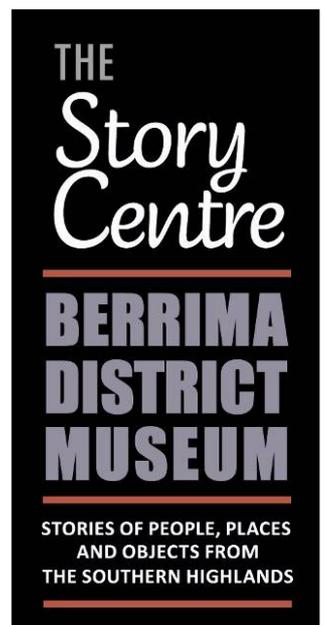
GUEST SPEAKER: **Bruce Stannard** of Maritime Heritage Press.
A history of the Stannard Bros early maritime services company established on Sydney Harbour.

AFTERNOON TEA: To be served following the speaker. Members please bring a plate or a donation.

OCTOBER MEETING: Thursday 22 October at 2:00pm

VENUE: Society Research Centre, Old Council Chambers Building, Bowral Road, Mittagong

GUEST SPEAKER: An 'Archives Roadshow' - members are invited to bring along interesting objects for a show and tell afternoon of interest and enjoyment.



Museum news on page 5

From the President

Continued from front page

During the war we watched plenty of black & white propaganda films, mainly of us 'goodies' stalking the 'baddie' Japs in the thick studio jungles. One night it rained heavily, adding realism to the movie. Undaunted, the canvas roof was slowly rolled out for our comfort. Engrossed in the story, Mum passed around more of her famous brawn sandwiches. She always thought we were starving when we went out.

Long before stereo & 3D were invented, we heard blood curdling yelps coming from outside. Or was that inside?

It seemed like machine guns, rattling, followed by more screams.

We were under siege at Werris Creek! The lights came on. Mum packed up the sandwiches and we made a beeline for the exit. Simmo was yelling at soldiers who had their bayonets fixed. Confusion reigned.

Later, it was apparent these were recruits on leave, celebrated by having a few too many drinks at the "Loco" (Locomotive Hotel). These soldiers decided to have some fun by running their bayonets along the corrugated walls of the theatre.

This experience scared the living daylight out of me. I was so glad we built a bomb shelter in the backyard, so I could hide.

Here's a suggested line for the next James Bond movie:

"Now pay attention, 007; this looks like an ordinary suitcase but, if you push this button, a handle comes out and you can wheel it!"

Research fees

Research fees for non-members:

\$20.00 per hour or part thereof for telephone and postal enquiries.

\$5.00 per hour or part thereof for enquirers who attend the archives and carry out their own research.

Oldbury spring tour

A self-drive tour will take place on **Wednesday 14 October** to inspect the old barn of the historic **Browley** property at **10:15am**, followed by a visit to the gardens of the historic **Oldbury** property at Sutton Forest at **11am**. A BYO picnic lunch at All Saints cemetery, Sutton Forest will then follow.

Browley was granted to John Waite, a former convict servant to Dr Charles Throsby, in 1820. The fine stone barn was built in the 1830s.

Meet at Browley at 10:15am, or contact the Archives to arrange a meeting locateon to travel in convoy.

Participants are limited to 25/30 and the tour is only available to Society members. Cost is \$10, bookings and payment at Archives.

Berrima District Museum

THE STORY CENTRE

Please note that the museum is now open at least 5 days a week

MUSEUM OPEN: 10am to 4pm

WEDNESDAY TO SUNDAY

and every day during NSW school holidays and on public holidays.

Groups welcome at other times by arrangement. Please phone John on 4872 1660.

Archives opening hours

Monday 10:00 am - 4:00 pm

Tuesday 10:00 am - 4:00 pm

Saturday 10:00 am - 1:00 pm

Membership details

Please note that all membership enquiries and changes of address details should be addressed to:

The Membership Secretary
c/- the Society's postal address
or email to:
bdhsarchives@gmail.com

RAHS conference 2015

The conference theme for this year is 'Migration Matters'. It will be held at Bankstown on October 24-25. All details and a booking form can be obtained from RAHS website or from our Secretary.

Bankstown is one of the most ethnically diverse communities in Australia, and with a vibrant culture, a perfect location to consider matters of migration. Conference delegates will have the opportunity to explore the importance of migration history, learn skills that will support history projects and to network and share histories

Bankstown Sports Club is the venue for Pre Conference Drinks and for Saturday night dinner. The program:

DAY 1 Sat 24 October. Sessions:

- Welcome and Keynote Address
- Cultural Grants Awards
- Lesley Muir Address - David Hill
- Sue Rosen - The Immigrant Experience in Bankstown
- Tim Carroll - Springboard: Oral Histories as the base for new projects, new audiences
- Ann Parry - Connecting your history society with local schools
- Liz Rushen - The government's hand in 19th century migration to Australia
- Bruce Pennay - Migration locally
- Judith Dunn - Every Migrant has a Story

TOURS Food tour, Historical bus tour, Telstra Museum, Self- Guided Walk

DAY 2: Sun 25 October. Sessions:

- Heritage Grant Awards
- Business Session and Certificates of Achievement Awards
- Session E
- Tamara Lavrencic - The Importance of Significance Assessment
- Paul McPherson - The other side of collecting: refusing, replacing and deaccessioning historical material
- Jean Winston - Experiences in undertaking a significance assessment
- Wayne Peake - The Peake Family of Peakhurst and the Georges River District 1811-1996. Impressions and Sketches.
- Linda Myring - Migrant Experiences
- Cultural Performance.

September meeting speaker

Bruce Stannard AM

In his talk at our meeting, Bruce will give a history of Stannard Brothers, the maritime services company that began with his great, great grandfather William Henry Stannard, one of the earliest watermen on Sydney Harbour.



William set up for business in a stone cottage on Bennelong Point with his Whitehall pulling boats drawn up on the little beach to the east of the point, now known as Man O' War Steps. His descendants continued the business and, known as Stannard Bros, it developed a lighterage, tugboat and launch enterprise that eventually stretched around the Australian coast and became an outstanding commercial success, the biggest of its kind in Australia.

Bruce's second cousin, Alan Stannard, now aged 94, has been a resident of Bowral for much of the latter part of his life. He was the key figure in driving the outstanding commercial success of Stannard Brothers. Alan was incarcerated in Changi following the fall of Singapore. Bruce will touch on some strands of Alan's well lived life.

Brief biography

Bruce Stannard AM has had a life-long association with maritime heritage and has a special knowledge of the ships of the mid-nineteenth century. He is also a passionate advocate for the recognition and preservation of the marine environment and is currently focussed on highlighting the plight of the Wandering Albatross.

He runs Maritime Heritage Press, an independent publishing house producing high quality books on maritime heritage, including marine art, maritime history, traditional maritime practices and skills and the preservation of historic vessels.

In 1997 Bruce was awarded Membership in the Order of Australia for his work in preserving Australia's maritime heritage. Bruce has also been awarded a Knighthood by the King of Norway, Norway's highest civil honour. Bruce is a Life Member of the Australian National Maritime Museum. He conceived the idea for the Endeavour Replica and was instrumental in raising much of the \$17 million for Endeavour's construction.

Bruce is the author of ten books. One of the best known is the award-winning *Bluewater Bushmen*, first published in 1981 with a limited edition reprinted in 2004 by Maritime Heritage Press.

Archives news

Linda Emery

I am pleased to be able to report that we were successful in our application for a grant from the Ministry for the Arts through the Royal Australian Historical Society to digitise and rehouse the Taylor Collection of photographs of Wombeyan Caves in 1899. The amount of \$600 will allow us to have the collection professionally scanned and restored, and pay for image binders to keep them safely stored.

Volunteer Claire Lansley has started an indexing project during the month. The Berrima Police Occurrences Book from 1915-1923 has been in our collection for a few years, having been found at a tip in Newcastle and donated by the finder. The book gives us an opportunity to see how a rural policeman spent his time in the days before motor vehicles, which seems to have been quite a bit of riding around the district, with very little crime in evidence! Thanks to Claire we will have another index to help researchers.

We have had a number of acquisitions this month, including a lovely collection of photographs and programmes of the Bowral Choral Society mainly from the 1970s from the estate of Lois Madden, donated by Garry Barnsley. The choral society was a very active organisation and did some wonderful productions over the years. We are fortunate to have quite a good collection in the archives and this latest material is a very welcome addition.



Appearing in the Bowral Choral Society's production of 'The Gondoliers' in 1973 are *from left* John Boag, June Buchan, Mollie Branch and Charles Dunk.

Updating the Poppy Seed Index project which I wrote about last month, we have now traced 360 soldiers - and counting. I have written an article for Highlife about the project for the October/November issue so look out for it.

Empire Picture Theatre, Bowral

The Empire Cinema in Bowral is the longest running commercial cinema in Australia. It celebrates its 100th birthday on 15 September this year. To celebrate this milestone, we provide a brief overview of its history.

Motion pictures come to town

Silent motion pictures commenced screening locally in the early days of the 20th century at School of Arts centres in Robertson, Moss Vale and Mittagong, as well as at the Memorial Hall in Mittagong. In Bowral, by 1909 a Picture Theatre was in operation at the School of Arts, where films were shown once a week.

A great advance came in July 1914 when 19 year old Hamilton Painter introduced the Empire Pictures to residents of Bowral. He began showing films at the School of Arts, with music supplied by an orchestra, three evenings a week and on Saturday afternoons.

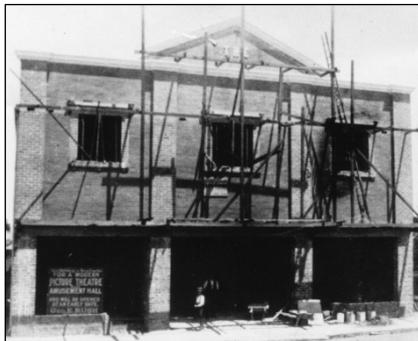
The local press reported that the general verdict of the pictures was "They're good" and residents soon embraced this new entertainment with great fervour.



Hamilton Painter

The Empire opens

His parents, Maude and Jack Painter, became most enthusiastic about their son's plan for a new purpose-built theatre. Jack set about constructing a building on land owned by Mr Arnett in Bong Bong St. The builder was Alf Stephens.



Amidst much excitement, the Empire Picture Theatre was opened on 15 September 1915, with the feature film being 'Rupert of Hentzau', a sequel to 'The Prisoner of Zenda'. Patrons entered through the foyer which opened directly onto Bong Bong Street. On one side of the foyer was a confectionery shop, run by Roy's sister, and on the other side the Empire Lounge served tea and homemade cake.

Roy, the projectionist, made the Empire the entertainment centre of the district. On the evenings when pictures weren't screened, the folding wooden seats were packed away and the flat floor was used as a roller skating rink. At times Roy and his wife Evelyn gave skating exhibitions. Roy also organised live and travelling shows to perform at the theatre. The auditorium held 946 people and two uniformed usherettes showed patrons to their seats.



The Empire Theatre opened in September 1915

Movies were screened Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at 8pm with a matinee on Saturdays as well. The program was divided into two parts with an interval before the feature film. The first part was a series of cartoons, shorts, newsreels and serials. The newsreel was the main way in those days to keep up with current events. At interval, lollies and ice creams would be brought into the auditorium in trays suspended by a strap around the seller's neck. Seating was divided into different price ranges with the upstairs Dress Circle the most expensive.

Sue and Percy Weedon became proprietors of the Empire Theatre on April 1, 1925.

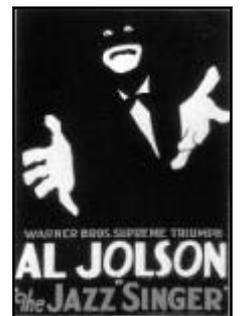


Sue and Percy Weedon

They managed to pre-release some major films and Sydney people often came to Bowral to see the film before it was released in the city. After a year the distributors decided that this anomaly was not in their interests and they introduced simultaneous releases.

In 1927 'talkies' exploded onto cinema screens throughout the world. The Weedon's, being progressive, installed a Western Electric Sound System at the enormous cost of £5,000. Other major alterations included a sloping floor replacing the flat floor and extending the front dress circle by six rows.

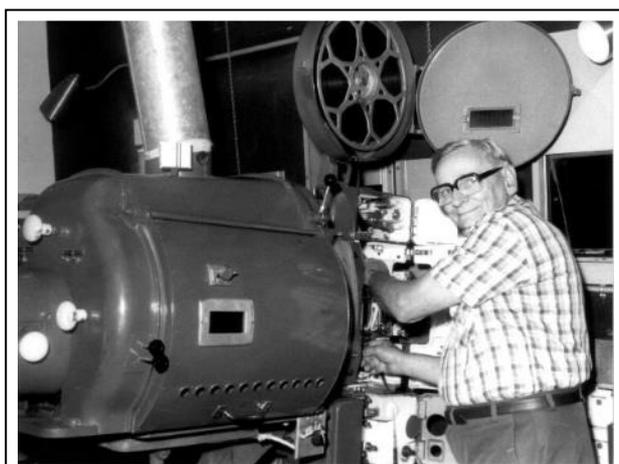
In October 1930, the first talkie, Al Jolson's "The Jazz Singer", was screened in Bowral to a packed house. After Percy Weedon's death in 1932, Sue ran the theatre until 1934 then sold to Joshua Stokes who hired the enterprising manager Claude Lee in 1935.



Clive Speechley

Another key player throughout this period worthy of mention was Clive Speechley, known as the district's Picture Show Man for over 55 years. Clive became

projectionist at the Empire in the mid 1940s, having started at Mack's Theatre in Moss Vale as an assistant projectionist in 1926. As projectionist at the Empire he had to work nights, weekends and public holidays.



Clive Speechley working the Empire projector

He was often helped by his wife Clarice. The bio-box (projection room) in winter was cold and draughty and in summer hot, cramped and stuffy. It was necessary to have two people in there because nitrate film was highly flammable and the light source was carbon arc lamps which needed constant adjustment, unlike the xenon lamps which followed.

On two projectors, Clive had the feature on large spools and had to make a changeover every 40 minutes or so. With such equipment and brittle film, problems were likely and, if there was a breakdown, Clive was highly skilled in getting the show running again, egged on by hoots and cheers from the audience. Clive retired in 1981 and is remembered as a thoroughly professional and very special Picture Show Man.

The Streets

In 1958 Leslie Corne, the new owner, hired Joe Lyons as his manager. The Contos brothers took over after them, and sold the Empire in 1973 to June and Stan Street. Ron and Marjorie Duffus leased the theatre at that time with Percy Sewell and later Clive Speechley as their managers.



Stan and June Street

By 1973, apart from its facade, little had changed in the four decades since the Weedons had installed sound and made changes to the seating arrangements. Most Sydney suburban picture theatres had closed after the spread of television, and soon country theatres followed. The Moss Vale Royal closed in 1963 and the Mittagong Regal in 1971. The grandest country picture palace of all, the Goulburn Odeon, closed in 1966.

The Empire's seating capacity of 946, which was barely adequate on Saturday nights in the halcyon days, was certainly an over-abundance in 1973. Here was a theatre that had seen better days, situated in a prime position in the main street of a prosperous country town. What would be its salvation?

Empire theatre survives as cinema complex

By 1973 the Empire Theatre had seen better days. New owners Stan and June Street closed it temporarily and made extensive alterations. A new cinema was created in the upstairs space of the old theatre's dress circle with a realistic 350 seats; while underneath the street level was remodelled into shops. A Grand Re-Opening held in August 1973 featured the film "Young Winston".



However colour television arrived in 1976 and, combined with a shortage of good films, the Empire Cinema had a patchy run so that by 1979 Ron and Marjorie Duffus, who leased the cinema, called it a day. The cinema was closed. Concerned that this would be permanent, the local community organised a petition to plead for the cinema to continue.

The Streets decided to retain the Empire and two energetic, experienced people from Sydney, Mark Davie and Nabil Bouny, were keen to take on the lease. In order to make the property more viable, the Streets moved the entrance to the side where it is today. This allowed for the construction of two shops facing Bong Bong Street. They also donated their land at the rear of the building plus the laneway to Council.

The conversion into two cinemas during 1993 was supervised by Stan Street, then in his mid-70s. With James Selby as the builder, they completed Cinema 1 in six weeks and opened with the blockbuster 'Jurassic Park'. Cinema 2 opened five weeks later with the animated film 'Aladdin'.

With the increasing variety of films available into the 21st century, the two cinemas were hard pressed to meet the demand. The concept of adding two smaller cinemas suspended over the rear car park and including a lift for disabled access was undertaken by new owners Gerry and Meil Kroon in 2005 with Richard Ruhfus and Mal Kirk as operators.

The Empire Picture Theatre, now cinema complex, has been in continuous operation for a century and brought entertainment and delight to generations of patrons. As many members will be aware, a colourful exhibition of the theatre's history opened in 2011 at our museum in Berrima, curated by Lyn Hall. It is still on display and well worth a visit to the museum.

Article compiled by Philip Morton with thanks to Lyn Hall and Empire management

Gib's role in historic 1958 telecast

Mount Gibraltar has been a familiar local landmark since the first explorers came through in 1798. For ages before that it was known to Aboriginal people.

A Heritage Reserve now occupies the summit and upper slopes of 'The Gib'. The restored natural forest provides a conservation site for wildlife and a pleasant area for quiet recreation.

The mountain, composed of the rare igneous rock microsyenite, known as Bowral Trachyte, was quarried for 100 years and the stone widely used, including in grand public buildings.

From the 1950s the summit has been used for communication towers, and on one occasion was part of an historic microwave link. The following story is adapted from 'Radio, Television & Hobbies' magazine of April 1958.

Just two years after black and white TV broadcasting first commenced in Sydney, television station ATN (Channel 7) performed a remarkable feat on 25 February 1958 when it televised the visit of the Queen Mother to Canberra. It covered the inspection of Duntroon Military College in the morning and the Ball at Government House in the evening.

This was done by use of a microwave link operating over a distance of 170 miles. At the time, this was the longest TV link ever attempted by a station using its own facilities. ATN was a prolific user of these links. One was permanently installed to carry normal programs from the Epping studios to the Gore Hill transmitter. The receipt of new link equipment meant that, for the occasion, ATN was able to mount two repeater points in addition to its normal OB van, and these were used for the broadcast.

The first link was established on Mt Gibraltar, a well-known high spot much favoured for many years by amateur experimenters on VHF and used for PMG telephone link equipment.

The second repeater was installed on the top of a high mountain outside Canberra so as to allow a clear path back to Gibraltar, and down to the valley in which Canberra lies. The distance between the two repeater points was approximately 85 miles, and a further 20 miles carried the signals into Canberra.

The occasion was the result of much careful planning extending over several weeks. Because of the extremely long hops involved, an initial survey of the path was made, and the probable behavior of the equipment calculated to ascertain whether sufficient signal strength would be forthcoming.

Later, field parties went out to verify these forecasts, and the results in practice were found to tally almost exactly, demonstrating that the telecast was quite practicable. A pilot run, made about a week before the event, ironed out initial problems.

Careful co-ordination was needed between technical crews and their equipment, for some of these were required at the weekend to cover a surf carnival on the Saturday and a visit of the Queen Mother to AWA's factory on the Monday. Immediately this was over, the crews left for their distant position and commenced setting up the gear, including portable motor-driven generators to power the transmitters.

The arrangement of the links was as follows: the OB van, a completely equipped TV station in a truck, was located at a selected spot at Duntroon and later at Government House. It transmitted its signal to Repeater No 2 on the mountain outside Canberra.

The equipment at this point received the van's transmission and used these to modulate a transmitter the output of which was beamed to Repeater No 1 at Mt Gibraltar where the process was repeated for the final hop to the Epping studios.

After being absorbed into the normal equipment at Epping, the signals travelled over a fourth path, the fixed link used to carry programs from Epping to Gore Hill. At the studios, the synchronizing pulses received as part of the signals from Canberra were used to lock the synchronizing generators at ATN, thus allowing all the normal telecasting facilities of the station to be used.

The success of the venture was illustrated by the excellence of the pictures received in Sydney, and made available to both ABN (the ABC's Sydney station) and ATN because of the national interest in the occasion.

The hobby magazine of 1958 finished its description by stating that the historic telecast's importance did not stop at the success achieved. It also demonstrated to Australian telecommunication engineers the practicability of such links to extend the range of TV networks throughout the country.

Almost sixty years later, residents in fringe reception areas such as the Southern Highlands have benefited enormously from such feats.



LOCAL LINK: Equipment being unpacked at Mt Gibraltar for the historic telecast in 1958. Photo from 'Radio, Television & Hobbies' April 1958.

Compiled by Philip Morton

Museum volunteers' morning tea

Lyn Hall

A good morning indeed with 25 volunteers squeezing into the Klein room to enjoy home-made refreshments while listening to a museum report covering the past 3 months from John Schweers, museum manager.



**John Schweers
& Gloria Williams**

John thanked the volunteers for their important contribution in making it possible for the museum to be open daily from Wednesday through to Sunday and Sylvia Carless was acknowledged for her contribution in running the roster. Compliments were given to the regular Monday volunteer cleaners who make sure the museum is kept pristine for visitors.

John presented his analysis of museum visitor attendance figures which showed that it is worthwhile opening the extra days of the week compared to previous years, even when some week days are very quiet.

School holidays are just around the corner so a timely reminder to every grandparent that the museum is open every day during the school holidays and when children are admitted free when accompanied by an adult. There are special activities to make a child's visit interesting and fun.



Lisa Grimshaw, Vanessa Dagleish, Michele Woods, Chris Moore



**Gil Wheaton, Connie Binks, Bev Schweers and Lyn Hall, with
Phil Yeo and Eddie Jones in the background**

From the 1830s newspapers

The Sydney Herald Monday 29 September 1834 page 1
ROADS.

Bong Bong Bridge has been (during the late rains) nearly washed away; and there is scarce a vestige to be seen of the old temporary bridges that were erected six or eight years back; consequently, from Bong Bong to the farthest part of "Moneroo," southward, and from Bong Bong to the most distant parts of the Murrumbidgee, westward, there is not a bridge fit to drive a wheelbarrow over; and yet it will be acknowledged, the inhabitants of the counties above mentioned, pay their quota towards the Revenue.

The new line of road is now, and will be for some months hence, impassable-it is a complete bog; horses and bullocks have, within the last week, been nearly suffocated; one horse actually was suffocated, and it was with difficulty the rider got his saddle, &c. It required the united efforts of ten oxen to draw an almost empty dray out of the slough; one dray and load was, together with the bullocks, entirely swept away at the Wollondilly; happily the beasts were saved, but the load was totally lost.

The Colonist Saturday 13 January 1838 page 3

BONG BONG.-It is intended that a Juvenile School should be established in the town of Berrima, similar to those already set on foot in various other parts of the country, under the auspices of the Synod of New South Wales. Mr. Alex. Frazer, one of the teachers brought to the colony by Dr. Lang, has been appointed for this station, and has proceeded thither to commence arrangements for opening his school. Mr. Frazer is the son of a late respectable parochial teacher in Scotland, from whom, both as his pupil and assistant, he received both a liberal education and a competent experience in the process of teaching. Mr. F. is an excellent classical scholar; he was attending the University of Glasgow before he left Britain; and he holds the diploma of the Glasgow Educational Society, at whose institutions he was initiated in the principles of the Training System. We trust that the inhabitants of Berrima will consult their own interest, by securing and encouraging the labours of so well qualified and deserving a person as Mr. Frazer.

The Sydney Morning Herald Tuesday 28 November 1843 page 4

Argyle. 3. 20 acres, at the old Wingello Stockade, commencing at a stump at the Great South Road, near the Wingello Lock-up: this allotment includes the remains of seven old huts, formerly occupied by an iron-gang at Wingello. *Upset price, £25 for the lot.*

Compiled by Lavinia Ford

Berrima District Historical & Family History Society Inc

PO Box 131 Mittagong NSW 2575 ☎ Telephone / Fax (02) 4872 2169

email: bdhsarchives@gmail.com ☎ web: www.berrimadistricthistoricalsociety.org.au

- ARCHIVES:** Cnr Old Hume Highway and Bowral Road, MITTAGONG.
OPEN: Mondays, Tuesdays 10am-4pm and Saturdays 10am-1pm. Closed Public Holidays.
Library collection contains reference books, journals and newsletters of other societies.
- MUSEUM:** Market Place, Berrima. Tel: 02 4877 1130. Email: bdmuseum@bigpond.com
OPEN: 10.00am to 4.00pm, Wednesdays to Sundays, and during school and public holidays.
Museum Committee: John Schweers (Manager, Tour Bookings), Harlan Hall (Project Manager),
Lyn Hall (Graphics, Exhibitions), Sylvia Carless (Roster), Chris Moore (Artist, Children's programs),
Judith Green (Procedures), Michele Woods (Exhibition content), Harold Wall (Human Resources).
- MEMBERSHIP:** Any person wanting to join the Society may do so at any stage during the year by completing a form
and paying the appropriate fee. Joining Fee \$10.00 - Single \$25.00 - Family \$35.00.
- AFFILIATIONS:** Royal Australian Historical Society, NSW Association of Family History Societies,
Museums Australia Inc & Regional Chapter.

If undelivered return to:

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Berrima District Historical & Family History Society Inc

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plus members Peg Harvey (Minute Secretary), Carolyn Hutton, Denyse Barker, Robyn Arrowsmith and Ros Dale

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Southern Highland News

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