



Founded 1960

BERRIMA DISTRICT HISTORICAL & FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY INC

NEWSLETTER
No 404 March 2009

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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. OPEN: Saturdays, Sundays, Public and School Holidays
(except Good Friday, Christmas Day and Boxing Day) 10.00 am to 4.00 pm.

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 \$5.00 – Single \$20.00 – Family \$33.00.

AFFILIATIONS:

Royal Australian Historical Society, NSW Association of Family History Societies, Museums Australia Inc & Regional Chapter.

GENERAL MONTHLY MEETING

MARCH MEETING:

Thursday, 26 March 2009 at 5:00pm

VENUE:

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

GUEST SPEAKER:

Denis Gojak

TOPIC:

**Mysterious barracks and indestructible toilets - recent
archaeological work along the Great South Road**

LIGHT REFRESHMENTS:

To be served after the meeting

Denis Gojak is an Archaeologist who has worked on various archaeological digs in the Southern Highlands as well as many other locations in NSW.

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APRIL MEETING:

Thursday, 23 April 2007

VENUE:

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



EVENTS CALENDER 2009

MARCH

- 12 Management Committee Meeting
26 Monthly General Meeting -
Talk on *Mysterious barracks and indestructible toilets - recent archaeological work along the Great South Road* by Denis Gojak.

APRIL

- 9 Management Committee Meeting
10 School Holidays commence
23 Monthly General Meeting -
Talk – TBA
27 School holidays conclude

MAY

- 14 Management Committee Meeting
28 Monthly General Meeting -
Talk – TBA

TRIAL MEETING TIMES

Our March meeting is the last of our trial meeting times of 5.00pm. We would appreciate any member feedback on the meeting times.

BERRIMA DISTRICT MUSEUM

Market Place, Berrima.
Near the bridge.

OPENING HOURS

10 am – 4 pm.
Weekends, Public Holidays and
NSW School Holidays.
Closed Good Friday, Christmas Day
and Boxing Day.
Groups also welcome at other times
by arrangement.
Please telephone Bob or Gloria
on 4889 4405

Official Opening 'Prisoners in Arcady' Exhibition at Berrima District Museum Gloria Williams

Berrima District Museum's latest and most ambitious exhibition 'Prisoners in Arcady' was officially opened by Mr Hans Gnodtke, Consul-General of the Federal Republic of Germany on Friday 20 February 2009.

On arrival, guests enjoyed drinks in the museum grounds. The clouds that had been ominously present thankfully did nothing more than provide pleasant relief from the direct sun. At around 2.30 pm, when the guests were seated under the willows, Master of Ceremonies Harlan Hall introduced the speakers for the afternoon.

President Ken Reid began by extending a warm welcome to everyone. John Simons, author of 'Prisoners in Arcady' and an Honorary Life Member of our society, had written a most interesting insight into the background of his research. This included interviewing the now late Jack Schott, a resident of Berrima, who as a child had played with the internee children. As John is currently not enjoying the best of health, his daughter Frances read his speech. This was followed by an address from Mr Hans Gnodtke who spoke of the warm friendship that Germany and Australia have enjoyed outside the parameters of two brutal wars. Councillor Duncan Gair, Mayor of Wingecarribee Shire Council in his address made the salient point that the funding of an exhibition is one thing, but it requires the volunteer input to make it happen.

Among the gathering were representatives from Wingecarribee Shire Council, Museums and Galleries NSW, Powerhouse Museum and Historic Houses Trust. Stephen Dickman who in 1978 found the canoe, which the museum proudly displays, was present along with his wife Myrtle. Bonnie Pierce and Jim Wood, both retired long serving museum volunteers enjoyed the afternoon.

At the conclusion of the speeches, guests were invited into the museum to witness the cutting of the ribbon by the Consul-General to signify the official opening of the exhibition. It was then time for guests to experience the exhibition first hand and marvel at this fascinating part of our history over a delicious smorgasbord of finger food loving prepared and served by friends of John and Jenny Simons.

The Editor

Dear Madam,

I would like to thank the Society for a wonderful event last Friday, being the official opening of the "Prisoners in Arcady" exhibition at the Berrima museum. It was a splendid occasion, and a fitting celebration of the work of so many people who have been involved in bringing this story to life, over many years.

I would like to take this opportunity to recall an important but unsung aspect of the "Prisoners in Arcady" story, and to thank, in particular, Linda Emery for her role in getting 'Prisoners in Arcady' published. While John has described elsewhere how he undertook the research and writing task, it was thanks to Linda's strenuous efforts that the work was eventually published.

Without Linda's involvement, and indeed the support of the Society itself in this - the story may not have been in the public domain for many more years, and may not have been available to take to the next step, as we have now seen with the fine display that has been created. Thank you, Linda, for your hard work all those years ago, and for your confidence that this was a story worth telling.

Yours sincerely,
Jenny Simons

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Ken Reid

Firstly I would like to formally welcome our official guests:-

Consul-General, Mr Hans Gnodtke and Mrs Gnodtke

The Mayor of Wingecarribee Shire, Cr Duncan Gair - Cr Gair is also the Patron of our Society.

Our guests from Museums & Galleries NSW - Sarah-Jane Rennie and Phoebe Arthur.

The cost of presenting the exhibition was beyond the Society's finances, and on behalf of our Society, I would thank very sincerely our three sponsors who made the production of the exhibition possible - Wingecarribee Shire Council, Museums and Galleries NSW and the Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany, Sydney.

A short outline on the background to the creation of this exhibition.

In 1978, following a flood, Stephen Dickman, a noxious weed inspector with Berrima County Council, found a canoe half buried in a sandbank along the river. Knowing that the German Internees had been located in the area, Stephen surmised that the canoe had been made and used by the Internees. We now know that just prior to their repatriation, the Internees placed bricks in the canoes and sunk them. When Stephen advised the Society of his discovery, society members with assistance from other community groups salvaged the canoe and brought it to the Museum - research shows there may be more canoes at the bottom of the river.

For many years the Museum had exhibition space allocated to a much smaller display of the canoe and the story of the more than 300 Germans who were interned at Berrima Gaol between 1915 and 1919. In the early 1990s, Dr. John Simons, who was at that time the society's archivist, felt that the story of the internees should be told. After many, many hours of painstaking research and locating and scanning relevant photographs, the book "Prisoners in Arcady" as written by John, and published by the Society in 1999.

During workshops with Museums and Galleries NSW, it was suggested that local museums should endeavour to highlight something unique to their area, and so thoughts of the internees story as told in John's book, grew into the

enlarged exhibition that you are about to see. What is more unique than the internees story of their time at Berrima, and this exhibition re-tells their story in an expanded and fresh visual way. Although there were other internment camps in NSW, we feel that none are able to present an exhibition detailing a lifestyle such as the prisoners made for themselves here in Berrima. Most of them, being mariners with various skills, centred their activities on and around the Wingecarribee River as you will see in the displays.

Much credit for both the displays in the exhibition and today's event must go to our Museum Curator, Bob Williams and his wife Gloria, the museum committee and its volunteers, and a very special thank you to Lyn and Harlan Hall who were a driving force behind the exhibition. Bob Williams (nicknamed *Bob the Builder*) together with museum volunteer Phillip Morton did the carpentry and painting required, while Lyn Hall is the exhibition's Curator and responsible for its design and layout.

Once again, thank you all for your attendance here today and helping to make the official opening a very special event for our Museum.

It now gives me much pleasure to introduce to you, Frances Simons, eldest daughter of the author of the book "Prisoners in Arcady". On behalf of her father, Frances will relate how Dr. Simons became interested in the story of the German Prisoners Frances Simons.



Stephen Dickman who discovered the canoe in the river bank in 1978 while working as a noxious weed inspector.

(Photograph courtesy of Desmond Kennard)

DR. JOHN SIMONS SPEECH

Read by Frances Simons

John and Jenny's eldest daughter.

I have been asked to say a few words about the background of this exhibition and how the items you will see displayed in it came about.

Before I began my research, what was generally understood - but with little detail about the individual internees themselves - was that the internees were connected with shipping, mostly the German and Austrian Merchant Marine, and were the captains, officers and engineers of those ships that had been seized in Australian ports or captured off the coast at the outbreak of the war.

I was personally very surprised to be told that Berrima,

during World War 1, had indeed held enemy aliens, because when I was a young lad (in the 1930s and late 1920s), this Southern Highlands region was very well stocked with my relatives: grandparents, uncles, aunts and numerous cousins, who picnicked and swam at the very sites that the internees of 1915-1919 occupied. When my parents and I visited on holidays, we too often picnicked at Berrima with the relatives, but never once had any of them mentioned the internees who had been there only a few years before. But let me tell you how my story and discoveries unfolded.

When I became archivist of this wonderful Historical Society, I set about learning the extent of the collection. I soon came across four sets of evidence that there had indeed been internees at Berrima. Firstly there was a small book written by the Second-in-Command of the Guard of Berrima Gaol, Lieutenant Edmond Samuels. His booklet described the general appearance of the gaol, which was the centre of the internment camp, and activities of the internees. The booklet also mentions one

of the huts made by them as "the Emden hut" with the explanation suggesting that some Emden survivors had been present there. Secondly, there was another booklet of 39 photographs taken and published by the Bowral Photographer of the time, David Speer. His booklet showed scenes of the internees' huts and other constructions along the river, but apart from showing the name of their bridge

across the river as the "Hansa Bridge", it gave me no vital lead. The third example was two autograph albums that had been owned by girls of the village at that time. The books contained signatures of various members of the guards, and a couple of German sounding names, but these turned out to be the names of descendants of German immigrants who had settled here during the middle 1800s. Lastly, there was a collection of a number of individual photographs.

Nothing in these sets of information told me anything of the personal details and background of the internees.

Most of the collection of individual photographs were the same as in Speer's booklet, but some were very different and consequentially drew my close attention. The majority of these were black and white photographs of playbills and cast lists that obviously related to productions of the plays and orchestral concerts the internees had performed, but others were of illustrations of episodes in the war career of SMS Emden. The striking thing about

these photographs of playbills and scenes of the career of SMS Emden, were that they were all done by someone who had a solid command of technique, and the eye of an artist. By using a magnifying glass, I discovered the author of one of the scenes of the career of the Emden had signed it as "O. Moenkedieck - Emden". Research at the Archives of both the War Museum and Australian Archives revealed that there had been an Otto Moenkedieck, a Warrant Officer on the Emden, who had been seriously wounded, and that he and five other Warrant Officers had been interned at Berrima. The hut they built at Berrima may have been called by the guards, "the Emden Hut", but the internees called it "Schoene Aussicht" which we, in French or English, would translate as "Bellevue". The discovery and naming of the Emden POWs was, so to speak, my first real 'result' in identifying individual internees of Berrima. The next result, however came about through someone who was a true native of Berrima, having been born there, and had actually known the internees when a young child, Jack Schott.



Frances Simons, reading her fathers speech.

(Photograph courtesy of Desmond Kennard)

Jack Schott, or the late Jack Schott as I now have to say with regret, deserves a book in his own right. He became an industrial chemist, achieving international fame for processes and ideas he introduced in Berrima's cement factory. But let me fix on his part in the internee story. Various people had advised me to meet Jack, and so I made an appointment. When I first met him, he talked about individuals he had met and the huts he had

played in - he even showed me where he remembered them being. He also had memories of himself and other village children playing and making friends with the German children - despite the censure of the local schoolmaster. The German children had come with their mother to be near their internee father. That surprised me. "Oh", I said, "Do you remember any of the ones you played with"? To my astonishment he answered that not only did he remember Carmen and Eva Machotka but that he still kept in touch with them in America. Later, he gave me their address and this led to a double result: the reception of the reminiscences of Carmen, and also her mother's account of her years at Berrima. Then, also through them, I received the address in Germany of the Koester daughters whose father, Willy, had been a close friend of the Machotkas at Berrima. Thus the archives received two separate sets of reminiscences; one of Carmen's and the other of her mother's, as well as a photograph album and various papers from Willy Koester's daughters.

The two reminiscences, and the Koester papers and annotated photo album were mines of information about names, special events, and the daily life of the internees. For instance, I learned that an Ernst Dannemann and Willy Koester had been members of the *Camp Committee* which was the committee that, together with the Commanding Officer and his 2IC, was the interface between "Officialdom" and the internees. I became very busy translating, recording and digesting all the information that had been sent to me, but it was an enjoyable task that I willingly and interestedly undertook.

Several months passed, with me deep in the material that had been sent, but out of the blue one afternoon I received a message saying that a "Mr. Danman", a son of one of the internees had visited the museum and was staying overnight at the local motel. I guessed the name was Dannemann, and thereupon telephoned the motel and arranged a meeting for that night - and so I met and became friends with Gerhard Dannemann. To my great delight he became enthusiastic with what I had achieved, and my general interest in the internees, and offered to help from Hamburg when he got home. He departed next morning for Canberra and other parts of Australia, so it was sometime before I received a packet which contained various papers and items relating to his father's enforced stay in Berrima, including his activities as a member of the internees' theatre.

I'm sure I would have been happy to have received only the Dannemann papers, but I was soon receiving much more, in fact an overwhelming avalanche of material, because Gerhard had not only been involved with the Hamburg and Bremen shipping companies for sometime, but also knew many other families that had been - and maybe still are - equally involved. This circumstance resulted in material relating to individual internees, or the Berrima Internment in general, arriving in my letter-box for quite a number of months: copies of, photographs and photograph albums, diaries, career documents, theatre and concert reviews, lecture notes, and so on. To my mind the diaries are the most interesting, particularly those of Captain Faas and Captain Bahl whose ships followed as supply ships to SMS Emden as she acted as lone raider. I also had much satisfaction in pursuing Frau Hurtzig's diary. She had been first interned in Queensland with her husband, Captain Hurtzig, and their two young children. Later the family was relocated to Berrima. The copy of her diary was sent by her daughters, but when I

started reading it I discovered that Frau Hurtzig begins by stating that she writes from memory "*because my first two volumes were confiscated*" when the family was relocated to Berrima. It took me quite a while to find where the two original volumes were held, but I finally located them in the Brisbane Museum where they had been entered not under the name of Hurtzig, but under those of several Lutheran Pastors who were then, in 1914, a suspect species.

So much material arrived during the ensuing months, not only from families in Germany but from across the Globe, and also from Jack Schott's memory of what had lain on the banks of the river, that I felt the best way to unite most of the huge amount of information that I now had was to write a book, and so I took up my pen and duly started, and completed the task. I must say, by the way, that the full story is not yet complete, because some of it still lies underwater and remains to be fully discovered at

some future date, but although the great flood of material from Gerhard Dannemann's efforts has now passed, the Archives and the Museum have benefited greatly from the 80 odd A4 packets that did arrive, and so has our knowledge of the people and the period, of the internment years of 1915 to 1919, in the history of Berrima.

In concluding, may I say a few words about the actual exhibition itself. While it is largely based on the book I wrote and some of the material



Hans Knodtke presents his speech to the audience.
(Photograph courtesy of Desmond Kennard)

that subsequently came to us, I would like to pay tribute to the curator of the display, Lyn Hall. She sat down with me numerous times to discuss what content to use or not, but it was she who designed the posters, the moving stories and displays, and decided details of where and when items would be placed, and it is her expertise and experience that has produced the impressive results you will see. I think you will agree with me that it was a very fortunate day when she and her husband retired to the Southern Highlands and that she offered her extensive museum knowledge and experience to the Society and Museum. To you, Lyn, both the Society and I offer our humble and heartfelt thanks.

**INAUGURATION OF EXHIBITION
IN BERRIMA
Friday 20 February 2009**

German Consul-General, Mr Hans Gnodtke

Mr. Mayor, Mr. President and members of the society and the Wingecarribee Council, distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

I want to start by thanking you all for your kind invitation to this opening of your exhibition. I feel indeed very privileged by your gesture, belonging to a generation of Germans that are particularly and painfully aware of the horror, pain and suffering that emanated from Germany during the 20th century. I am all the more touched by the loving care with which a site has been restored which bears witness to an example of sanity in a world engulfed by a World War.

Today's reopened exhibition is therefore not really about the horrors of war. It is rather about lessons learnt from one of the side events of World War I, a chapter that was written here in the quietly beautiful Southern Highlands of New South Wales where German internees and local people from Berrima came randomly into contact with one another while a savage war that found Australians and Germans on opposing sides raged on in Europe, the Middle East, on the high seas and elsewhere.

It is an amazing story and it would probably have never been told if it had not been for the years of devoted research into and the recording and preservation of the history of the human side of those years undertaken by Dr. John Simons. His book "Prisoners in Arcady" is a fascinating record and precious to all those, who understand that history is always essentially human. Research would not have been feasible without keeping in contact with those involved searching for testimony from surviving eyewitnesses or children who became keepers of their fathers personal records and other memorabilia. It is fascinating reading; It is particularly fascinating reading for all those whose forefathers had been participating in these events, be they Australians or Germans, direct descendants or just interested students of history.

I therefore feel privileged and authorized to express our sincerest gratitude to Dr. Simons also in the name of those of my countrymen, who profited directly from his research into their immediate family history.

War is always terrible business and even if one might conclude that civilian internees had drawn the lucky

straw, being confined and restricted is never a pleasurable experience. Also wars have the propensity to be brutally simple forcing everything and everyone into the crude divide between friend or foe with no room for subtleties.

And yet I believe that the title "Prisoners in Arcady" was well chosen. Far removed from the horror of the trenches in Flanders or the heartbreaking Drama of battlefields like the Somme or Gallipoli, and despite their isolation for many years being half a world away from their loved ones, the internees here in Berrima were never threatened in their personal dignity and eventually enjoyed the respect if not within the confines of a state of war the affection of the local population that had become their random host as they had become their uninvited guests but of course with no intention of ever being hosted in the first place.

But everyone made the best of it as the records especially the amazing collections of photographic film and plates demonstrate. Theatre, learning, sports and especially the design and display of all kinds of vessels allowed the prisoners to keep themselves active mentally and physically and they never stopped surprising the local population with their activities.

If I understand correctly John Simons comes to the conclusion that the experience of Berrima afforded both Australians and Germans a unique chance to learn from each other. I think maybe it went even deeper than that and that a reasonable mutual understanding might have developed. I only wished for example that I could have been present during the conversations when the internees managed to talk the local womenfolk out of their girdles and crinolines to be better equipped in the costume

department of the internees theatre group. There were many expressions of humanity on all sides during this period. By all accounts, those interned here may have felt cast away, and quite understandably so. But they were eventually accepted by the people surrounding them and who helped to make hardship more bearable thus they were actually much more fortunate than many others of those who were brutally thrown into the impassive maelstrom of the first global armed conflict in modern history the price of which was eventually to be the hitherto unimaginable loss of 9 million human lives.

I understand that some Australians have also looked critically at some aspects of their internment system. There were indeed reports of some German Australians interned merely on the basis of their German ancestry or



Hans Günter Knodtke cuts the ribbon to open the exhibition. (Photograph courtesy of Leonie Knapman)

disallowing internees after the war to continue to stay in Australia although they should have been allowed to stay, based on fairness and justice alone.

That may have been so, but those were episodes without lasting impact and understandable emotional reactions to the two world wars. However the lasting reality was and continues to be today, that wherever I go I hear appreciation and esteem for Germany and the Germans in Australia, regardless of whether they have made Australia their new home or came over for a limited time as tourists, business people or international students. Despite those two terrible world wars Australia was never closed for Germans for very long and Germans since the beginning of European settlement in Australia began have felt privileged by the opportunity to stay and live here in Australia and to contribute to the communities that they have chosen for themselves and which in turn have made their German migrants welcome here. Today more than a million Australians have German ancestry. This for me is one of the real miracles of the twentieth century.

Many historians have agreed that World War I has been in the final analysis a tragic fratricide. The primordial tragedy of the twentieth century.

Maybe Berrima was one of the few places where despite the brutality of global warfare ordinary people, internees and locals alike have had more mature and more advanced insights into our common humanity than what a broader public was ready for at the time. One might have wished that the Berrima experience could have been shared by a much wider audience, could have been experienced by whole nations and had had a global impact and not been limited to this little NSW community alone. Who knows, what course history might have taken. That is all speculation of course. What remains to note though is, that the events here in Berrima were indeed worthy to be recorded and I would like to end by repeating my congratulations and appreciation to Dr. John Simons and all those good people here in Wingecarribee Shire especially the Council, Museums and Galleries NSW, all of whom have supported him and helped to preserve this important page in the history books of our two nations.



PRISONERS IN ARCADY EXHIBITION

at Berrima District Museum
2pm on Friday 20th January 2009
Cr Duncan Gair

Guten Tag to all of you who have come to Berrima today for the opening of the magnificent 'Prisoners of Arcady' exhibition at the outstanding Berrima District Museum.

May I extend a special welcome to the Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany, Mr Hans Gnodtke and Mrs Gnodtke on behalf of Wingecarribee shire Council and the people of the Shire Guten Tag.

To the two ladies from Museums and Galleries New South Wales - Sarah-Jane Rennie and Phoebe Arthur welcome to Berrima.

This project was made possible with a \$4,000 grant from Museums and Galleries New South Wales along with \$6,000 from Wingecarribee Shire Council, \$500 from the German Consulate and a lot of hard work by local volunteers committed to preserving the history of the Berrima District, as we once knew it.

A special welcome to Dr John and Jenny Simons. Your work and dedication to researching our local history has been stunning.

I get a bit worried going into museums these days when I see things in there our family used when I was a kid.

Makes me feel very old. But at least I am young enough not to remember the early 1900s when this neck of the Wingecarribee River hosted a bustling little village of German internees.

I must say that I am not so sure we would give development consent for 300 German internees to build a village on the banks of the Wingecarribee River these days.

Imagine getting past the referrals to the Sydney Catchment Authority, the Department of Environment and Climate Change, the Rural Fire Service, the Heritage Trust, the Berrima Village Association, resident action groups and anyone else we have to refer development applications to these days.

Our records don't indicate too many building applications were ever lodged to construct those 50 huts on the river bank.

And the three tennis courts, waterslide, diving boards and even a wharf would be battling to get consent, not to mention the aquatic playground that would have made our proposed leisure centre look like a paddling pool.

Then there was a school, bowling alley, bandstand and a high bridge across the river. Truly amazing.

And so is the exhibition.

It is a credit volunteers like Bob Williams and many others that this museum is so good, so professionally set up and so lovingly cared for.

I congratulate Dr John Simons on his research and wonderful job in documenting the history of this remarkable chapter in the history of our district in his book on which this exhibition is based and I again thank all of the people who have made this exhibition possible.

A terrific job well done.

DIARY DATES

THURSDAY	12	MAR	Management Committee Meeting	9:30 pm at the Historical Society
THURSDAY	26	MAR	Monthly General Meeting	5:00 pm at the Historical Society
THURSDAY	9	APR	Management Committee Meeting	9:30 pm at the Historical Society
THURSDAY	23	APR	Monthly General Meeting	7:30 pm at the Historical Society
	10-27	APR	School holidays	
THURSDAY	14	MAY	Management Committee Meeting	9:30 pm at the Historical Society
THURSDAY	28	MAY	Monthly General Meeting	7:30 pm at the Historical Society

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Berrima District Historical & Family History Society Inc
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THE BERRIMA DISTRICT HISTORICAL AND FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

is proudly supported by the following organizations that encourage the work of our Society in collecting, preserving
and maintaining the history of the Southern Highlands.

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