



Bowral



Mittagong



Berrima



Moss Vale

BERRIMA DISTRICT HISTORICAL & FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY Inc.

Founded 1960

Located in the Wingecarribee Shire,
Southern Highlands of NSW

ABN 29 362 616 937

NEWSLETTER

No 579 March 2025



From the President's Desk

Under the banner of NSW Seniors' Festival, our museum hosted a delightful gathering of folks eager to share a nostalgic walk down memory lane.

The event, planned and presented by our dedicated volunteer Ros Dale, aided by her colleague Vanessa Dalgleish, saw thirty enthusiastic guests reminiscing about their school days and early family life. This pleasurable occasion was enhanced by music and the handling of familiar objects, sparking memories of how families were affected by WWII contrasting with those of the exhilarating Rock & Roll years before relaxing with morning tea in the museum garden.

Among the cherished moments was an extra special one. Lynn and Bruce Shepherd celebrated their 44th wedding anniversary at our event. Married at the church of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour in West Pymble, the happy couple chose to spend their memorable day with us, posing for an anniversary photo before heading off on a second honeymoon. See photo page 2.

Adding a touch of ancient allure, Conni Lord mesmerised our February General Meeting audience with her vivid presentation on Egypt's ancient gardens. She convincingly revealed how the lush displays of flowers, fruits, and vegetables along the banks of the

River Nile have influenced our gardens here so close to the Wingecarribee River.

This month we welcome Bernadette Mahoney as our guest speaker. She will be keeping us firmly local with her fascinating insights into the history of Kangaloon and the colourful characters who have shaped it. See page 3 for details.

After years of uncertainty, we are eagerly anticipating the renovation of our Resource Centre/Archives in Mittagong. In May, our Society will embark on a new adventure as we temporarily relocate to the Council's Civic Centre in Moss Vale. This move, although it entails some serious downsizing with much of our archival material going into storage, marks the beginning of an exhilarating journey!

What awaits us at the Civic Centre, or Town Hall in old language? In addition to our research and archive related activities in the Gibraltar/Jellore rooms, we will have access to meeting rooms so we can continue enjoying each other's company whether one's interest lies with the Family History Group, DNA Group, or General Meeting/History Group. With lift access to the meeting rooms, facilities for making afternoon tea along with the benefits of climate control, and nearby car-parking, we are all set to embrace our new home of at least the next two years, with open arms.

Stuart Handley

GENERAL MONTHLY MEETINGS 2025

MARCH 2025:	Thursday 27 March at 2:00pm
SPEAKER:	Bernadette Mahony with a history of the Kangaloon district
APRIL 2025:	Thursday 24 April at 2:00pm
SPEAKER:	to be advised
AFTERNOON TEA is served following the speaker	

The **Family History Interest Group** meets at the Mittagong Archives on the first Wednesday each month, at 1pm



Moore Memorable Musings



A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

I was once asked by my son, a keen ornithologist, to which family does a fluffy-backed tit-babbler and a red-eyebrow-ed tree creeper belong? To which I replied, 'go and wash your mouth out!'

You have to be a little Cuckoo or almost a Raven ratbag to be Babbling on about birds. I suppose you could Koel it ornery ornithology.

As Jenny Wren reminded me after a long Chat, that writing just for a Lark is a hard pill to Swallow.

After a game of golf Jay Pardalote, the bloke with black Curlew hair, was Chough-ed that his scorecard indicated a Birdie on the 5th, an Eagle on the 8th and he was going for an Albatross on the last 9. What an eventful Stint that was.

His partner, Willie Wagtail reckoned he had Goose-bumps by the 18th. It rained during the game but instead of Duck-ing for cover, he was Swift to open his um-Corella to stop getting wet. As you could imagine there was an instant Thrush for the 19th hole.

Their partners Robin Macaw and Linnet Finch, who were like a Pigeon pair, were waiting patiently after a Mynah incident.

Their car had run out of Petrel and of course it wouldn't Budgerigar. They felt like proper Dotterel old Drongos. The car was parked up a Sparrow lane near the Butcher-bird's shop but there was no one to keep Cockatoo in case some Galah Skylark-ing should Bustard into the vehicle.

The story ended well as Jay and Robin tied the Knot. She was the Starling at her Wading, looking like a Mannikin. A true Diamond. Swan-ing around at the reception, they danced the Flamingo with a full or-Kestrel backing which seemed to go on for Owls. Guests Craned their necks to have a Tern to Gang-Gang at the bride and afterwards sign the visitors Boo-book.

I can't be Buzzard with any Ibis Goshawk, not on your Nelly!

However, the blissful couple went on to have two Gull Chicks and played Happy Families without any Egrets.

Bruce Moore

BERRIMA DISTRICT MUSEUM

1a Marketplace cnr Bryan St, Berrima

OPEN: FRIDAY to SUNDAY

10.00am to 3.00pm

throughout the year including school and public holiday periods. Closed Christmas Eve, Christmas Day.

Groups welcome at other times by arrangement. Ph John 0434 623 402

Museum: Phone 4877 1130 or email bdmuseum@bigpond.com

Managed and operated by members of our Society who volunteer their time and expertise.

The Grove family make contact

An email to the BDHS from Eric Grove was received on 14 February 2025:

"Hello Linda, Last night I was reading the December 2024 BDHS newsletter from your website and noticed you are preparing a feature article on Charles Grove and family in the February 2025 edition. Wow this is incredible! the family will be anxiously waiting for this to be published and be able to read it.

Charles and his sons certainly left a legacy in the Southern Highlands, buildings that have stood the test of time. On behalf of all the Grove family I would like to thank you and your team for the time and effort that must have gone into preparing this; if I can help in any way please

don't hesitate to make contact with me. Regards, Eric Grove"

Linda's reply to Eric included the following: "thank you so much for your email - it is great to know that the work we do at the archives is appreciated. I have attached the February newsletter for you to read and share with your family."



Burrawang ES&A Bank, one of the many local iconic structures built by Charles Grove and sons



At Museum: back Lynn and Bruce Shepherd, front friends Mary Leigh and Frank Jones (refer page 1)

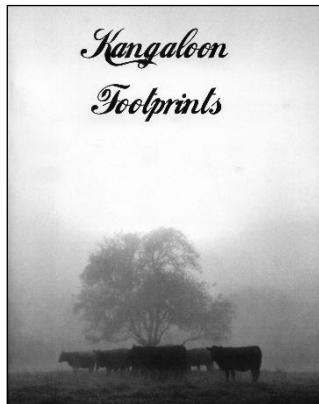


Wedding Photo of John and Emma Benbow, 1924 – see page 3 for details

March General Meeting Speaker

Bernadette Mahony

A retired teacher and amateur historian, Bernadette had lived in Kangaloon for 46 years and has gathered much information and history regarding the district.



In 2013 she wrote a book, *Kangaloon Footprints*, a collection of recorded events, written and spoken, along with photographs, charts, and anecdotes that together tell us much about Kangaloon's past, and the people who lived in Kangaloon as well as East Kangaloon, Mount Murray and Boxvale.



Mr Virtue's blacksmith shop at Kangaloon

The majority of written records are from "Trove," an online search engine to locate resources about Australia and Australians.

Bernadette's research on the Kangaloon area led her to Don Bradman and his family as his mother, Emily Whatman, was born in nearby Glenquarry, and his father's family farmed in this district for over 10 years before heading out to Cootamundra. The information gathered on Bradman and his Kangaloon connections enabled her to see him as much more than just a cricketer. Encouraged by Rodney Cavalier, she co-wrote an essay about the Don and the Bradman family that was published in the cricket journal, *Between Wickets*, in 2014.

Feedback re Ford family photograph

The Society received an email on 12 February 2015 from Susan Small, who had been looking online at the Ford family photographs on our Image library.

One of the photos, LAM number 103661, see page 2, is the wedding photo of John and Emma Benbow. It is regarding this image that Susan contacted us, for the description provided with the photo, the original version reproduced below, refers to 'an unknown lady'. Susan informs us that this same photo sat on her grandmother's dresser and the unnamed lady is Miss Connie Bunt, one of Emma's nieces.

Wedding Photo of John and Emma Benbow



Date 22 October 1924

Description Wedding group, left to right: standing - George Henry Ford, Emma Benbow, Edwin Ford; seated Daphne Ford, John Benbow and an unknown lady.

Emma Ann Benbow nee Ford (1885-1966) was a daughter of George Ford and his wife Emma nee Whatman. She married John Benbow relatively late in life in October 1924 when he was 51 years of age and she was 39. George Henry Ford (b. 1883) and Edwin Ford (b. 1877) were Emma's two brothers and would have been part of the wedding party as her father George had died in 1922. Daphne Ford was Emma's niece. John Benbow died in 1936 at Bowral. Emma lived all her life at *Inglewood*, the Ford family home close to the *Roberton Park* estate, Glenquarry.

Our Image Library catalogue entry has now been updated which is pleasing, as the details on the back of the original photo did not identify Connie Bunt.

Joseph Henry Ford (b. 1927) grew up on a dairy farm at Glenquarry and attended school there. He worked for 18 years as accountant to Springett's in Bowral and then commenced a more than 20-year stint with the Berrima Co-op in Bowral and eventually became General Manager of the group. He was active with community service organisations, including Moss Vale Lions Club, Apex Club and Harbison Homes Committee. In 1978 he became NSW Grand Master of the Manchester Unity Friendly Society.



Joe was an active member of our Society from the 1970s, serving terms as Treasurer and President, and was the publicity officer for many years. The Society's archives holds considerable information on the local dairying industry and our photograph collection has many valuable images, all provided by Joe. He died in January 2010, aged 83.

Museum News and Information

Morning Tea for volunteers at Museum. A group of twenty members and former members gathered in the Williams Gallery on Wednesday 12 February at 10:30am, having been invited for a morning tea as a thank you and for an update on museum activities.

Museum Manager John Schweers welcomed and sincerely thanked the museum volunteers for their amazing commitment, stating that obviously without them the museum could not function.

John then introduced John Mann, a Fire Brigade representative who spoke at length, firstly to say that an inspection of the museum's fire safety equipment had found it was totally suitable for the building. He pointed out that it was also a requirement that a museum volunteer be nominated as fire warden each time the museum was open to the public and that a method be established to keep track of how many visitors were in the building at each point in time. He also provided an overview of the fire and rescue situation in the Southern Highlands which gave much food for thought for those in attendance.

Our President Stuart Handley then took the floor for the presentation of a plaque and a thank you to Brian and Sylvia Carless for their many years of dedicated volunteer service to the museum. Due to ill health, recently Brian has had to reduce his commitment.



Stuart noted that **Brian** has cared for the museum garden since around 2010 with more care than many of us spend on our own, and always brought his own mower, unloading and reloading it from his utility. Brian has professional knowledge of gardens and their upkeep. His expertise is portrayed in a tribute display to Brian in the Williams Gallery.

Sylvia, meanwhile, has volunteered continuously at the museum since 2006, not only as one of our renowned "meeters and greeters" but for a long period she also looked after the monthly roster,

which current incumbent Vanessa will confirm is a demanding role all by itself. President Stuart also noted that Sylvia has for ages served on the Museum Sub-committee and continues actively to do so. She often helped Brian with the upkeep of the garden and has also been devoted in the supply of *Rocky Road* chocolate treat and baked goods for museum functions and events, and is a deft hand at making marmalade, providing many jars for fund raising.



President Stuart then presented Sylvia and Brian with a plaque commemorating their years of service, which will be mounted in the garden under the new Dogwood tree at the front of the museum, recently donated by museum volunteer Bud Townsing.

The morning tea occasion continued with Lyn Hall acknowledging the fine dedication of the four accessioning ladies who are beavering away with the Mosaic program. They are Donna Harris, Maria French (both were in attendance), Jenny Burnham and Barbara Faretto. Everyone then adjourned out to the front verandah to relax, chat, and partake of a delicious morning tea.

NEW SLIDESHOW SCREENED in Williams Gallery

Featured now on one of the digital screens in the Williams Gallery is a slideshow of images taken from a collection of 50 glass slide photographs purchased some years ago by Bud Townsing. They were taken in 1891 by Richard F Lean of Lithgow, being of scenes photographed while on a tour through NSW and Qld. Bud also tracked down a booklet published by Lean in 1891, held at the State Library of NSW, that provides a descriptive lecture by Lean of the tour.

The slides are shown along with extracts from the lecture, providing relevant historical details. Some early equipment owned by Bud is also on display, including a magic lantern once used to show glass slide images and a selection of stereoscopic viewers.



A history of the several existences of the Bong Bong Picnic Race Club

This feature is adapted from a BDHS article published in the *Southern Highland News* in 2011, compiled by Philip Morton and Dr Alan Chittick, a racing historian, veterinarian, horse breeder and Life Member of the Bong Bong Picnic Race Club, who died in June 2023.

Overview The first Bong Bong Picnic Race meeting was held 138 years ago and – apart from a gap of 30 years from 1930, and for six years from 1985 – the annual local event has been held ever since, with four different sites used for the racecourse.

The original Bong Bong Picnic Race Club was founded in 1886, and the first Picnic Race meeting was held in 1887 at the grounds of *Throsby Park*, Moss Vale. A site near the Briars Inn became the racecourse in 1901 and a new venue was established at Burradoo in 1910. The last meeting of the original Club was held there in 1930 and, 30 years later, an entirely new Bong Bong Picnic Race Club was formed in 1959 with its meetings held at the *Wyeera* property on the Bowral-Kangaloon Road.

The revived event became so popular that by the 1980s Bong Bong was the largest picnic race meeting in the world. At a time when race crowds were declining, Bong Bong's increased to 35,000 in 1985. These large crowds, however, caused major traffic congestion and unruly behaviour became a problem, so the picnic races were stopped. Then in 1992 the event was once again revived but under strict crowd control with attendance limited to only members and their guests. After a 3-year break due to Covid, racing returned in 2023. A more detailed history follows:

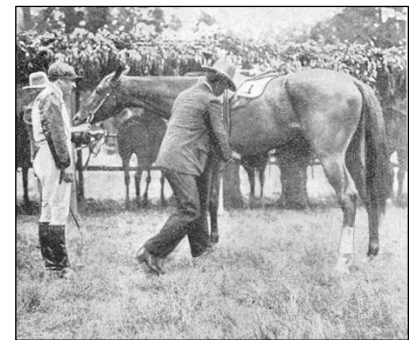
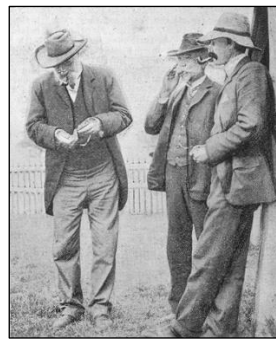
The early years on Throsby land at Moss Vale

The first Bong Bong Picnic Race Club was launched at a meeting in Moss Vale on 3 May 1886, attended by Messrs J Lackey, J Ponder, J Cordeaux, P Throsby and H Graham. Mr Pat Throsby gave the Club the right to choose from two sites on his estate for a racecourse. The area chosen was near Throsby Park house and much later was still known as Racecourse Paddock.

The first Picnic Races, held on Friday 4 February 1887, was reported to be a great success, the winner of the first Bong Bong Cup being Mr H Chisholm's horse *Don Antonio*. Other races included the Hack Race, the Wingecarribee Plate, the Ladies Bracelet, the Picnic Race, the Bachelors' Bag and the Welter Handicap. The day was proclaimed a district holiday, and that night a grand ball was held in the Agricultural Society's Hall at Moss Vale.

Foundation members of the Club were H Acraman, who rode the winner of the first Cup; John Henry, Andrew and Frank Badgery of the pioneering family in the Exeter district, who held executive positions from time to time; E M Betts, a Goulburn lawyer; Chris Bennett, proprietor of a Sydney newspaper *The Evening News*; M Butler, R Campbell, and Edward Carter who had large properties at Canyon Leigh.

Other foundation members included W J and P C Cordeaux, pioneers of the Wollondilly River area; Austin de Lauvet; William McCourt, a member of the Legislative Council; the Nicholsons of *Newbury Farm* at Sutton Forest; B M Osborne, who built *Hopewood House* at Bowral; Alec Osborne, who built what became Tudor House School, Moss Vale; and H M Oxley, descendent of Surveyor-General Oxley.



On left, J A Badgery makes up a sweep at an early Bong Bong meeting. At right, Chiefswood was a Bong Bong race winner in one of the first years (Mitchell Library)

The sixth Bong Bong Picnic Race meeting in 1892 was perhaps the most enjoyable yet, proclaimed the *Bowral Free Press*. "Over a thousand visitors must have been present, the fair sex comprising quite half of this total. A continuous stream of vehicles rolled up to the course, each one depositing its freight of gaily dressed ladies. The Moss Vale band enlivened the proceedings during the two days."

In 1899 the *Mittagong Express* reported that at the annual re-union of the Picnic Race Club there were good attendances, notwithstanding that the weather was none too pleasant. The annual ball of the Club was held in the Moss Vale Hall on Friday night with about 150 local people and their visitors attending.

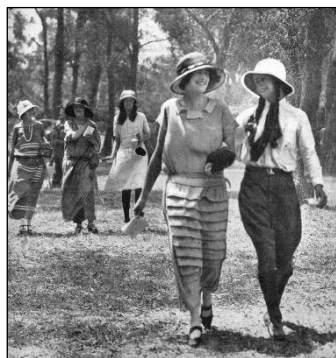
In 1901 the racecourse was relocated to a large, pleasant grassy area adjacent to Moss Vale-Bowral Road between the Briars Inn and the Wingecarribee River (now part of Bong Bong Common).

In 1911 the Bong Bong Picnic Race meeting was again moved, this time to Normans Paddock, known as 'Old Meadows', at Burradoo. This land was on the west side of the Bowral-Moss Vale Road, near the Eridge Park Road turnoff. It featured a beautiful spread of trees that provided shade for the picnic lawns.

The original Race Club functioned as a club until 1921 when it was formed into a company, known as the Bong Bong Picnic Race Club, which then purchased the racecourse grounds. That year Mr H L Austin's *Purser* won at Bong Bong and later the Caulfield Cup.

In 1924 the *Sydney Mail* reported that many of the visitors to the Picnic Race meeting later attended the Moss Vale Golf Club's ball on the Thursday night, and on Friday night the Bong Bong Club's ball was a brilliant finale to the festivities. The *Sydney Mail* gave a glowing report in 1927: "There are altogether too few picnic race meetings in Australia. Bong Bong is one of the best. Seldom has the racecourse looked better. The recent rain had imparted a rich verdure to grass and trees, forming a picturesque background for the pretty and varied dressing of the ladies."

That year *Bronze Fuze*, trained by Warwick Farm-based Norman Dewsbury, won the Bong Bong Cup by a head from *Bequest* in a thrilling race to the finish. Two years later, the doping of *Bronze Fuze*, favourite for the 1929 Bong Bong Cup, marred what should have gone down as one of the Club's most successful.



The *Sydney Mail* reported that visitors from all parts of NSW enjoyed the 1929 meeting, and the racing was exceptionally keen for the 39th annual event. Consternation was caused when it became known that the favourite for the principal race, *Bronze Fuze*, was 'doped' by some unknown person prior to the race. When the horse left the barrier, it was seen that something was wrong although he responded for a time to his rider's coaxing. As the horse's suffering was evident, his rider allowed him to slow up and he ran home four lengths behind the winner, *Anvil*.

It was then seen what a pitiful condition the horse was in. The pupils of his eyes were dilated, his tongue was dry and he appeared totally blind. It was later established that the horse had been poisoned with belladonna, the active ingredient of which is atrophine, similar to what oculists drop into the eyes of a patient suffering from defective eyesight in order to see at the back of the eye, and this has the effect of sending the patient blind for the time being.



As to the culprits, the *Sydney Mail* reported that the doping was most likely in the interests of a gang who

had backed *Anvil* off the course and, as starting-price betting is illegal, it was not likely that any off-course merchant would come forward saying he had been victimised. One thing was certain: the bookmakers operating on the course were not big winners over *Bronze Fuze's* defeat, only one of them showing a profit of £200 on the race. A chauffeur told the Stipendiary Steward that he saw a young man slip some crystals into *Bronze Fuze's* drinking water before the race but was unable to identify that man.



At the Tote, Bong Bong Picnic Races in 1929

The doping almost put a finish to the grand galloper that, but seven days before, had won the Cup at the Tirranna Picnic Race Club meeting near Goulburn. It also heralded the end of the original Bong Bong Club that would only hold one more meeting at Burradoo.

At the time, the Race Club was struggling to make ends meet. Adverse conditions caused by the Great Depression were undermining confidence and money was scarce. Even though the Race Club provided only trophies and not cash prizes, times were tough and it could no longer conduct the races.



Picnicking in style at the 1929 Bong Bong race meeting

The last ever meeting of the original Club was held on 16-17 January 1930. The Bong Bong Cup, made of solid gold encased in oak, was won that year by Miss McClarty's *Kinaird*, ridden by Frank Bennett.

In order to continue race meetings, a new Bowral Race Club was formed in 1931, and it conducted professional races at the Burradoo racecourse until the mid-1930s, offering prize money for the winners.

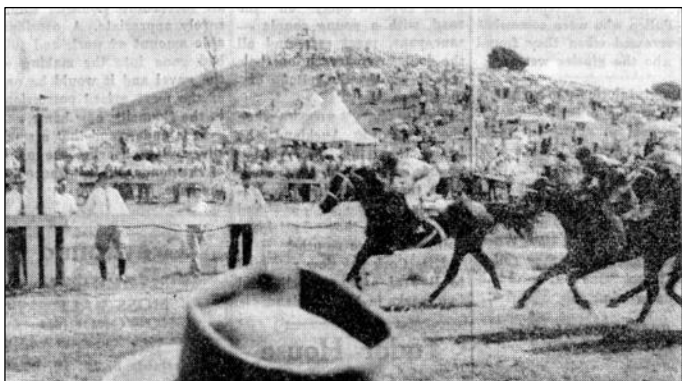
Eventually in 1937 the Bong Bong Picnic Race Club was wound up and the racecourse land sub-divided.

New beginning in 1959

The name was revived when a new Bong Bong Picnic Race Club was formed in 1959 by a group of local people interested in horse sports and bearing the name of the old Club only. It was announced in the *Southern Mail* of 6 August that year: "During Festival of Flowers Week the Bong Bong Picnic Race Club will be revived after a lapse of almost 30 years. The newly formed club will conduct its meeting on the *Wyeera* property of Mr R Jackson in Kangaloon Rd, opposite Milton Park intersection". The *Berrima Post* provided a detailed description of the property and race day:

It was at *Wyeera* that the late Etienne de Mestre used to train his horses, and it was on this very ground that two ultimate Melbourne Cup winners were trained. In 1892 de Mestre leased the property, then named *Old Merrivale*, and with the help of his sons constructed a training track on the property and prepared three horses for the tenth annual Bong Bong races held in 1894. During World War II, sports meetings including horse events were held at the property for 'patriotic' purposes. An elevated hill standing in the centre served as a natural grandstand with the course designed around the base of the rise.

For the revival in 1959, local people were asked to attire themselves in early century or pre-war dress and, if possible, to travel to the course in buggy or sulky and to bring their own hampers. Local people responded keenly, some forming parties of families and acquaintances in the old picnic days style and spread the tablecloth. The Sydney Veteran Car Club brought a parade of vintage cars to the racecourse and Sydney television viewers were able to watch a direct telecast of the races courtesy of Channel 7.



Fickle Maid, winner in 1959 of the Flying Handicap at the revived Bong Bong Picnic races.

The first meeting on Saturday, 24 October 1959 was a great success. The winner of the Bong Bong Cup was *Star Hinge*, owned by SV Kensit. There was some criticism of the event in the *Sydney Telegraph* that

portrayed the occasion as nothing like the usual picnic race meeting. The reporter stated that the 7,000 people on the make-shift course were a 'motley crew who wore boaters, battered bowlers, black toppers, grandma's Easter bonnet, crinolines, anything olde worlde' and 'there wasn't even a champagne bottle in sight – just warm beer'.



1959 patrons dressed in styles of earlier Bong Bong races

A retraction was published the following day which went some way to soothe the indignation of the hard-working locals who had coped well with the crowd of 7,000 attendees, served cold refreshments from a refrigerated unit and grossed £2,500 takings.

The sour-grapes of the 'city slickers' who scoffed at Bowral's picnic race day as being nothing like Royal Randwick certainly did nothing to diminish the hordes of people who flocked to the event every year from then on. By the 1980s Bong Bong was the largest picnic race meeting in the world.



1981: Aerial photo shows the huge crowd and lots of buses at the Bong Bong races.

At a time when race crowds were generally declining, Bong Bong's increased to reach almost 35,000 in 1985. These large crowds, however, caused major traffic congestion and unruly behaviour became a problem, so the picnic races were then stopped.

In 1992 the event was once again revived but under strict crowd control with attendance limited to only members and their guests. This remains the situation today, with the 2025 event scheduled for November.

And so, by surviving, the Bong Bong Picnic Race event carries on a local tradition begun 138 years ago at the Racecourse Paddock on Throsby land in Moss Vale.

Photo Credits: *Sydney Mail* (*Sydney Morning Herald*) for 1924 and 1929 photos, BDHS Archives, Leonie Knapman.

Berrima District Historical & Family History Society Inc

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- 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 a general collection.
- MUSEUM:** Marketplace, Berrima. Tel: 02 4877 1130. Email: bdmuseum@bigpond.com
AT PRESENT, OPEN: 10.00am to 3.00pm, Fridays to Sundays.
This includes during school and public holiday periods.
- 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, Museums Australia Inc and NSW Association of Family History Societies.

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