



Merewether Historical Society

"A society aimed at recording memories of the past for the benefit of the next generation."

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The Chronicle

April 2022

Meetings: Next meeting is **April 12**, 10.00 for morning tea, meeting begins at 10.30. Venue is Merewether Bowling Club and we shall be celebrating our 20th Anniversary with a special lunch at \$50 per head afterward. **Bookings are ESSENTIAL prior to 5/4. If you have not booked, the regular lunch of Chinese meals will not be available so you will have to miss lunch!**

Anzac Day: After 2 years enforced absence the Anzac Day Service is returning to the Mitchell St Memorial at 6.30am on 25 April. All members are invited to attend and the Society will be laying a tribute of a book. This will then be donated to Ronald McDonald House. The Newcastle Family Historical Society has arranged a timely tour of the Newcastle (Sandgate) War Memorial, led by Ed Tonks and have issued an invitation to our members to participate. Please see attached flyer. RSVP by 15 April 2022.

Birthday Wishes to Rick Neville, Judy Preston, Ian Sherman and other members who celebrate in April. Hope you all enjoy a wonderful day.

Guest Speaker: Terry Collins, 'Money'

Bus Trips: 15 March saw us travel to Marthaville House Arts and Cultural Centre Cessnock, for morning tea and then onto Nightingale Vineyards for a wine tasting and lunch. The House is owned by Cessnock Council and home to Marthaville Guildry Art and Craft. If only our Society was so fortunate! Our intrepid driver Pete saw us safely through floodwaters to get us to lunch and a delightful, and memorable, day was had by all. Unfortunately we had several late cancellations which come at a cost to the Society. Numbers need to be confirmed with the caterers 7 days prior to our visit and we are charged for this number. Details for our 17 May trip to follow.

Hunter Valley Convicts: The following is an excerpt summary of an article in the Maitland Mercury. The full article is available at

<https://www.maitlandmercury.com.au/story/2196122/the-hunter-valley-a-land-of-convicts-and-bigots/>



A government jail gang in the 1830s.

James Fallon arrived in the colony under a sentence of seven years in 1818, aged 18. By his death in 1852 he owned a nine-acre farm on Fishery Creek with good fences, a strong slab cottage of two rooms, sheds, livestock and produce. Convicts who worked hard were able to make a good life for themselves in Australia once their sentence was served.

Despite the great man theory of history, which records the likes of the Windeyer, Close, Dangar, Eales and other pioneering landholders, it was people like James Fallon and the thousands of other convicts who made this nation, and made the Hunter. But who remembers them – very few even have marked graves?

In the 1820s and early 1830s, the population of the lower Hunter consisted of more than 49 per cent convicts and more than 25 per cent was ex-convict. Only 13 per cent was born in the colony and only 12.5 per cent had come to Australia" as free men or women. "Eighty-six per cent of the population was male and most all were between the ages of 20 and 40."

"When they arrived in Australia, the Irish, Catholic convicts found a colony where the penal laws were in full operation, the Anglican Church, although not established, was in sole command of all religious rites, and where their convict status gave them no rights at law".

Convicts arrived to find an 'unnatural' society in that males were in the vast majority and there were few families, old people or children. For most of the convicts who had come from a close family network in England or Ireland this was extremely upsetting. Because of the gender ratio of 14 men to 1 woman they were virtually denied the chance of ever finding a partner.

“Despite this, most went on to live worthy lives that contributed much to the Hunter Valley’s development.”

No clergyman lived in the Hunter Valley until 1822. All those who died before then would have been buried without clergy and in unconsecrated ground. Most of the deaths probably occurred on properties and they would have been buried on that property.

John Thomas was typical. John is listed in the 1828 Census as a 37-year-old settler in the Swamps area around Beresfield. With him was his “housekeeper” Mary Styles, a 17-year-old colonial born girl, and their two-year-old daughter. They married in 1832, registered at St Mary’s Sydney.

In 1838 Thomas died and was buried by his friends on his land. They then proceeded to Newcastle to register his death at Christchurch, so that the estate could be settled and his wife and seven children left with an income and assets.

The Hunter’s convict history is fascinating and well worth further research. “The Convict Valley” by Mark Dunn explores this early convict history and the interactions with local Aboriginal populations that shaped the story of the Hunter Valley from the first encounters until the end of the convict era in the 1840s and 1850s. This is a good start for anyone wanting to follow up.

Help Please: Apparently we have a teabag label collector among us and I have been asked if he/she would make themselves known so we can add to the collection!

Thanks to Jan and Jeff Graham for the following:

Cumberland Place The Rocks Sydney is of great historic significance – it is believed to be the oldest used street in Sydney and maybe dates back to 1808.



Photo courtesy of John Reynolds

This photo is the home of Dr James Mitchell and his family taken in mid 1800’s. The home was designed by Colonial Architect Frances Greenway. Although Greenway was transported to the colony as a forger he became the first government architect, appointed by Governor

Lachlan Macquarie. The home was built in 1825 for Robert Campbell Snr.



On the veranda are Dr James Mitchell and his wife Augusta Maria, formerly Scott. Their children, Augusta Maria Mitchell born 1834 married Edward Christopher Merewether; son David Scott Mitchell born 1836, founder of Mitchell Library and Margaret Scott Mitchell born 1840 – married William Bell Quigley (Margaret died in 1886 when their home the first Awaba House was burnt down).

Point to Ponder:

Look around, all that clutter used to be money!

Great news the developer has withdrawn his application to close off the Llewellyn/Caldwell Sts Walkway!!!

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