



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

October 2022

Meetings: Next meeting is **Tuesday 11 October at 10.30** for morning tea. Meeting begins at **10.45**, venue is Merewether Bowling Club Caldwell St. Lunch will be available following the meeting for members to socialise and enjoy a delicious, cheap meal.

Guest Speaker: Ed Tonks' topic is one we all relate to, 'Australian Money', but unfortunately there will no samples!

Birthday Wishes to Lynette Dailey, Trevor Jenkins and Daryl Boyce and all other members celebrating in October.



A very young looking 90-year-old!!
Congratulations on your September birthday Jean

Bus Trip: **On Tuesday 18 October** we travel to Grossman House Maitland for morning tea and a tour and then lunch at the Windsor Castle Hotel. Seats are \$70 for morning tea, lunch and lucky seat prizes

Cowra/Young Bus Trip: Several seats still available so hurry and get your name down!

Point to Ponder: "While we may have more still to endure, better days will return: we will be with our friends again; we will be with our families again; we will meet again." QE11

RAHS Special Online Event:
Country Calling: History on the Land
Online via Zoom Saturday 22 October 2022

Join the Royal Australian Historical Society (RAHS) for a special online event and learn about

new developments in local and community history as we explore our *Country Calling*.

Session A – Facing the Truth: How to Create History with Aboriginal Peoples

The special event begins with a morning session (10.00am – 12.00pm) that features historians, curators and archaeologists who practice truth-telling in their history-making. Marika Duczynski (Repatriation Officer and Curator of Indigenous Heritage, Chau Chak Wing Museum) will discuss her experiences working with collections, communities and the issue of repatriation.

Dr Stephen Gapps (historian and curator) will provide insights and advice on how to appropriately include Aboriginal perspectives in your history and heritage projects. Dr Iain Stuart (RAHS President and archaeologist, Artefact Heritage Services) will talk about Indigenous archaeology and working with Aboriginal peoples.

Session B – Best on Show: Country Shows and their Communities

The afternoon session (1.00pm – 3.15pm) brings together community historians to take a closer look at the importance of agricultural shows to our local history. Judith Dunn OAM (RAHS Councillor) will talk about the evolution of agricultural shows and what local information you can learn from them. Liz Harfull (historian and author) will explore the history of food and cookery at country shows. Graham Shirley (RAHS Vice President) will present on how agricultural shows have been captured by moving image media since the early twentieth century. This session will also feature the President's Address.

For further information and bookings visit:
<https://www.rahs.org.au/event/country-calling-history-on-the-land>

A History of Ash Island by Fran Dorey



Ash Island was once one of a number of islands and mudflats found in the Hunter River estuary near Hexham. Today it is part of the larger island known as Kooragang Island. It has an interesting history of occupation and use. For thousands of years the Worimi and Awabakal people hunted, fished and collected food from the area, well supplied by the abundant flora and fauna that included water birds, shellfish, wetland plants, mammals and fish.

The islands in the estuary, including Ash Island, were explored and surveyed by Europeans in 1801. Ash trees were abundant, with mangrove and swamp oak and species of eucalypt also recorded. Within about 20 years, most of the valuable timber, such as red cedar and ash (that gave the island its name), was removed from the island.

Ash Island was granted to Alexander Walker Scott. The grant included 2560 acres of prime land that retained much of its forest, despite losing its profitable trees, and would be a paradise to naturalists. He settled there in 1831 with his mother and sister, although shared his time between the island and other properties in the Hunter and Sydney. He made Ash Island his primary residence after his marriage to Harriet Calcott in 1846, moving there with her, his step-daughter Mary Ann (his other step-daughter Frances had married) and two daughters Helena and Harriet. Under Scott, Ash Island was a social and learned community. Despite its relative isolation, visitors included travellers, artists like Conrad Martens, scientists and collectors such as John and Elizabeth Gould, and the explorer Ludwig Leichhardt, who stated in 1842 that the island '... is a remarkably fine place, not only to enjoy the beauty of nature, a broad shining river, a luxuriant vegetation, a tasteful comfortable cottage with a plantation of orange trees but to collect a great number of plants which I had never seen before ... It's a romantic place, which I like well enough to think that – perhaps – I'd be content to live and die there ...'.

For many years a wooden bridge linked Ash Island to the mainland at Hexham (replaced today with a short concrete bridge), but most traffic came and went by boat, docking at a long jetty built on the point of the island facing upriver. This jetty, with the Scott house in the background, appears on the cover page of Scott's two-volume work *Australian Lepidoptera and Their Transformations*. In 1866, AW Scott went bankrupt and sold his Ash Island property. After the family left, the island changed significantly. It was subdivided, cleared and drained in the late 1860s for agriculture and dairy farms. Over 50

families and a school were part of this agricultural community until 1955 when the island was devastated by a massive flood. It fell under State control and was leased for grazing and prepared as potential industrial land.

From the 1960s large-scale industrial development took over the majority of the region and most of the islands were amalgamated as part of the Industrial Islands Scheme to form Kooragang Island (named in 1968). The name 'Ash Island' now refers to the land at the western end of this larger island. Concerns about pollution and environmental degradation led to the Coffey Inquiry in the 1970s. This inquiry highlighted the importance of retaining a natural habitat in the Hunter estuary, particularly for the native wildlife that relied on the area. In 1983 the Kooragang Nature Reserve was formed, encompassing the north-east parts of Kooragang Island. In 1992 a feasibility study led to the inception of the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project, launched in 1993. This project's role was to restore and rehabilitate Ash Island and create new habitat for the diverse wildlife of the estuary.

This strategy included protecting river banks, managing water flows, weeds and feral animals, and revegetating areas such as the woodland, floodplain rainforest and salt marshes using local native plants. To achieve the latter, they needed to know what plants grew on the island before it was cleared. Fortunately, and in a suitable return to the past, previous occupants Helena and Harriet Scott had been passionate in recording and illustrating the island's botany. These records survive in the Australian Museum Archives and are used by KWRP as a management tool to help re-establish areas.

[Ash Island Information](#)

2022 Committee:

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