Merewether Historical Society

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

Email: secretary@merewetherhistorical.com Website: www.merewetherhistoricalsociety.com

The Chronicle

November 2026

The December 8th meeting will be the Christmas party luncheon
See details below

Meeting: REMEMBER there is NO meeting in January 2027.

Next meeting of the Merewether Historical Society, is on **Tuesday 9th February 2027** at 10:45. Venu is Merewether Bowling Club, Caldwell St. Club opens at 10:30. Complimentary tea, coffee and nibbles are available.

The guest speaker at the Tuesday February 9th 2027 meeting is Drew DeCarvalho speaking about his time in New York and where it lead him.

Please remember to use our NEW suggestion box.

We have paper and pens next to the suggestion box on the table at the back of the meeting.
Alternatively you can write your note at home and just drop it in the box.

Any thoughts?

* Improvements or changes to meetings, or how the society is run,
* Ideas about how to commemorate our 25th anniversary in April next year,
* Excursion suggestions, comments…
* Venue alternatives or comments about the current one,
* Anything else????

John Mayo OAM gave a very interesting talk on "Nine WWI locals you've probably never heard of".

What follows is *my recollection* of his talk.

John started his talk by describing an incident that happened to him in the summer of 1970 when he was a nurse in the old Newcastle Hospital.

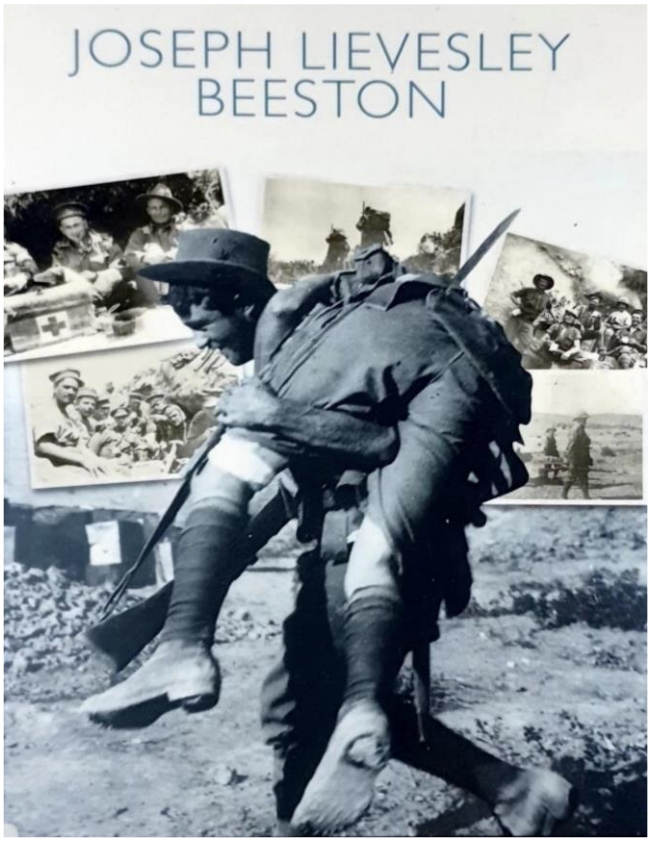
On night duty John noticed an old WW1 digger could not settle to sleep. John knew this digger was on his last legs. As the ward was quiet John took the digger out onto the ward veranda, to enjoy the sea breeze and a cup of tea. As they sipped their tea the digger started talking about WW1 and how the soldiers who were thrown together became comrades and mates for life. He reminisced about the conditions for soldiers and the battles fought - particularly Passchendaele. The digger was mainly concerned for his mate in bed 21 in the next ward, another WW1 soldier. This mate had won the Military Medal at Passchendaele, but didn't speak about it, and nobody except soldier mates knew how he got it.

This incident has stayed with John his whole life and still motivates his desire to record the histories of these unknown heroes of the past.

The first "Unknown Local" John spoke of was <u>Sir Neville Howse VC.</u>
Born in 1863 in Somerset England he graduated as a doctor/surgeon in 1886 but due to a chest condition he travelled to the better climate in NSW. He practised in Newcastle and Taree.
He volunteered during the Boer War and went over to South Africa as a Lieutenant.
Neville Howse was the first Aussie to be awarded the Victoria Cross.

On 24 July 1900, during the action at Vredefort, South Africa, Howse saw a trumpeter fall, and went through very heavy cross-fire to rescue the man. His horse was soon shot from under him, but he continued on foot, reached the casualty, dressed his wound, and then carried him to safety.
After that war he moved his practice to Orange and was elected Mayor.
As a 50 year old Reservist he arrived at Gallipoli. As doctor in charge of the ANZAC contingent he instigated the policy of early medical intervention which saved thousands of lives.
He went on to the Middle East and Western front. He was Knighted twice and on return to Australia was voted in as the federal member for Kolaire.
He died in 1930 in England of a lung condition.

Joseph Beeston – born in Newcastle in 1859. Went to the old Newcastle East Primary School.
Won a medical scholarship to become a doctor and then Surgeon in the UK.
In 1883 Attended at the Royal Newcastle, joined the local Milita, Newcastle surf club, and was appointed (not elected) to the NSW upper house.



At age 55 he volunteered for service in WW1 and landed on Gallipoli on the first day, 25th April 1915. He stayed in Gallipoli for 5 months until retired as medically unfit for active duty (due to enteritis). He donated and his name is on the WW1 memorial board in St Augustine's Church.
His Story is available free on the web. Five months at ANZAC.

Herbert Churchill – born 1890 in Newcastle. First job - Railway fettler. Enlisted August 1914. 3rd Battalion. Was in the initial Transport convoy to the Middle East. Initially stationed in Egypt next to the Pyramids. Remembers endless practise for boarding boats from ships and getting off on the shore and then the reverse. Over and over.
Landed in ANZAC cove at about 8:30 am on the morning of the 26th April, in the third wave. Fierce fighting. Before noon he was shot in the jaw, developed a hard to heal fistula and was discharged as medically unfit. He was Clive Churchills father. Died in 1957.

Garnet Dart – born 1893, one of 15 kids! Foundation member Cooks Hill Surf Lifesaving club. He was a pacifist who didn't drink, gamble or bet.
Enlisted at 22 in 1915 on proviso he wouldn't carry a weapon. He became a member of Field Ambulance corps.
He survived the war and became a railway clerk. In 1930 he became the 11th life member of SLSA. He died in 1962.

Joseph (Joe) Maxwell VC – Born 1896 in Anna Bay, became a boilermaker. In February 1915 aged 18 he enlisted. Fought well at Gallipoli. Was selected for officer training in 1917. During officer training he "stole a government bus" and was then NOT considered officer material. Instead he was promoted to Sargent Major and continued fighting on the Western front. At the end of 1917 he was given a field commission to Lieutenant. By the end of the war aged 22 he had been awarded the DCM, the Military Cross with bar, and the Victoria Cross. His story of how he won the VC is thrilling and too complicated to recount here. There is a book about Joe written by Joe

"**Hell's Bells and Mademoiselles"** available via the internet. He also features in "THE LOST DIGGERS" book.

Hugh Connell - born 1884 in Sydney. Trained as a teacher then married in 1911. Was sports-master at Wickham school. Was a unionist, agnostic, CMF officer. Taught William Richards when he was 12.
William Richards – born 1889 in Wickham - was a student of Hugh Connell.
William at 16, a bank clerk tried to enlist in Newcastle in1915 but was rejected – too young to enlist. He then went to Maitland, lied about his age and was enlisted.
One day Hugh recognised William, knew he was under age but made a deal with him. He could stay enlisted if he was willing to be Hugh's batman. The deal was agreed to. Unfortunately, William was caught in an artillery barrage, lost both legs and died in Hugh's arms.
Hugh survived the war, was awarded the Military Cross and bar as well as the DSO for Valor. He was elected to parliament in 1920 and served 14 years.

Arthur Gardiner – Was an accounts clerk and in the Milita. As soon as he enlisted, he was seen as a natural leader and was promoted to Quarter-master Sargent.
As a lieutenant he landed in Gallipoli on the 25th April in the afternoon. After 10 days he was shot in the leg and discharged as medically unfit. Undaunted after arriving in Sydney on 25th August 1915 he put himself through intensive physiotherapy.
He then re-enlisted and by May 1916 was back on a ship headed for Belgium. He survived the war as a training officer and upon return to Newcastle was elected to Waratah council and spent two terms as Mayor. He was a firm believer that the SLSC was a great place for the returning soldiers to meet, talk and find their way back into civilian life. Arthur died in Maitland Hospital in 1950.

Matron Ida Greaves RRC (Royal Red Cross medal)
Ida was born in1875 – one of three sisters. After nurse training in Australia she sailed to England and started training in 1901 in the then new "Nightingale System of Nursing". She was still in England when WW1 broke out in 1914. The red tape was such at the time that to become an Australian Army Nurse she would have to return to Australia!! She thought that was a waste of time and so together with likeminded nurses and doctors she volunteered to be part of the "Australian Volunteer Hospital" as Matron. This hospital was not officially part of the Army war effort but was treated as part of the Army. The hospital was constantly about one kilometre behind the front line but also constantly having to uproot and retreat before the advancing Germans. Ida was superb in organising all the hospital functions and administration and was awarded the highest medal possible for non-combatants - the Royal Red Cross medal by the King himself in 1915. In 1916 the Volunteer hospital became part of the British army.
Ida came back to Australia in 1919 and continued in nursing. She died in 1954.
A recent book of her exploits is Matron Ida Greaves : 'a right daughter of Australia' by Christine M Bramble.



MEREWETHER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CHRISTMAS LUNCH

AT
MEREWETHER BOWLING CLUB, CALDWELL ST, MEREWETHER
TUESDAY 8TH DECEMBER 2026
11:30 for 12:15

COMPLIMENTARY GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE or DRINK ON ARRIVAL



2 COURSE CHRISTMAS LUNCH
MAIN COURSE - BAKED DINNER
DESSERT
ALTERNATE SERVING



COST $50 PER PERSON (same as last year)
Christmas trivia – Table groups
LUCKY SEAT prize and Table prize from Trivia.

PAYMENT BY END OF NOVEMBER 2026
DIRECT DEPOSIT BSB 650-000 A/C 966001108
Please include your Name in the deposit so we know who's paid.

PLEASE ADVISE OF ANY SPECIAL DIETARY REQUIREMENTS



CONTACT
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MEMBERS AND FRIENDS WELCOME

The Committee of the Merewether Historical Society
would like to wish one and all a very happy Christmas
and all the best for 2027
with sincere thanks for your support throughout 2026.

