

# Hawkesbury Historical Society Newsletter

Newsletter of the Hawkesbury Historical Society Inc.

## HAWKESBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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**Aim:** Hawkesbury Historical Society aims to encourage & preserve the history of the Hawkesbury

**Meetings:** 4th Thursday, alternate months, 7.30pm-10pm  
Hugh Williams Room at the Museum in Baker Street, Windsor

**Open to:** People interested in the preservation of the history of the Hawkesbury, new members welcome.

**Patron:** Ted Books

### Office Bearers 2020/2021:

President: Jan Barkley-Jack

Snr Vice President: Ted Brill

Jnr Vice President: Richard Gillard

Secretary: Peta Sharpley

Public Officer: Neville Dehn

Treasurer: Heather Gillard

Social Co-ordinator: [Vacant]

Publicity Officer: [Vacant]

Hon Curator HHS Collection: Carol Carruthers/ Rebecca Turnbull

Newsletter Editor: Jan Readford

Web Administrator: Dick Gillard

Bookshop Manager: Heather Gillard

Facebook Administrator: Peta Sharpley

**Committee members:** Rebecca Turnbull, Sean Flavin, Ellen Jordan and Peta Sharpley

**HHS Collection Committee:** Carol Carruthers, Hawkesbury Regional Museum Manager and Curator – Rebecca Turnbull

**Publications Committee:** Jan Barkley-Jack, Ellen Jordan and Jan Readford

## MEETINGS

Thursday, 22 April 2021 - 7:30pm

Saturday, 26 June 2021 - 2pm

Saturday, 28 August 2021 - 2pm

Thursday, 28 October 2021 - 7:30pm

Hugh Williams Room, Hawkesbury Regional Museum,  
Baker Street, Windsor

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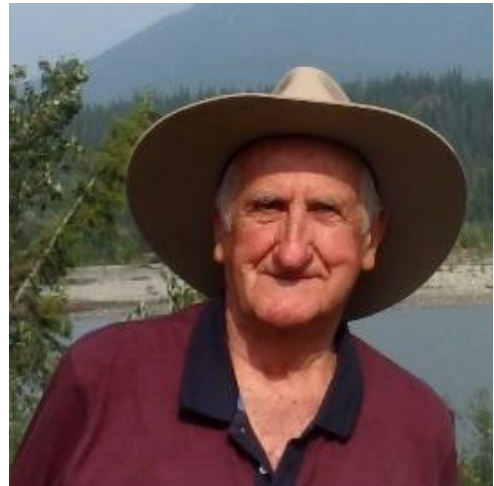
## General Meeting

of the Hawkesbury Historical Society

**Thursday, 22 April 2021 - 7.30pm**

Hugh Williams Room, Hawkesbury Regional Museum,  
Baker Street, Windsor

**Guest Speaker: Dick Gillard**



## The Good Wives of the Hawkesbury Royalty - Sarah Cobcroft

This presentation will explore the role the wives of the Hawkesbury Royalty played in the establishment of the Hawkesbury Region, in particular Sarah Cobcroft (nee Smith). We will explore her early life and why she made the journey to the early colony.

What was Sarah's life like in the early days of the Hawkesbury and what contribution did she make not only to her own family but to the broader Hawkesbury community? Why did she marry her life-long partner in the later years of her life despite being partners for some fifty years? Was Sarah really the one who built the Cobcroft Empire despite being unable to read or write?

Sarah represents all those wives who supported their husbands and families through the difficult times of floods, droughts and the aboriginal uprisings. These wives have gone unnoticed and their stories have not been told.



## **EBENEZER CHURCH HERITAGE DAY** *A Heritage Festival Event*

Owing to the limit of participants being quickly reached for this day on 1st May, a second day is being held on **Saturday 15th May**.

It will be a day when you can learn more about the fascinating story of Australia's oldest church - Ebenezer Church.

You will hear about the people who built the church, pioneers such as ...

Andrew Johnston, the architect and builder of the church;

John Grono who was a ship-builder, sea captain, explorer, sealer and farmer;

John Turnbull who planted the first commercial citrus orchard and was a loyal supporter of Governor William Bligh;

George Hall, a pioneer who expanded his properties so rapidly that he was accused of 'over-Halling the colony'.

**At 10.00am** there will be a talk in the church (if covid regulations permit, otherwise in the church grounds under a shady tree).

**10.45am** is the time for morning tea – that's Ebenezer's popular devonshire teas.

**From 11.15am to 12 noon** there will be a walk-and-talk through the church grounds and colonial graveyard.

Should you wish to stay longer then please bring **your own picnic lunch** to enjoy in church grounds. (Please note that lunch is not available from the Ebenezer Church shop.)

**At 1.00pm**, for the more energetic, there will be a short walk to the quarry from which the stone was cut to build the church, to the riverside beach onto which the pioneers pulled their rowing boats when coming to church....and if you wish to walk further, there is a walk along the riverbank to a lookout from where you can view two magnificent reaches of the Hawkesbury River.

**Location:** 95 Coromandel Road, Ebenezer

### **Bookings and prepayment essential:**

Adults: \$20 (includes morning tea)

School Children: \$8 if having morning tea (Fruit juices, soft drink available)

School Children: No charge if not having morning tea

### **To book ...**

- **Confirm that a place is available for you by contacting us as below;**  
Sue / Ted Brill - [tedbrill@bigpond.com](mailto:tedbrill@bigpond.com) - 4579 9235 - 0438 777 215

- **Then make a direct deposit to ...**  
Uniting Financial Services  
BSB: 634634  
Account No: 100024249  
Name of Account: Ebenezer Church Shop

Please use your surname as a reference.

- Alternative methods of payment can be arranged by contacting us as above.

# Remembering John Miller OAM



Local historian, John Miller, passed away in Hawkesbury Hospital on Friday, 12 March 2021. As well as being an active Hawkesbury Historical Society member with a passion for Hawkesbury history, John was also very active in community affairs right up to his death at 91 years. Our sincere condolences are extended to John's family; John was a valued member of our Society.

Following here are the recollections of some of our Society's members including known facts about John's life journey...

## A tribute to John William Miller, OAM (1929-2021): a passionate advocate for the community and for the Hawkesbury

One of my first encounters with John Miller was through Hawkesbury Historical Society in the 1990s, when he persuaded me into taking over from him as social secretary of the Society. John's enthusiasm for service to community was such that he considered if one belonged to a community organisation, one should be an active member of that organisation and contribute whole-heartedly. This was evident in every aspect of John's contributions to the Society, from his work on Hawkesbury Council's Floodplain Risk Management Advisory Committee and Heritage Advisory Committee, to his appointment as an Ambassador for the Hawkesbury. The enthusiasm and commitment to the Hawkesbury community

which led to his award as a Member of the Order of Australia (OAM), was shown in his membership of the SES, the Windsor Business Group, local historical societies, family history groups and Probud.

John and Beryl Miller farmed on the Hawkesbury River at Mud Island from the mid-1950s and experienced the extensive floods of 1956 when there were seven recorded floods ranging from 7 metres to 13.7 metres.

After losing all his crops, John started growing mushrooms in his packing shed before moving to higher ground in The Hills to continue growing mushrooms. An early pioneer in the mushroom-growing industry in the Hawkesbury and The Hills, he was Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Mushroom Growers Association through the 1970s. John was actively involved in the establishment of a research facility at Rydalmere to improve productivity of local farms and travelled to France in 1978 to support Australia's bid to hold the international farmers' conference in 1981. He commented that his 2004 publication, *Reminiscences of a Fun'gi: the story of a community that mushroomed*, describes 'the origin and deep roots of the Australian mushroom industry'. John explained that the book was 'dedicated to...the dogged determination of old and new migrant Australian men, women and their children to survive and prosper in the harsh environment of this land of droughts, floods and bushfires'.



Beryl and John Miller at the launch of *Reminiscences of a Fun'gi* in 2004 (photograph from 'Mushroom memoirs make a tasty read', *Hawkesbury Courier*, 28 October 2004, p. 10)

Returning to live in the Hawkesbury after retirement, John and Beryl made their home at 37 George Street, Windsor, right in the heart of the historic Peninsula district.

They travelled extensively throughout Australia and in the 1980s, recognising that the Hawkesbury lacked a tour-guiding business to educate visitors about the history and heritage of the area, John founded guided heritage tours in the Hawkesbury. With his extensive farming background, knowledge of Hawkesbury River floods, his enthusiasm, entrepreneurial skills and love of the history of the local area, John's business flourished through the 1980s, 1990s and into the early 2000s. As he worked with staff at the Hawkesbury Visitor Centre and online tourism companies to promote his business, John devised tourist routes for coach companies coming into the district along with walking tours and guided self-drive tours.

In about 1998, he established Windsor Ghost Tours, a night-time walking tour around Thompson Square, the Green Hills Burial Ground and the Peninsula precinct. I well remember John striding ahead on his ghost tour after handing out lanterns to participants, stopping at significant sites on the tour to deliver his well-researched commentary (sometimes with a few embellishments) with his wife, Beryl, bringing up the rear to make sure no-one was left behind. John was passionate about the fact that the Hawkesbury encompassed the whole valley, not just the main towns, so he inserted 'Valley' into Hawkesbury Valley Heritage Tours.

In the early 2000s, John successfully campaigned for the new flood-free road from McGraths Hill to Richmond to be named Hawkesbury Valley Way.



John Miller as town crier in 2005, Macquarie 195th commemoration celebrations, with 73rd Regiment of Foot (photograph courtesy of the late John Miller).



John Miller (town crier) with Governor and Mrs Macquarie in 2005 Macquarie 195th commemoration celebrations 2005 (Governor and Mrs Macquarie possibly members of 73rd Regiment of Foot); (photograph courtesy of the late John Miller).

In 2005, John (with the support of members of Windsor Business Group and Hawkesbury Council) was instrumental in organising a successful programme of events for the 195<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations for the Macquarie Naming Day of Windsor, with the assistance of members of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of Foot Inc. John revelled in his job as town crier. He was also involved in the 200<sup>th</sup> Macquarie anniversary celebrations in December 2010.



John Miller (centre back row) - Community Curatorium for *Agri/culture: Re-creating the Living Landscape*, 2005. Front row from left: Margaret Down, Cheryl Yin-Lo (exhibition curator), Lily Bugeja, Carol Roberts, Jenny Allan. Back row from left: Michelle Nichols, Sonia Porter, Ingrid Hoffmann, John Miller, Brian Jones. (Photograph courtesy Hawkesbury City Council.)

John's other activities in 2004/2005 included assisting in the researching of farming in the Hawkesbury as a member of the Community Curatorium for the opening exhibition at Hawkesbury Regional Gallery, *Agri/culture: Re-creating the Living Landscape*, (June 2005).

At the same time, he was researching information about Hawkesbury-born Julia Bligh Johnston and her involvement with Australian Army Nursing Sisters in the Boer War and in the First World War. After many trips to the Australian War Memorial, the National Archives of Australia, the State Library of NSW and with assistance from Valmai Tuckerman of Ebenezer Uniting Church, and Michelle Nichols and Cathy McHardy of Windsor Library, John was ready to compile his book *Sister Julia Bligh Johnston RRC and her Australian Army Nursing Sisters: A Hawkesbury Angel of Mercy*.

He had approached me after *Agri/culture* was completed to ask if I would type up his research and I spent several hours with John deciphering his writing and gathering references, quotes and acronyms. The extent of his research was extremely impressive and the book was printed by Hawkesbury City Council in 2006. John successfully campaigned for a plaque to Hawkesbury's Angel of Mercy, Sister Julia Bligh Johnston RRC, to be added to the Boer War Memorial in Windsor and raised funds towards the Boer War Memorial erected in Canberra. Due to his efforts, Sister Julia Bligh Johnston was also recognised posthumously in Hawkesbury Council's Australia Day Awards in 2018.

After running the tour businesses for over 20 years, John decided to retire (again) and in 2011, not long before his 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday, he sold Hawkesbury Valley Heritage Tours to me (he had already sold Windsor Ghost Tours to Janice Hart). His enthusiasm for the history of the Hawkesbury continued, as he recorded a DVD in 2016 titled *A Review of Hawkesbury History*. Lester Vincent, who recorded and edited the content, comments that 'he spent much of his life studying the local history, places of historic interest and local folklore...John has a great affection and respect for Aboriginal people, which becomes obvious when one hears him speak'. When I took over Hawkesbury Valley Heritage Tours, John enthusiastically continued with his work in the community. His main focus was on Council's Floodplain Risk Management Advisory Committee and Heritage Advisory Committee, although he was still an active member of Hawkesbury Historical Society. He also joined a local Probus group, gave talks and conducted occasional cemetery tours for members.



John was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in June 2018 for service to the community of the Hawkesbury, and his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated with friends and family at a function at Loxley on Bellbird Hill in 2019.

I think we will all agree with Councillor Mary Lyons-Buckett's comments: 'John was passionate about the Hawkesbury, its river, its people and its potential...his knowledge of local history and specific issues such as our flood vulnerability, agriculture, military involvement, tourism and more, will be remembered and valued for generations to come'.

It may be perceived by many in the Hawkesbury, as ironic, that after 60 years of working to raise flood awareness in the Hawkesbury community and campaigning for the raising of the Warragamba Dam wall and a third river crossing that a major flood occurred in the Hawkesbury a week after John Miller's death.

As Matt Lawrence, Editor of the *Hawkesbury Gazette*, comments: 'People like John Miller are truly rare diamonds. They have a passion

for their community that you can tell straight away transcends ego. John truly cared. He will indeed be sadly missed.'

Carol Roberts MPHA NSW&ACT  
Hawkesbury Valley Heritage Tours  
Advancing History

#### References:

- Matt Lawrence, 'Heavy hearts in Hawkesbury after passing of John Miller', *Hawkesbury Gazette* Facebook page, <https://www.hawkesburygazette.com.au/story/7165740/heavy-hearts-in-hawkesbury-after-passing-of-john-miller/>, accessed 11 April 2021.
- John Miller, *Sister Julia Bligh Johnston RRC and her Australian Army Nursing Sisters: A Hawkesbury Angel of Mercy*, Hawkesbury City Council, 2006.
- Krystyna Pollard, 'Long-time local John Miller named in Queen's Birthday Honours List', *Hawkesbury Gazette* Facebook page, 11 June 2018, <https://www.hawkesburygazette.com.au/story/5454155/hawkesbury-ambassador-now-an-oam-john-miller-named-in-queens-birthday-honours/>, accessed 11 April 2021.
- Krystyna Pollard, 'John Miller, OAM, marks 90<sup>th</sup> birthday', *Hawkesbury Gazette* Facebook page, 18 April 2019, <https://www.hawkesburygazette.com.au/story/6047352/local-legend-celebrates-90-years/>, accessed 12 April 2021.
- Lester Vincent, *A Review of Hawkesbury History* presented by John Miller, DVD, April 2016.

- ‘Mushroom memoirs make a tasty read’, *Hawkesbury Courier*, Thursday, 28 October 2004.
- *Agri/culture: Re-creating the Living Landscape* catalogue, Hawkesbury Regional Gallery, 2005.
- Photographs of the Macquarie 195<sup>th</sup> Commemoration celebrations in Windsor, 4 December 2005, courtesy of John Miller.
- Photograph of members of *Agri/culture* Community Curatorium, 2005, courtesy Hawkesbury City Council.

## John Miller OAM

On 21<sup>st</sup> April 2021, John William Miller was farewelled and laid to rest following a simple private service at Castlebrook Memorial Park. Typical of the man, John had already arranged his burial spot near the top of the hill overlooking the beautiful valley vista below.

For many years John had been an enthusiastic and energetic member of the Hawkesbury Historical Society and was recognised as an authority on Hawkesbury history. He was particularly interested in the Aboriginal history of the area and the early interaction between them and the white newcomers to the point that in 2001 he was largely instrumental in the installation of a memorial on Pitt Town Bottoms commemorating the first meeting between Captain Arthur Phillip and the Aborigines. His respect for the Aborigines can be traced to his childhood around Botany Bay where many of his friends were Australian natives.

John was also prominent in identifying the site of the first burial ground in Windsor which almost certainly contains the graves of the nine convicts who perished in the Battle of Vinegar Hill in 1804. He always attended the annual commemoration of the battle and arranged an event on the site of the Cemetery in 2004 to recognise the site, on the bi-centenary of the battle.

John was also very active in 2013 in activities to recognise the parts played by George Evans and William Cox in the building of the first road over the Blue Mountains, and was instrumental in having permanent installations created to commemorate the event. He was successful in bringing many family descendants together for these events.

As an author, John has provided publications of historical significance as well as being a sought after speaker at events of an historical nature. In his tourism business of many years he enjoyed spreading his knowledge to his clients during his

tours of the Hawkesbury, including Cemeteries and iconic buildings.

John received recognition of service to his community through the presentation of an OAM and being named as an Ambassador of the Hawkesbury by Hawkesbury City Council.

Outside of his contribution to Hawkesbury history, John was also deeply involved in other community projects. He was Chief Warden of Hawkesbury State Emergency Services for 10 years. He was also a driving force in the Hawkesbury/ Nepean Flood Mitigation organisation in their attempt to reduce the risk of major flooding in the Valley. The current push to have the dam wall raised on Warragamba dam had his complete support.

He was also very involved with the project to have a third river crossing built at North Richmond and promoted the building of a Centre of Excellence for Aged and Dementia patients on the campus of Western Sydney University, Richmond.

John had developed a wide range of contacts, including many senior politicians, and was never intimidated by any of them but used his network very effectively to help him in the pursuit of his objectives for his community.

Much of his working life was as a dairy farmer and Mushroom grower. However, he was very influential in raising the Mushroom industry from small beginnings to the major industry it is today when he moved from mushroom growing to business administration of the industry.

After 92 years John leaves Beryl, his wife of 68 years, daughters Annette and Robyn, son Kenneth, grandchildren and great grandchildren, after an outstanding contribution to his community.

Neville Dehn 5/4/2021

## Sean Flavin remembers...

In April 1998, I moved into the Windsor Country Village having just retired from Telstra. On my very first weekend in the Village, I got to thinking, what's there to do around here. Luckily, I spotted a news item in the local paper, the article was about a talk to be given that Sunday at the former colonial burial site behind the Jolly Frog Hotel. Having an interest in historical matters I looked up where this Jolly Frog place is, and went along, and listened to a talk that really interested me – it was my first meeting with John Miller, the speaker that day.

It was that meeting with John that resulted in my hearing of this Society – and subsequent joining up. We both had an interest in the same early colonial event - the March 1804 Convict Uprising. It was an event we approached from different directions. John from a broad and deep knowledge of early Hawkesbury and colonial history. In my own case, from my membership of the Gaelic Club in Sydney. The Club had a small affiliated group called the ‘Friends of Vinegar Hill’ that every March, combined with Blacktown Council to commemorate that 1804 clash which followed on from that Convict Uprising (the clash with Colonial militia came to be called the Battle of Vinegar Hill – after an earlier clash in Ireland).

Having a special interest in common, John became my closest contact in this Society, and as he had led me to membership in this group, I like to think it was I who led John to becoming a member of the ‘Friends’ group mentioned above.

In 1988, local Councils were encouraged to do something in their areas to mark the bicentenary of European Settlement in Australia. The various local authorities came up with all sorts of projects that they considered locally significant in their districts (Federal grant money was also on offer).

Blacktown City Council came up with a project to erect a monument in Castlebrook Cemetery to mark the location – as close as anyone can now tell – to the location of that 1804 clash. John Miller would attend every March the ‘Friends’ commemoration at the monument.

On one occasion John showed me the plot he had chosen for himself and Beryl, as close as possible to the monument.

The Flags were fittingly at ‘Half Mast’ on the day John came to claim his plot...



# TIMELINE

- 1965** John and Beryl Miller joined the local State Emergency Service branch as volunteers and worked as communications officers during the floods, keeping the community up to date and answering questions about the flood. John was chief warden for the Hawkesbury State Emergency Services for 10 years.
- 2004** Published ‘Reminiscences of a fun'gi : the story of a community that mushroomed’ by John Miller.
- 2005** John participated in a group creating the inaugural exhibition at the Hawkesbury Regional Gallery called "Agri/Culture: Recreating the Living Landscape" the culmination of many months of work. The Exhibition covered the period after World War II to the present, looking at the combination of Agriculture and culture.
- 2006** Published ‘Sister Julia Bligh Johnston RRC and her Australian Army Nursing Sisters : a Hawkesbury angel of mercy’ by John Miller
- 2009/2010** Member of Hawkesbury Macquarie 2010 Committee.
- 2016** Produced ‘John Miller's review of Hawkesbury history’ DVD 2016. Recorded & edited by Lester Vincent.
- 2018** Long-time local John Miller named in Queen's Birthday Honours list...  
<https://www.hawkesburygazette.com.au/story/5454155/hawkesbury-ambassador-now-an-oam-john-miller-named-in-queens-birthday-honours/>
- 2019** John Miller’s 90th birthday...  
[https://www.hawkesburygazette.com.au/story/6047352/local-legend-celebrates-90-years/?fbclid=IwAR27iRqMbbGwYt2Pnyh4GJeyM7heP1XvYalZkZg7zQ9XlfMi\\_WI8lCwwUAI](https://www.hawkesburygazette.com.au/story/6047352/local-legend-celebrates-90-years/?fbclid=IwAR27iRqMbbGwYt2Pnyh4GJeyM7heP1XvYalZkZg7zQ9XlfMi_WI8lCwwUAI)



Farewell wreath - Hawkesbury Historical Society

# AIR FORCE 100 – Centenary of the Royal Australian Air Force in Australia

*This year marks 100 years of RAAF service to Australia.*

*From modest beginnings in 1921, the RAAF has grown into a potent, world class Air Force which Australia relies upon in both conflict and peace.*



The formation of the Australian Air Force was announced in the Australian Government Gazette on 31 March 1921. Later in the year on 13 August, following receipt of approval from the King, the Governor General signed an order authorizing the use of 'Royal' making this the start date for the use of the Royal Australian Air Force name.

While the first RAAF base was formed in Point Cook, Victoria, in March 1921, the establishment of RAAF Base Richmond occurred soon after in 1925 and it became the first RAAF base in NSW and the second in Australia. The first Air Force unit in New South Wales, No 3 Squadron, was also formed at Richmond in 1925.

Prior to being a RAAF Base, the airfield at Richmond was used by pioneering aviators as well as a State Flying School during the First World War. Sir Ross and Keith Smith visited in 1920 after their flight to Australia from England. Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith flew the Southern Cross to Richmond for its servicing after his trans-Pacific flight in 1928, and Miss Jean Batten passed through on her solo flight from England to New Zealand in 1936.

At the outbreak of World War II, Nos 3, 6, 9 and 22 Squadrons and No. 2 Aircraft Depot were based at Richmond. No. 8 Squadron formed on 11 September 1939, and No. 11 Squadron two weeks later.

During World War II, Richmond became a base of major importance to Australia's defence, evolving from a combat centre to the home of Air Mobility Group, where it is now the hub of logistics support for the Australian Defence Force.

RAAF Base Richmond has played an important part in the history and development of the Hawkesbury. From modest beginnings as an aviation school with earthen floor hangars and minimal buildings, it was identified as an important and suitable site by the RAAF, emerging into a major base and an unmissable and valued aspect of living in the Hawkesbury.

Over the years of the RAAF being stationed in the heart of the Hawkesbury at Clarendon, residents have played keen observer and participant in its growth and have been front and centre in the development of aircraft and flying.

A new display will feature at Windsor Central Library from 26 April, produced in conjunction with RAAF Richmond and Hawkesbury Regional Museum and recognises these successes and commemorates those who lives have been lost as part of RAAF Richmond, over the past 100 years.



Image: Early years of the RAAF Base Richmond, 1937. Courtesy of Air Force 2021.



## 1925 – 1929

*A military flying school was set up at the site of the present-day RAAF base on 28 August 1916, when the area was known as Ham Common, this continued until RAAF Base Richmond was established on 30 June 1925.*



### 1926 -TRIAL FLIGHT TRAGEDY

In the early days of flying, trial flights often led to unexpected tragedy, as was the case on 12 February 1926 when staff of the Richmond Aerodrome received a message from Canberra announcing that the DeHavilland DH9 biplane, which had left Richmond earlier in the day for Canberra, under the charge of Flying Officer Peter M. Pitt, had crashed at Ainslie, resulting in the death of the pilot and an aerial photographer (Mr. V. Callendar) who accompanied him.

*Although the machine left Richmond apparently in perfect running order, reports specified that the mechanics had worked through the night to have the machine ready, and finished, only at 4 a.m. A flight was made from the aerodrome, and it was noticed at the time that one cylinder was missing fire and the defect was adjusted later, but this wasn't enough to save the plane from crashing later.*

**Sydney Morning Herald, Friday 12 February 1926**

### 1927 -SLIGHT DAMAGE

*Crashing into a post at Mulgrave recently, an aeroplane came to rest with its tail in the air, and remained in this position until dismantled. The pilot was uninjured, and only slight damage was done to the propeller and the wings. Within three hours of the accident the plane had been dismantled, loaded on motor lorries, and taken back to the aerodrome at Clarendon.*

**Windsor and Richmond Gazette, Friday 23 September 1927**

### 1929 - DEATH OF AIRCRAFTMAN COLLESS

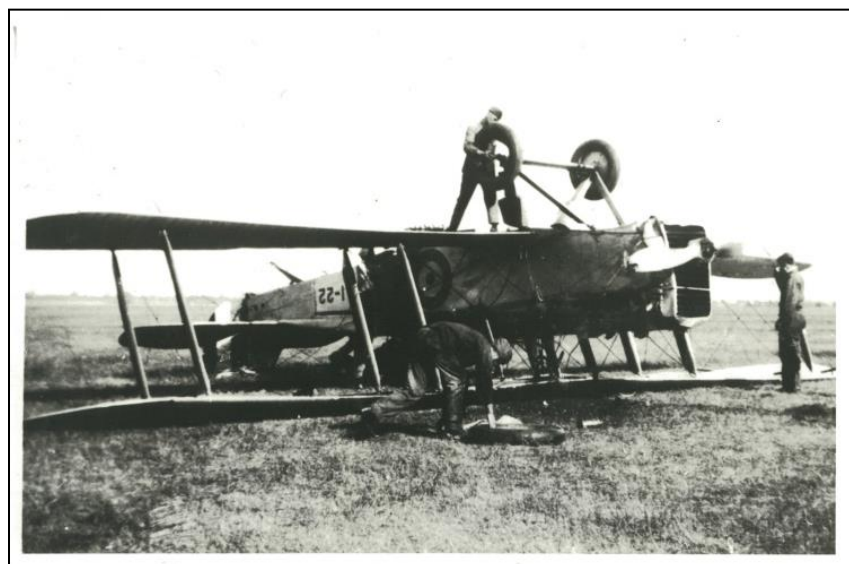
In early 1929 the first recorded loss of life from an air craft crash occurred at the RAAF Base Richmond.

Twenty three year old aircraft mechanic Llewellyn Lancelot 'Lance' Colless, died from injuries received when the DeHavilland Gipsy Moth biplane he was a passenger in crashed on the Richmond-Windsor Road, through striking the branch of a tree. Flight Lieutenant Anderson, pilot, while injured – survived.

Flight Lieutenant Anderson said that the machine took a long time in rising due to lack of wind and the rain-sodden ground. After travelling 300 yards (274m) he saw a tree 97 (30m) feet high immediately in front. He tried to turn the machine gently, but the starboard wing caught a branch and crashed.



Image: Hawkesbury Historical Society Collection, Courtesy of Hawkesbury Regional Museum



Eye-witness to the crash were two Sydney doctors, who were at the aerodrome inspecting the plane *Southern Cross*. As soon as they saw the crash they rushed over with the ambulance, and rendered first aid, before Dr. Steele, of Richmond, arrived.

The coroner recorded a verdict of accidental death.

Image: DH9A Aircraft caught by strong winds at Richmond Aerodrome in 1926. The Airman in foreground was leading Aircraftman Colless who was later killed in a Moth Aircraft accident at the Richmond Aerodrome. Hawkesbury Historical Society Collection, Courtesy of Hawkesbury Regional Museum

## “THEY COME PRETTY CLOSE” – A FARMER’S TRAGIC DEATH

*One of the most tragic aircraft incidents occurred in January 1929.*

Mr. Albert Charles Smith aged 51, a well-known Hawkesbury farmer, was killed instantly when an aircraft dived on top of him while he was chipping weeds on his farm at Cornwallis, on the lowlands near Windsor.

Reports stated that when the plane struck, it smashed the handle of the hoe he was using, dragged him about 15 yards (13m), and bounced another 10 yards before it came to rest. The deceased's son, James Smith, who was working on a tractor nearby, witnessed the awful tragedy.



Image: De Havilland DH.60 Moth, the type of aircraft involved in the tragic incident. Hawkesbury Historical Society Collection, Courtesy of Hawkesbury Regional Museum

A witness reported seeing the air craft flying at about 200 ft (61m), then diving till it went a few feet over Mr Smith's head at only 10ft (3m) from the ground. Mr Smith reportedly took off his hat, waved and laughingly said “*My word, they come pretty close, don't they?*” The aircraft then rose and circled the farms.

"The next thing I saw," said the witness, "was Mr. Smith running or being carried by the plane, I heard the plane roaring, but did not see the accident, as my attention was directed to the horses, which were playing up on the farm owing to the noise of the engine. The plane was coming straight towards me...I rushed over and saw Smith a few yards from the tail of the plane. I noticed he had one boot off. When I saw the plane coming towards Smith the second time it was gliding down. It was not crumpled up nor was it nose-diving."

Other witnesses testified that on numerous occasions airmen in planes had swooped down on pea pickers, potato-diggers, Chinese market gardeners, and others who were working in farms in the district.

The District Coroner found that Smith died from the effects of injuries received after being knocked down by an aircraft which had been negligently piloted by Sergeant Robert Somerville, and he was committed for trial. Somerville declared that he could not remember anything after wheeling the machine out of the hangar. Dr Arnold of Windsor the Government Medical officer said that he examined Somerville after the accident and that his condition constituted serious shock.

What makes this case even more devastating was that Sergeant Robert Somerville was engaged to Miss Smith, the daughter of the killed framer Albert Smith. She lived with her family at Meroo, 105 The Terrace,

Windsor in a Californian Bungalow built for the Smith family, which they had moved into in January 1927. The farms at Cornwallis and the aerodrome could be seen from the back of the house.

Seven years later Somerville himself was disastrously killed in a plane crash at Point Cook in Victoria in a RAAF training exercise, after colliding with another plane. His wife had tragically lost her father and now her husband in plane crashes.



Image: Remains of the Moth aircraft in which Sergeant Somerville suffered fatal injuries after a mid-air collision at Point Cook in 1936. Courtesy of the NR Ford collection, RAAF Museum.

# NIGHT TIME FLYING



*After the first trial in 1926, night flying was continually being explored further by the RAAF. Conditions were much more difficult to navigate at night with planes not having their own lights, no radar detection system for the dark and a lack of illumination on the ground.*

## 1926 – FIRST NIGHT FLIGHT

*For the first time, in Australia, an aircraft flight at night was attempted on Saturday night, when a Defence Department plane left Richmond aerodrome at 8p.m for Melbourne. It was piloted by Squadron Leaders' Wrigley and Hepburn. The flight however nearly ended in disaster. The petrol pipe of the machine, broke when 100 miles (160km) from Melbourne, and the pilots were compelled to make a forced landing in the dark. The machine landed on a cleared paddock and the airmen were not injured. Point Cook was telephoned for assistance, which arrived a few hours later. Repairs were speedily affected, and petrol supplies renewed. A spark from the engine as the machine left for Point Cook caused a grassfire in the paddock, but it was extinguished. The pilots were disappointed that they did not achieve their object, but were satisfied that night flying was feasible.*

**Windsor and Richmond Gazette, 3 Dec 1926.**

## 1931- NIGHT CRASH

On 3 June 1931, a Gipsy Moth aircraft piloted by Sergeant Brown, crashed between Windsor and Mulgrave at 9pm while on night cross-country practice and observation flight. After being in the air for short period of time, he experienced engine trouble, and sent out distress signals, indicating that he intended to make an early forced landing. Some of these flares were seen by local residents, including Eric Pritchard, who realised what was happening, and saw the plane crash. He notified the Richmond aerodrome, and then drove swiftly to the spot where he believed the plane to be. He discovered that the machine had turned over and was lying crumpled on its back. It was located near the railway viaduct over South Creek, the pilot dazed and suffering from shock.

Mr Pritchard rescued the airman and was driving him back to Windsor when he met the Air Force ambulance on its way to the rescue. The pilot was transferred to the ambulance, and taken to receive medical attention. It was found, however, that he had had a remarkable escape and, had not been seriously injured.

In later years the RAAF Base Richmond had its own medical staff and hospital, but in the early days local services were relied upon. Used on several occasion was the Richmond Hospital- now known as *Eulabah*, located in West Market Street, Richmond. Constructed in 1881 by Rev James Cameron, it was then purchased from owner George Woodhill in 1911 to establish a hospital. A committee raised funds by hosting tea parties, concerts and balls. Richmond Cottage Hospital opened in 1913 with Matron Swannell in charge. Later called Richmond District Hospital, in 1957 it became Richmond Community Hospital and later Richmond Community Nursing Home, between 1966 and about 1990.

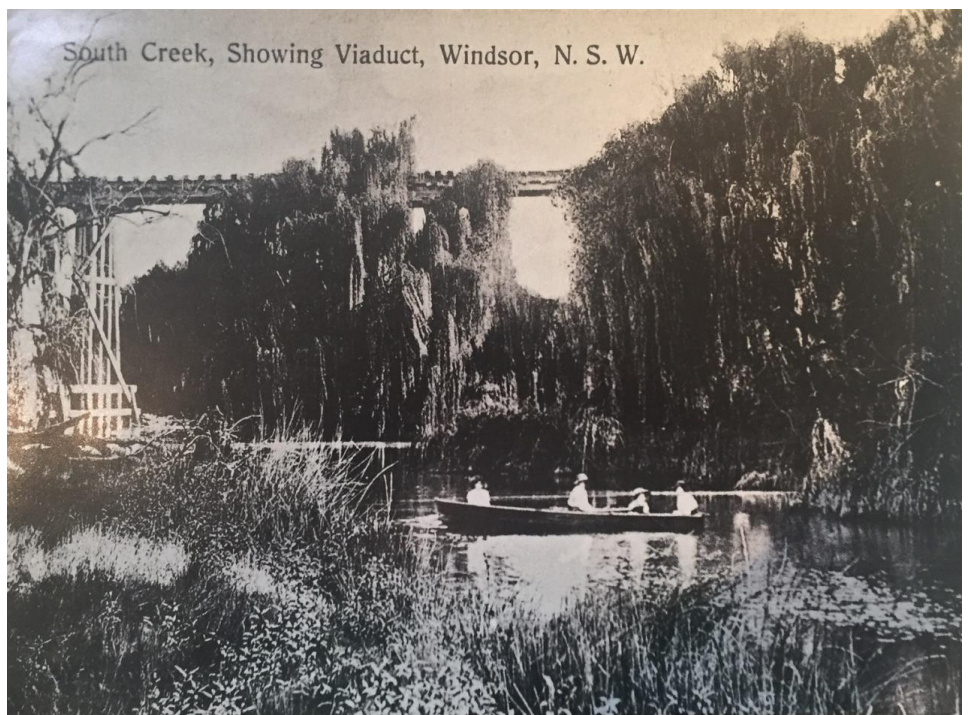


Image: Railway viaduct over South Creek, courtesy Hawkesbury Regional Museum

Articles relating to the RAAF's Centenary compiled by Rebecca Turnbull

# ANZAC DAY

This day of days, upon whose storied dawn  
Australia's sons the world's high plaudits won;

When sprang to fame a full-orb'd nation,  
born  
As in a day, by deeds immortal done.

And from Gallipoli, in Belgium, France,  
In Palestine—wherever need was great—  
These sons, new-born, as Anzacs, made  
advance  
With zeal and courage that knew no  
abate.

How great the toll the widow'd homes but  
tell  
In many a covert, glen, and crowded mart;  
The orphan'd children, wives, and loved ones  
spell  
The agony of torn and quivering heart.

Years now have roll'd; the Armageddon  
pass'd;  
Its mem'ry lingers still; its aftermath,

Disturbed unrest—but ANZAC DAY will last  
The while Australia plods her destin'd path.

Once more upon this day the chaplet chaste  
We bring, in mem'ry of our honor'd dead;  
Once more we mourn war's awesome, wan-  
ton waste,  
And silent tribute pay to those who bled.

And humble spots, where once no glories  
vied,  
Are glorious now as sepulchres rever'd  
Of those who braved fell Mars' resistless  
tide,  
And faced the last grim gaze of death un-  
fear'd.

No only cenotaph to enclose them round,  
They peaceful sleep dispart—a scatter'd  
whole;  
Their deeds remain; their story will be  
found

Inscrib'd for aye upon proud Austral's soul.  
—J. EGAN MOULTON.

Windsor and Richmond Gazette, Friday 25 April 1930 (Trove). Sourced by Peta Sharpley.

## ANZACS Remembered...



On 25 April 2015, on a river cruise in Europe, a very special and moving Anzac Day service was commemorated. With mainly Australians on board, along with some New Zealander's, British and Americans, one of the passengers, being a representative of the RSL, led the service. The camaraderie between the Australians and New Zealanders on board was palpable. Everyone on board attended and were given a sprig of Rosemary and hand-made poppies by the Captain. The staff, all of European origin, were deeply moved and asked respectful questions about our Anzac's and the significance of remembering them in this way. It was an emotional service for some of the war veterans on board and a proud moment for us all.

The daily 'on board' Australian newspaper highlighted news on commemoration services both in Australia and abroad, and the following are some brief extracts to share...

"Australians at home and abroad have stood alongside New Zealanders in a silent pact, never to forget the sacrifice of the Anzacs on the battlefield at Gallipoli a century ago. For it was there, it is said, our national identity was forged. They didn't know it at the time but those courageous young men were the making of a legend." Queensland Governor Paul de Jersey

"Together they had become Anzacs, the proudest of terms, the mightiest of labels, because it showed being an Australian or a New Zealander, a Kiwi or an Aussie, stood for something; it stood for everything." Sir Peter Cosgrove

Lieutenant General Morrison made reference "to the enduring willingness of Australians and New Zealanders to step up and fight for the values they hold dear. Like us, they were men and women of their time, responding to their events in their world...Like us, they dreamed of something better. They were prepared to fight for their beliefs."

The most poignant commemoration was held on the other side of the world (to Australia), where a silent crowd of 10,500, including the [then] Prime Minister Tony Abbot, New Zealand counterpart John Key, Prince Charles and Prince Harry, gathered at the Australian Commemorative Site on Gallipoli's North Beach. Mr Abbott said "the Anzacs represented Australians at their best. If they had not been emblematic of the nation we thought we were, Anzac Day would not have been commemorated from that time until this, in every part of our country, in every place where Australians gather and in every military base where Australians serve". Mr Key said "The campaign waged at Gallipoli ensured its name would be written into the histories of New Zealand, Australia, Britain, Turkey and the many other countries that fought there, never to be erased. To us, Gallipoli is also a byword for the best character of Australians and New Zealanders, especially when they work side-by-side in the face of adversity."

## LEST WE FORGET

