

# CANOWINDRA HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM INC

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## Canowindra Historical Society News January-February 2015

### Meeting dates to note

The first monthly meeting for 2015 of the Canowindra Historical Society & Museum Inc. will be held on **Tuesday 10 February 2015 at 10am in the Historical Museum**. Please note that this is a week later than the usual first Tuesday of the month. This will be a planning meeting to outline a tentative program for the year.

The **AGM** will be held on **Tuesday 3 March 2015** at 10am. New members are welcome to attend. Subscriptions for the calendar year of 2015 are due.

### End of Year Function at Rustic Notions Cargo

A festive luncheon at Rustic Notions Café was a fitting end to another successful year for the Society. Members and some of the Cargo locals enjoyed a pleasant meal and good company as well as learning some interesting facts about the history of Cargo. Tour guide, Dorothy Balcomb, said, "We did most of our talking about the history of Cargo at the café. You could look up and down the street from the verandah and point out things. The bank that was robbed in 1893 was right next door and is now the home of Heidi and David who have Rustic Notions." The group also looked at the Anglican Church, the cemetery and the school, which now has only 11 pupils but still has a most wonderful set of buildings.



## Open Day

It's estimated that up to 100 visitors came through the museum during the recent Open Day when the new interpretive panels on the Merriganowry Pioneer Hut were unveiled. The Hut, dating from the early 1830s, is one of Canowindra's most significant objects. Its association with pioneer John Grant and long history of use as a home for early settlers makes it a regional time capsule.



The newly installed panels were unveiled by descendants of some of those early Scottish settlers. John Davidson and Dorothy Balcomb (nee Davidson) officiated at the ceremony and delighted the audience with recollections of the hut and the stories told to them by their elders. The panels illustrate aspects of a woman's life as an early settler and feature a photograph of a woman inside a hut which is very similar to the Merriganowry Hut.

As an interesting aside, the well-known Davidson pikelets also became the end product of a display in the 'Pasture to Plate' theme featuring some early wheat harvesting equipment, different types of wheat and resulting flour products and examples of early baking using flour. An original griddle iron, on which foods such as pikelets and scones were originally cooked, was also part of the display.

The Open Day was held in conjunction with the local food and wine Twilight Markets in the adjacent park which facilitated visitor flow between the two events and further highlighted the Now and Then differences in food and lifestyles. The day was a great success with the added bonus of fabulous Spring weather.

## The Most Beautiful Caves You'll nEver See

Preserved in pristine condition and accessible to only a few cavers and research scientists, the Cliefden Caves (aka the Belubula Caves) have been a well-kept secret for more than a century. However, the proposal to build a new dam on the Belubula River has brought the Caves into the limelight. The Caves are on the Belubula River between Canowindra and Carcoar and only 2.5km from the proposed site of a new dam at The Needles\*, which, if built, would inundate the caves and fossil sites at Cliefden.

### The history of our natural history

The Cliefden Caves Limestone was the first discovered in inland Australia, being recorded on 24 May, 1815 during the explorations of surveyor G. W. Evans only 2 years after the crossing of the Blue Mountains. This year marks the bicentenary\*\* of that expedition to the central west. The first land grants in that area were taken up by Rothery brothers in 1832. The barn at the Cliefden homestead bears the bullet holes from a holdup by the infamous Ben Hall gang in the 1860s. The Caves have been known for well over a century and were recorded by Wilkinson in 1892 and Trickett in 1908.

In 1934 a party from the Australian Museum camped near the caves to obtain specimens for the Museum, and provided this evocative description for the *Sun* newspaper:

From a crystal-encrusted roof nearly 30 feet high countless stalactites hang down vertically, at times almost meeting stalagmites which rise from the ground and on both their ends glistens lime impregnated water. Some are several feet in length and in between them is an amazing variety of weird and fantastic shapes – “mystery” formations they are termed – into which the stalactites and stalagmites have been formed, it is believed, by varying currents of air.

About 200 feet below the ground level are several perfect ‘shawls’ varying from snow white to light amber in colour, and the folds are so shaped as to look like some flimsy material billowing in the breeze.

Excerpt from *The Belubula Caves, Canowindra Celebrates Its One Hundred Years, 1939*



Group of people standing at the base of the Cliefdon Caves Limestone formation c1920s.

Photo: National Library of Australia

Below: Some of the ‘flimsy material billowing in the breeze’ inside one of the caves that would be flooded if the proposed dam on the Belubula was built.



You can read about our unique natural history and see more of the fantastic formations in the Cliefdon Caves at the website [www.savecliefdencaves.org.au](http://www.savecliefdencaves.org.au).

\*The proposed dam is part of the government's response to the region's fluctuating water catchment issues and high demand for water for mining and agriculture in the area. The proposed site is part of the government's current feasibility study and is at the Needles Gap, where the river has cut a narrow gap through a resistant zone of conglomerates, quartzite and sandstones. According to the NSW Government: "a new dam on the Belubula River is part of the Water Security for Regions program in the 2014-2015 budget. The investigations will consider potential dam sites to establish their suitability in terms of offering value for money for taxpayers and downstream water users."

## WWI and Anzac Centenary

Molong author and historian, Robert Ellis, is well known to many locals. He is writing a book to commemorate the centenary of WWI and the wartime experiences of local people at home and abroad. He is particularly interested in personal letters, diary entries, photographs of send-offs, stories of individuals and their families, which will add depth and colour to the narrative. If you have some family history that you would like to share with Robert, he would be very grateful for your help. He confesses to being a bit of a Luddite and has no email but you can contact him on 63668841 or by mail at 14 Kite Street, Molong. He'd love to hear from you.

## Membership Renewal

The Society is planning another busy year with the commemoration of important historical events and the interpretation of Canowindra's history. Your past assistance is greatly appreciated and we look forward to your continued support. Membership renewal form for 2015 is attached and dues can be paid:

- By direct deposit to Canowindra Historical Society BSB 082-500 Account No. 509583181. Please use your name as a reference.
- By cheque addressed to The Membership Secretary, Canowindra Historical Society, PO Box 76, Canowindra. NSW 2804.
- In person at the next meeting, which will be held at the Museum on 10 February, 2015.

## Bicentenaries, Sesquicentenaries and Centenaries.

2015 is a year of many birthdays of national and/or local significance that may encourage special events in our area:

Bathurst is 200 years old and Proclamation Day on 7 May 2015 will be celebrated by a Colonial Fair on the banks of the Macquarie River and the raising of a new flagpole where Governor Macquarie proclaimed the town of Bathurst in 1815. There will be other celebrations throughout the year at Bathurst.

27 May 1815\*\* was the date when the expedition led by George W. Evans, reached and named the Lachlan River at Warwick near Cowra and continued downstream to its junction with Mandagery Creek near today's Eugowra, marking a tree on 1 June 1815 before turning back through lack of supplies.

**Bushrangers:** 4 May 1865 is the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Ben Hall when bushranger enthusiasts will hold special events in the district. Lesser known on the local scene is the death of Senior Constable John Herbert, who was accidentally shot in the hills at Mogong on the night of 28/29 March 1865 in a stake out looking for Ben Hall. Herbert died in Canowindra on 13 April 1865 and was buried there the following day, probably in the old Belubula Cemetery, the only burial ground at the time.

This might be the time to erect a new interpretive sign near the South Canowindra Monument to dispel the myth that this was the site of the inn held up by Ben Hall's gang in 1863.

## Calendar

Late February/early March, date tba. Meeting of the Canobolas Museum Network to be held at Canowindra at the Age of Fishes

12-19<sup>th</sup> April – Canowindra International Balloon Challenge

Saturday, 25 April, 2015 will be Centenary of Anzac Day.

Saturday, 9 May, 2015 – Museum Open Day for National Trust Heritage Festival

Dorothy Balcomb.

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Newsletter items contributed by D. Balcomb and A. Vincent.