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Leeton Family & Local History Society Inc

Newsletter

May-June 2021



**Members & Visitors at Our Presentation of
Historic Map of McCaughey's North Yanco Holdings**

LEETON FAMILY & LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY Inc

MEETINGS HELD: Third Thursday of each month – 10.30am (No Meeting- January)

WHERE: WC&IC Boardroom Leeton Museum & Art Gallery

MEMBERSHIP: Single \$15.00
Family \$20.00

OFFICE BEARERS:

Chairperson: Tony Reneker
Vice President: Bill Barwick
Secretary: Lyn Middleton
Treasurer: Karleen Reilly
Librarian: Lyn Middleton
Research Officer: Wendy Senti
Publicity/Newsletter: Tony Reneker

LF&LH SOCIETY ROOM WC&IC Lower Level Leeton Museum & Art Gallery
OPENING TIMES: Thursdays 10.00am – 2.00pm (Re-opening in July 2021)

RESEARCH ENQUIRIES:

A minimum charge of \$20 for each enquiry.
The Newsletter is produced yearly in June – cost \$2 each.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES:

To Promote Family & Local History Research
To purchase materials to assist our members to trace their family trees.
To collect early records, photographs and information of Leeton Shire (and the surrounding irrigation area).
To assist in educating the public of the importance of preservation of early history.

ATTENTION: Articles appearing in this Newsletter MUST NOT BE REPRODUCED without the written permission from the Leeton Family & Local History Society Inc.

DISCLAIMER:

LEETON FAMILY & LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY INC ACCEPTS NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE INFORMATION PROVIDED OR THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS NEWSLETTER.

FOR SALE:

Leeton Farm Registers Microfiche – P O A
Irrigation Recorder Film – P O A
Index to BDM's - (extracted from Murrumbidgee Irrigator)
1915-1950 \$32-50 includes post & handling)
1951-1975 \$37.50 includes post & handling) Will be produced on request
1976-1999 \$34.50 includes post & handling)
All three Indexes posted together \$90.
Applications for Employment W C & I C 1911-1922 \$10 + P & H
Leeton–Whitton Cemetery Transcriptions & Burial Records 1913-2000 \$30 + P & H
Henry Lawson in Leeton - Out of Print
Leeton 100 Years – Thanks for the Memories. (2013) \$35 + P & H
A Brief History of Leeton (1968) by AE Bowmaker on searchable CD (2018) \$20 + \$3 P&H
Leeton Lads of First World War (2018) \$10 + \$5 P & H
Celebrating 50 years of Leeton's Festivals & SunRice Ambassador Entrants 1970-2020 \$15 + \$5 P&H
Current Year Calendar \$15 & P&H – after June \$7.50 + P&H
Past Yearly calendars \$2 plus P&H

ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO POST OFFICE BOX 475 LEETON NSW 2705

Email: leetonfamilyandlocalhistory@gmail.com Web: leetonfamilyandlocalhistory.com.au Find us on 

The Leeton Family and Local History Society Inc, acknowledges the Traditional owners of the land the WC&IC Building stands on, the Wiradjuri people. We need to acknowledge the past to embrace the future

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6. Test Cricketer cont, Leeton Art Deco Festival

Annual General Meeting will be held on July 15th In the WC&IC Boardroom at Leeton Museum & Art Gallery 10.30am. Please ensure subs are up to date so you can vote.

Research:

Wendy has had a busy year with Research. It must be that people confined to their house are needing something to do and have decided to research their families while in lock down.

She has found some very interesting stories along the way adding to our local history in some cases.

One such story was whilst volunteering at the new Museum, a phone call enquiring about a former employee of the Water Conservation & Irrigation Commission was received. Wendy was able to quickly do a TROVE search and found that the person in question was certainly an employee and was in fact in charge of the WC&IC's Timberyard at Yanco back in 1911.

A lot of excitement was heard on the end of the line and some months later that very person visited Leeton to see where her ancestor had worked and lived.

Many other stories found by researching through the local papers on TROVE have produced quite a lot of interesting snippets of history that can be added to a persons' family history projects.

NEW MUSEUM FOR LEETON

On June the 15th 2020 amidst the threatening of a worldwide pandemic there was much excitement in Leeton with the opening of the new Museum & Art Gallery.

Leeton Family & Local History Society worked in partnership with the Museum in finding important milestones and information which has added to the museums display.

A NSW Drought Relief Grant was received which was used to employ workers to restore the old Water Conservation & Irrigation Building back to its former glory.

Queensland Drought, Flood and Recovery Officer Shane Stone said it was one of the best spent grant projects he had seen on a recent visit to Leeton

The theme of the display was '*The Story of Water*' as from our humble beginnings of a vast desert like plain we now have a thriving town and farms growing produce, grains and edibles that help to feed our Nation.

The foresight of those early New South Wales Parliamentarians to allocate millions of pounds of money and the Commission employees to plan and build a dam in the higher regions of the country, to store water, to carry water down the Murrumbidgee River and to irrigate the vast flat lands have certainly paid off.

The Commission built canals, channels, roads, two towns- Leeton est 1913 & Griffith 1916 as well as increasing the size of two smaller villages' Yanco & Whitton and planned the division of the land into farms. Farms were planned out although today the number is less than original numbers as many were not big enough to ensure a good living so had to be amalgamated with other farms.

In and around town the expansion has seen the smaller farm-lets subdivided into town blocks for residential use.

Figures from Murrumbidgee Irrigation in 2020 say there are now nearly three thousand landholders on an area of some three hundred and seventy nine thousand hectares in the Murrumbidgee & Coleambally Irrigation Areas.

To date just shy of the Museums first birthday more than three thousand nine hundred people have visited the site.

The Museum & Gallery is run by volunteers of the community and is open to the public Monday to Saturday 10.00am to 3.00pm.



WC&IC Building

COVID 19

No Newsletter would be complete without some reference to Covid 19. Leeton Shire has escaped so far with not a single covid infection. 'Signing in' and hand washing has become an automatic act prior to entering businesses or functions and vaccinations are slowly taking place.

Live meetings of the Leeton Family & Local History Society recommenced in September 2020 but there have been no guest speakers to this current time.

Life has slowly been returning to normal, but there is still a long way to go before Covid 19 is confined to history.



Residents with symptoms can be tested for Covid 19 in Leeton by booking an appointment at the Hospital. Bookings are essential.

THE TROCADERO

A large crowd was on hand on a hot Friday night in 1960 for the Trocadero Fight Night. The fight nights were a popular pastime in Leeton in that era and a 12-year-old Brian Troy was there amongst the crowd with his older brother John. The two normally went to the fights with their father, who had instilled a love for the sport in his two sons, but on this occasion the two boys were there by themselves.

As they waited for the next bout in the Fly Weight division, organisers announced that one of the fighters had failed to turn up to take on Tony Peacock in the next fight. Amongst the chorus of disapproval from the crowd, Brian's brother John, approached the organisers and boldly declared "My brother Brian can fight him!".

In a very short period of time, a very nervous, but determined Brian found himself in the ring waiting for the bell to start his first ever boxing bout.

While the Trocadero was being used for boxing on that night, the building had had a somewhat chequered past with a number of different identities.

The building that became known as the Trocadero was built in 1925 by Mr B. Governa, an Italian migrant who had a farm at Stanbridge. The property consisted of two blocks at 18 and 20 Belah Street, with the building constructed at number 18. It was opened on the 8th November of that year and was known as "The Gaiety Theatre".

Mr Governa was a well-known local identity and its first purpose was a cabaret hall and wine saloon. Following that, it was used as a motion picture theatre and was also utilized to host other performances like concerts and dances from travelling companies.

In June 1927 under the entrepreneurship of Reg Hollis and Jack Bacon, roller skating was introduced and this was very popular for about two years.

Map shows location of where the Trocadero stood from 1925 to 1985



The 1930s saw a falling off in patronage of the Gaiety, due mainly to the opening of the Roxy Theatre and the Cabaret Hall. From 1925 to 1937 the Leeton Old Time Dance Club were holding weekly old-time dances at the RSL open air dance floor known as "The Glideaway". These came to an abrupt halt when the RSL was destroyed by fire, and the old-time dances were then held at the Belah Street building from 1937 to 1940 and was known as "The Aussie Theatre" being leased by a Mr W.W. McEachern.

In May 1941 the property was purchased by a Mr H.J. Helson who also built a cottage on the adjacent unused land at 20 Belah Street. The Aussie was used by him as a laundry and dry-cleaning works. It was later leased for the same purpose by "Renue Dry Cleaning Service".

It was then occupied by "Ashtons Cordial Works" from September 1949 to June 1951.

In August 1953 the property comprising the cottage and the theatre was sold to Messrs R.J. Cafe Snr, R.J. Cafe Jnr and A.E.J. Cafe. They subsequently put the property to various uses including fruit packing, produce exchange, timber and joinery yard and roller skating amongst other things.

For a number of years there had been a call for a National Fitness Centre to be established in Leeton with the Leeton Shire Council rejecting the idea in 1949. In December 1956 a public meeting was held in Leeton to again discuss the idea, particularly as the Yanco National Fitness Centre had been established and was running successfully. From that meeting a committee was formed which established the Leeton National Fitness Committee and they obtained the use of the building which was now back being known as the Trocadero.

In November 1958 the property was purchased from the Cafes by Messrs S.G. Lanham, J.E. Dooley and A.R. Hobson as trustees of National Fitness Committee.

The Trocadero was transformed into an indoor basketball court, albeit not regulation size, and with boxing and table tennis in the basement level. It served itself well in this form for a number of years but in the 1960s full sized basketball courts were built by the Council in Parkview and eventually the basketball and boxing ceased to be.

The building stood abandoned and fell into disrepair and on Christmas Eve 1985 fire destroyed the building.

So how did a young Brian Troy go in that fight 61 years ago? After three rounds of quality boxing before an excited and raucous crowd, the match was declared a draw. As was the tradition at that time, patrons showered the ring with money in appreciation of the effort of the two young boxers with the combatants each pocketing a handsome five pounds each as well as trophy for their pugilistic efforts.

Pumped up on adrenalin and emotion, Brian ran home to Parkview to wake his parents with the exciting news. The reaction from his father was a little more subdued than he had hoped for and both he and John were banned from ever attending the fights again unaccompanied.

Despite offers from some locals to train Brian, his father would not permit him to box again and his record of one fight, one draw would remain his forever. As for his opponent that night, Tony Peacock, he went onto to become the Riverina Champion in his weight division and is now a well-known harness racing driver and trainer in Victoria.

**TROCADERO HALL
SOLD BY AUCTION**

A landmark of Leeton's early days and one of the first large buildings erected in the town, the old Trocadero Hall, has again changed hands. The building was sold by public auction last Friday afternoon, to R. J. Cafe and Sons, of Griffith.

The hall, originally built as a cabaret and wine saloon, has had a chequered career. The building was erected by Mr. Govern, a well-known local identity of Leeton's early days. The building was later converted to a picture theatre and conducted as such for several years. The hall was used for many years as a roller skating rink by Mr. Reg Hollis and later as a dance hall, by the Old Time Dance Club, and has since served as a dry cleaning premises, cordial factory and store room.

The purchaser, Mr. R. J. Cafe, conducts a timber mill at Griffith. He recently purchased the adjoining block of land and residence and intends to establish a timber depot there.

The vendor, Mr. H. Helson, is moving to Sydney, where he has purchased a business.

The sale was conducted by P. E. Thomas, P. Grace and O. J. Washington, auctioneers selling in conjunction.

Courtesy The Murrumbidgee Irrigator 18 August 1953



Brian Troy with his trophy from the Trocadero Fight Night in 1960.
Photo Tony Reneker

Acknowledgements:

- Brian Troy
- Joe Burns
- Luke Melidonis
- Joy Young
- The Murrumbidgee Irrigator A Brief History of Leeton – A.E. Bowmaker

HISTORIC MAP UNEARTHED

During the packing up and moving to our new location in the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission Building, researcher Wendy Senti stumbled across what is possibly considered a very historic map. The map is of North Yanco Pastoral Holdings owned by Sir Samuel McCaughey bearing the signatures of him and Mr LAB Wade dated 1911.

Sir Samuel is considered the father of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Scheme while Mr Wade was the first appointed Commissioner of the Water Conservation & Irrigation Commission (WC&IC) in January 1913. The map shows the vast portion of land that was 'sold' to the Government of NSW to be broken up into smaller irrigation farms.

Wendy was very excited about the find stating it had been folded up in a box for a hundred years and only seen the light of day several times in all that time. "It's a great piece of history". Wendy successfully applied for a Community Strengthening Grant for the Society from the Leeton Shire Council which enabled us to get the fragile and damaged map copied, restored then digitized with a number of copies made.

On the 20th May 2021 an official morning tea was held in the WC&IC Board room with copies of the maps presented to Yanco Agricultural High School (formally McCaughey's Mansion), Yanco Museum, Whitton Museum & Shire Library.

The original map is on permanent loan to the Leeton Museum.

Society President Tony Reneker recognised the generosity of the Leeton Shire Council and the ongoing partnership between our two organisations.



At the Presentation, a chuffed looking member Pat O'Callaghan with Mayor Paul Maytom and LSC General Manager Jackie Kruger

Photo: Karleen Reilly

THE ANSCOMBE DIARIES

Thanks go out to our treasurer Karleen Reilly, who liaised with the descendants of the Anscombe family in Wales.

The Anscombe's were part of the first European settlers in Leeton and they maintained diaries and records of their times in Leeton. The diaries had been in the family for years, but after corresponding with Karleen, they donated them to our Society along with several Photo Albums with photos of the farm and sites of Leeton.

They are in safe storage here, waiting to be thoroughly examined and digitized.

This is the beauty of having appropriate facilities in our new premises where we can have confidence in storing this valuable information.



Anscombe Diaries & Photo Albums



Photos Tony Reneker

LEETON'S FIRST TEST CRICKETER

Ask any local sports enthusiast from Leeton, "who has played Test Cricket for Australia" and you will get a quick response in the form of Mark Taylor. However, one of Whitton's current residents, Patricia Thomson, can claim fame to be the first Leeton Shire cricketer to don the Baggy Green. Patricia, or Pat or Thommo, depending on how well you know her, represented her country on the 1961 tour of New Zealand and the 1963 tour of England.

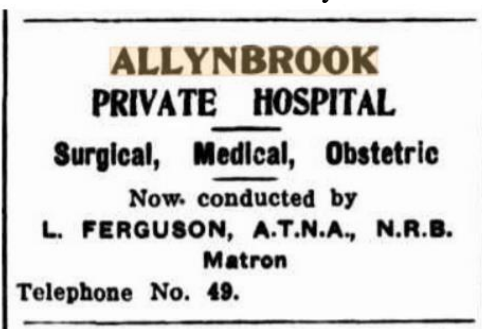


1963
Scrapbook of the Australian Women's
Cricket tour of England 1963 - Lorna
Thomas



Copy of Ticket to 2nd test against
England 1963 – State Library of NSW

Patricia has some significant historical links to Leeton and was born in 1937 at the Allynbrook Private Hospital which was situated on land which now houses the Leeton Soldier's Club. Her parents were Ronald Thomson and Mary Black.



Allynbrook Advertisement appearing in Murrumbidgee Irrigator 26.11.1937

Her grandfather, Reginal Lindsay Black was a notable Leeton resident and is credited with establishing the Leeton and District Bowling Club. In the 1950's Mr Black was the President of the Riverina District Bowling Association and he successfully lobbied the Leeton Shire Council to approve the construction of the L&D to allow the

game of lawn bowls be accessible to all.

He was also known for his efforts in establishing parks and gardens in Leeton and Black Park in Myrtle Street Leeton is named after him.



Black Park named after Patricia's grandfather R L Black

Her father Ron was the projectionist at the Roxy Theatre Leeton for a number of years but in 1940, when Patricia was only three years old, he received an offer he couldn't refuse from the Embassy Theatre in Sydney. He packed the family up and made the long and slow trip to Sydney by train, eventually settling in Charles Street Harbord. That became home and was where Patricia developed and honed her athletic ability. Remarkably, that one street would be the home of three future Australian Sportspeople. Apart from Patricia, Gordon Simpson was a surf champion who represented Australia at the International Surfing Championships in Hawaii in 1961 and was a friend of hers.

Ray Ritchie, who played Rugby League for Australia in the 1957 World Cup and coached Manly Warringah from 1981 to 1982 also lived in that same street and was a close friend of Patricia's.

Patricia spent most of her youth playing different sports but it was cricket in which she excelled and she was selected for New South Wales in 1958. Then in 1961 she was chosen for the Australian tour of New Zealand and then in 1963 she was again selected for the tour of England.

Chosen as an all-rounder, Patricia had a very successful tour making runs and taking wickets. Probably her best day on tour was the 23 June 1963 when she took an amazing 6 for 16 playing against Yorkshire. That was of course, apart from the day she met the Queen, but that's a story for another day.

Patricia, who has resided back in the Shire at Whitton for the past 20 years will be honoured later his year when she is inducted into the Leeton Shire Sporting Walk of Fame.



For the history buffs a Trivia Night is on at the Wade Hotel and for the 'night owls' Gatsby Cabaret Soiree at the Parlour 10.00pm.

Saturday will be packed with things to see and do commencing with the markets in Chelmsford Place, the Vintage Machinery Club showing their old machinery and wares, Vintage vehicles on display, Camel rides, Tutankhamun Roadshow beside the Gallery building and Miss Fisher 'The Crypt of Tears' exhibition in the Museum & Gallery.

The biggest drawcard at the 2019 Festival was the billy cart derby and it will be on the programme again to the delight of many kids and the bigger kids.



Billycart Derby 2019

Cocktails again at the Parlour and a specially written play 'Bloodshed at the Banquet' performed at the Yanco Agricultural Institute 6.00pm. Whitton Malthouse is hosting a Speakeasy evening at their premises at Whitton.

Again early on the Sunday morning the Hot Air Balloon Rides, a Vintage Trades and Treasures display followed by a High Tea at Yanco Agricultural Institute over the lunch mid afternoon timeslot and to round out the weekend Poetry in the Afternoon with Henry Lawson at the Uniting Church Hall.



Street Decorations

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An orientation morning will be held on Thursday 20th June for our members to familiarise themselves with where we can find our indexes, photos, school records and general information for when we are open to the public once again.

Patricia Thomson 2020

Photo Tony Reneker

Acknowledgements:

The Murrumbidgee Irrigator A Brief History of Leeton – A.E. Bowmaker
State Library of New South Wales – Scrapbook of the Australian Women's
Cricket Tour of England 1963

Interview -Patricia Thomson (2020) at Whitton. Interviewer-Tony Reneker

https://www.surfresearch.com.au/1960_Aust_Womens_Weekly.html

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ray_Ritchie,

LF&LHS resources - Wendy Senti

LEETON ART DECO FESTIVAL

Leeton's first Art Deco Festival under the new banner held in 2019 was a roaring success. Due to Covid 19 the 2020 Festival had to be cancelled along with the SunRice Festival and the Annual Show.

The Art Deco Committee have been working hard this year to organise a bigger and better Festival.

Being held over the weekend 2-4 July they are hoping for a better weekend weather wise with locals joining in and welcoming all the visitors who have booked to come to Leeton to attend the events.

Starting on the Friday a full day is planned with the Hot Air Balloons launching early in the morning, our Henry Lawson Cottage open each day to the public from 10.00am to 3.00pm with a visiting poet telling the story of Henry whilst he was living in the area 1916-17 at 11.00am & again at 1.00pm.

The Parlour is the place to be with Dance workshops and a cocktail making workshop during the afternoon followed by a Cocktail happy hour & a Harp Deco. A Pre Rollers Dinner at Pages on Pine in the evening followed by High Rollers at the Hydro, a Casino with entertainment by several of our special guests – The Gatsby Girls, Electro Swiggety and the Swing Katz.



Gatsby Girls