

## FORTY YEARS BACK

This December meeting completes the 40th year of the Illawarra Historical Society and truly marks the Society as one of considerable maturity. As a Foundation member it is a long way to look back to the formative years, but they are all very pleasant memories of enthusiasm and progress.

It was during the War when plans were made to form the Society, before any sign of peace except that coastal attacks had ceased. Thus, at the time there were few people with time for thought of jubilant entertainment; most active members of the community, which was only a fraction of what it is today, were working at reserved occupations in commerce, industry, the collieries and school teaching, together with medical and legal people.

The first suggestion of a local Historical Society was made by Capt. W.B. Nicholson who as far as I can remember was Harbour Master at Port Kembla, and with Bob Taylor, the veterinary surgeon and member of the Royal Australian Historical Society, an approach was made to C. Price Conigrave, General Secretary of the R.A.H.S. On Conigrave's suggestion a committee of interested people was formed, comprising Messrs. T.J. Donnelly, A.R. Jones, R.I. Ray, F.J. Spender, Bob Taylor and Capt. W.B. Nicholson. Messrs. Donnelly and Taylor were appointed Joint Acting Secretaries and the Mayor of Wollongong, Alderman J.J. Kelly, was approached.

The idea of an Historical Society was met with interest and enthusiasm, The Mayor called a meeting for 7.30p.m. on Tuesday, 5th December, 1944 in the old Wollongong Council Chambers on the corner of Crown and Kembla Streets, where some fifty people attended in the varnished wood panelled chambers.

Price Conigrave addressed the meeting on the objects and methods of working of local historical societies. He explained that the constitution of the R.A.H.S. did not provide for branch societies but accepted affiliation from local societies. On stressing that the main task in the formation of a society was the drafting of a constitution, the meeting, in disregard of all else, developed into a most lively series of motions and points of order, so much so that the meeting was closed on the election of a committee to draft a constitution for presentation to a general meeting to be held in the New Year. The following were elected to this committee:— Messrs. T.J. Donnelly, J.N. Harrison, A.G. Higgins, A.R. Jones and Tom A. Maguire, educationists, commercial and legal people, in addition to the original promoters, Cept. W.B. Nicholson and Bob Taylor, Alex P. Fleming was appointed Provisional Secretary.

Alex Fleming and I had been workmates for seven years and boarded together, Alex being an accountant in the blast furnace department of Australian Iron & Steel Ltd, where I was a metallurgical engineer and a shift foreman. I was a member of the Australian Railway Historical Society while Alex Fleming was very keen on becoming a treasurer or secretary of a society or soccer club. On going to the meeting, I was somewhat disappointed with the lack of historical discussion, but Alex

achieved his ambition with the secretaryship. Gordon Worland, surveyor at Corrimal Colliery, and Percy Cartwright, an engineer at A.I.S., Len White, manager of Metal Manufactures, Dr. Harry Maldon, dentist and Bill Wentworth were there, I think similarly impressed as I was.

With the constitution drafted, the first general meeting of the Society was held on Thursday, 1st February, 1945, again in the Council Chambers, and office bearers were elected. Harry Maldon had offered the Waiting room of his surgery, upstairs at the corner of Crown and Keira Streets, for the council meetings and was elected Patron. J.N. Harrison, I think inspector of schools, was President, A.G. Higgins and A.R. Jones Vice-presidents, Cyril Law from the Commonwealth Bank Hon. Treasurer and Alex Fleming Hon. Secretary. Bob Taylor was Hon. Research Secretary and Gordon Worland was elected to the Council together with Tom Maguire, H.S. Milne, W. Simpson and Capt. W. B. Nicholson.

Boarding together, I helped Alex with the mail and posting the Bulletin to the initial membership of some 110. We worked closely with Bob Taylor who, with the scarcity of transport during the War, offered his 'animal ambulance' which we affectionately knew as the dog cart, particularly when we shared with canine passengers.

Capt. W.B. Nicholson and A. G. Higgins withdrew from the Council during 1945; then Bob Taylor did not stand for re-election prior to leaving to take up a position in Harden. Gordon Worland was Hon. Research Secretary for 1946; then I took the position in 1947 at the time of the 150th anniversary of George Bass' discovery of the coal seam at Coalcliff in 1797, while Gordon Worland was elected President.

By now the War was over and, as a result of negotiations with Wollongong Council for accommodation for historical material at minimal rent, the Society was allowed the use of the concrete air raid shelter between the Council Chambers and the Post Office as the first archives; however, by no means organised. Nevertheless it provided the Society with a valuable windfall gain in photographs of early Wollongong as the Council had already made use of the shelter to store or discard records and framed pictures that once hung in Council Offices but had been removed when considered out of date.

Price Conigrave took a personal interest in the fledgeling Society and introduced members of the R.A.H.S. as speakers for the meetings held in Brandon Hall, downstairs at the corner of Crown and Atchison Streets, including Hon. Tom D. Mutch, James Jervis, Barney Dowd from the Lands Department, J.S. Metcalfe from the Public Library and P.W. Gledhill from the Manly-Pittwater and Warringah H.S. I was projectionist for the glass lantern slides of the ancient and varied 'Magic lanterns' these noted gentlemen brought to illustrate their addresses, but with the invention of the colour slide projector I was soon out of a job. Nevertheless the formation of the Society brought much interest and enthusiasm into Wartime Wollongong.

Cyril Law left on transfer to Cronulla and continued his interest in the Sutherland-Cronulla H.S. and now the only remaining Foundation members are Dr. And Mrs. Harry Maldon, Percy Cartwright, Tom Maguire, Dr. Bob Taylor, Bill Wentworth, Len White and myself.

J. L. N. Southern

20th November, 1984i