

ANNUAL REPORT 1993

It has been a great pleasure being president although I regret that my work commitments have lessened the time I have been able to devote to the Society. So often during the year, I have had to miss meetings and other Society commitments and have been thankful that other members of the Board have so willingly taken my place.

1994 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Society and a crucial time in its history. Few local historical societies have such a long and active history but many of our long term members are finding it more difficult to participate. We need to replenish our membership to ensure continuation of the Society. Increasingly, Australians are showing interest in their past and the Society has a valuable role to play in helping people appreciate that part of our heritage which affects the Illawarra.

During 1992, a great deal of effort was devoted to the renovation of the Museum. Work in 1993 slowed a little as people took a break and recuperated their strength. Tireless work by Joyce McCarthy, Amelia Pezzutto and Warren has resulted in the refurbishing of many of the displays.

Since the re-opening of the Museum, it has once again been a popular venue for school groups and other visitors. Margaret Christie continued her sterling work as Museum Coordinator and showed many school and other groups through the Museum. Volunteers from West Wollongong Lioness Club were also very helpful. Any one who has spare time, is encourage to become a Museum volunteer or to help in other ways around the Museum. There are always items to be cleaned and assistance with displays would be more than welcomed.

Throughout the year the Society held meetings in all months except January. The year began with an address at the February meeting by Michael Adams who gave a delightfully animated talk about Stanwell Park and the bushranger. Our March speaker took us to the icy climes of Antarctica. Leon Sawyer went to Casey Station in Wilkes Land in 1971. During his twelve months there, he worked as a cook and surgical assistant. Four years later, he returned for another twelve months. Leon used some of the 3,000 slides he took during his stays to illustrate his talk.

In April, members of the Society were taken beneath the waves at Corrimal beach. Our speaker was Tim Smith who is a marine archaeologist. Tim was involved in the assessment of the remains of the barque, *Queen of Nations*, which ran aground on 31 May 1881. Tim showed slides of the wreck and its cargo which were uncovered when a storm shifted the sands which had covered it for more than one hundred years. Seeing the wealth of heritage uncovered brought home the need to protect historic shipwrecks from senseless plunder and vandalism.

The annual general meeting was delayed until May. After the formal business session, Vice-President Frank Osborne gave a talk on the *Lycett Album*. Joseph Lycett was a well known artist of the early colonial period. Remarkably, an album of his paintings remained virtually unknown for many years. The album was owned by the descendants of La Trobe who was appointed Governor of Victoria in 1839. When the album was offered for sale, it was acquired by the National Library of Australia. The Library published a book of the paintings in 1990. In his talk, Frank pointed out the many significant details that Lycett had captured and highlighted their importance as a documentary evidence of Aboriginal life.

The lights dimmed and the long remembered theme music of the Movietone News filled the room when the Society met in June. For that meeting, the Society convened at the City Library and was treated to excerpts of the news which included footage of the second World War, Sir Robert Menzies and royal visits to Australia. For Many members, watching the old film brought back memories of afternoons and nights at the movies. First came the Movietone News, followed by the latest episode of the current serial to be followed by the main feature after interval. For those who listened hard, Jaffas could be heard rolling down the aisles of long ago theatres.

On Thursday, July 31st 1902, 94 miners and two rescuers were killed as the result of an explosion in the Mt Kembla Mine. Our July speaker, Henry Lee, recounted the disaster and its aftermath. He spoke of the failure to learn from the previous mine disaster at Bulli in 1887 and the effect which both events had on the local communities.

The development of the miner's lamp was the topic of the August meeting. Roy Hammond brought along a small sample of his lamp collection and entertained members with stories not only of the lamps but of life in coal mines. An electrical engineer, Roy has spent his working life in coal mines and has been part of the mines rescue service.

The Mitchell Librarian, Margy Burns, addressed the Society in September. Margy spoke eloquently of the Mitchell collection of the State Library of NSW and illustrated her talk with examples relating to Illawarra. A fairly recent resident of Coledale, Margy spoke about the effect of the local environment on her appreciation of Illawarra heritage.

Members who attended the October meeting had the unique experience of hearing Karen Jeffery relate her journey across the Gibson and Great Sandy deserts. Spurning the ease of the four wheel drive vehicle, Karen crossed these inhospitable areas on camel back. With three companions and seventeen camels, Karen made the journey in 84 days. During her talk, Karen recalled the contribution which camels have made to the development of Australia. Without camels, the telegraph line from Adelaide to Darwin would have taken longer to be provided and many outback stations would have been unable to receive supplies or to send their wool to market.

The November meeting was a gastronomic feast. Our speaker was Michael Conor who is the Education Officer at the Wollongong Botanic Gardens. Michael spoke about bush tucker and how Kooris sustained themselves from the land. Michael also illustrated the healing powers of Australian plants. During his talk, he prepared remedies and applied them to volunteers from the audience.

Instead of a formal speaker for the December meeting, the Society relied on its own resources. Members were asked to bring items and show them to the meeting. An eclectic array of objects surfaced. Money boxes, silver match boxes, dolls and a purse with a secret lock were among those items which entertained members. Frank Osborne highlighted the evening with his talk about the bushman's quartpot.

The Society lost one of its long time supports during the year. Bill McDonald died after a long illness and his passing signified the end of a particular era for the society. Apart from his continual assistance with the operation of the Society, Bill was an avid local historian and his works continue to be best sellers at the museum. Like Edgar Beale, Bill applied his legal training to historical research and his work was always flawlessly documented and will continue to be a valuable starting point for future local historians.

Much of the work of the Society falls upon a few loyal and hardworking members. I would like to pay tribute to all of the Board members who gave of their time unstintingly and without whose contribution, the Society could not function. It is necessary however to look to the future and find ways of attracting more members and of encouraging all members to be more active. Thanks are due particularly to Margaret Christie for providing supper after each meeting, to Cath Condell for her work as minute secretary, to Michael Organ as the Society's secretary and to Joe Davis who edits the Bulletin with such flair. In conclusion I would like to express my appreciation for the support provided by all members of the Society and especially the untiring and selfless contributions of Joyce McCarthy, Amelia Pezzutto, Frank Osborne and Warren Bellamy.