

THE Cedar Log

Issue No 168 – June 2026

Richmond-Tweed Family History Society Inc.

Ballina NSW Australia



Record crowds attended celebrations held at Lighthouse Beach to mark the end of World War II. Events included a concert, surfing display, treasure hunt and community singing. Ballina residents had significant roles during the war.

Photo courtesy Ballina Shire Council, published in the booklet "A Community at War", available in the Marie Hart Library.

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We acknowledge the Bundjalung people as the traditional custodians of the land and rivers where this journal is produced. We pay respect to their elders past and present and honour their culture, history and tradition of storytelling.

Richmond-Tweed Family History Society Inc.

(Incorporated in New South Wales)

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The Marie Hart Library: Opening Hours: 10 am to 4 pm Monday, Wednesday & Saturday. Closed 1st Saturday of the month 1pm – 4 pm and Public Holidays.

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Editorial

By Deb Warren

Welcome to my first official edition of The Cedar Log. I am excited to be taking on the challenge and grateful for the help and support I have received. As a reasonably new member I am so pleased to be a part of the society. It is so gratifying to associate with others who are as obsessed with family history research as I am when many just don't understand the attraction. In our 'club' we don't mind if the weather turns bad as it's a good excuse to pull out the research!

I am often found at the Marie Hart Library, even when I'm not on duty, and encourage others to come and visit to make use of its resources. There is always someone willing to have a chat about your family history and assist you with finding those elusive facts. Family history researchers just love a challenge.

This edition features a sample of stories I have received from presenters at our recent meetings covering the topics of *Myths, Legends and Family Secrets, Accidents, Near Misses and Survival* and *Women in Wartime*. Future editions will contain more stories on these and other topics. Grab a cuppa, put your feet up and start reading!



New members

Let's warmly welcome our new members:

1086	Margaret James	East Ballina
1087	Jacqui Baskerville	Ballina
1088	Janelle Mesner	Alstonville
1089	Robyn Ellis	Alstonville
1090	Leanne Doherty	Ballina

Also members rejoining after an absence:

540	Jean Ison	Ballina
884	Lalla Parkhill	Ballina

From the President

By Vicki Evans

This is the first issue of The Cedar Log under the stewardship of our new editor, Deb **Warren**. Deb is highly motivated and organised and is enjoying the challenge that the role of editor brings.

Carmel **Crosby**, as the former editor, has left a strong legacy of journal production, ably assisted by Judy **Cosgrove** as the proofreader and Liz **Marshall** in the role of layout design.

This year has seen strong attendance at the monthly meetings. Anecdotal and survey data indicates that members are by and large enjoying our meetings and the presentations. The suggestions for future topics and presentations, noted in the survey, are currently being considered, and the committee looks forward to bringing them to you in the future.

It has been very satisfying to have new faces at the podium at the last couple of meetings, and I hope we continue to have more. In my opinion, presenting is a rewarding experience for both the presenter and the audience, but especially for the presenter. I have found that in preparing for a particular topic, my research has brought new insights about my family tree and its members.

One of our goals is to have more members using the research room (Marie Hart Library) to further their research. The room has seen a little facelift; the start of our ongoing plan to make the room more inviting and a place that members regularly choose to use when researching. Our first step was the addition of some comfortable chairs and a coffee table to create a space for reading and reflection.

We would also like our room to be a place where a greater number of members come to support each other in their research, by sharing their skills and knowledge and/or seeking assistance. To this end in May we held the first of what we hope to be a number of ongoing skills training sessions, on *Powerpoint for Beginners*.

I look forward to your ongoing involvement in our meetings, our research room, and our community-building excursions and social club.

The Mariners Project

John Broadley - Member 841

The Mariners Project has been conducted by members of the Richmond-Tweed Family History Society over the last five years. It contains over 700 names of people associated with the Port of Richmond (Ballina) or those sea-going from the port, between 1840 and 1940. They include coastal and river boatmen, tugboat workers and pilots.

The project developed in three key areas: -

- The Pilot's Register of Seamen Engaged and Discharged 1888 to 1920
- Data listing individual mariners with relevant source information
- Collecting stories about each of these mariners

With the assistance of our patron, Martyn **Killion**, we received a digitised copy of the Pilot's Register from State Records (NSW Museums of History). In return we were asked to index the Register for them. This has been completed with Margaret **Schmitt** doing indexed data entry, and Richard **Goss** handling design and liaison with State Records. A hard copy of this work is available in the Marie Hart Library. It has been an excellent source for the next area of the project.

Scrutiny of books, documents and microfiche in the Marie Hart Library yielded many names of mariners. Newspapers accessed on *Trove* provided some names, and the Ballina Maritime Museum gave us access to what they *had*. Those



Ross Glover



L to R: Victoria Evans, John Broadley, Margaret Schmitt



Richard Goss

mariners have been listed by John **Broadley**, and ***Our Mariners*** is now available as an E-Resource, on computer in the Marie Hart Library.

The current version of ***Our Mariners*** contains some stories associated with individual mariners. These have been provided by Vicki **Evans**, Ross **Glover** and Lynn **Francis**, but hundreds more are needed. We will be happy to hear from any members willing to develop more stories, which can then be linked with the individual mariner's basic data. We can help you get started!

Vale Eldon Wright – Member 784

It is with deep regret and sadness that we received word of the passing of one of our long-term members, Eldon **Wright**. Eldon had been a member of the society for around twenty years. As well as being an active member, he held committee positions and later took on the responsibility for maintenance work in our research room. We extend our appreciation for his service to our society.

The Richmond-Tweed Family History Society extends our deepest sympathy to his family and friends at this sad time.

NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages Dates



The NSW BDM website allows researchers to enter a range of dates, but search results only give the year of the event. It is possible to

narrow down the search to establish the actual date quite simply. Having identified the year of the event you are researching, simply keep narrowing the date range until the specific date appears. Initially, search the first six months and the second six months. Then divide into three-month segments etc., gradually narrowing the date range until it is a specific day. After setting the search range, clicking on the 'Search' button will cause the result to disappear if the event is outside of the date range you entered. Keep narrowing until the result stays on the screen for the specific day. This technique works most of the time but some older records are not linked to a specific day.

Myths, Legends and Family Secrets

One of the Carter Family Myths

Ann Emery - Member 353

Until I began my journey into genealogy in 1990, I knew little of my father's family. Samuel Washington **Carter** was born in Trinidad in the British West Indies on 4 July 1904 and, when he died in 1965, he did not know where his parents were born.

I decided to reconnect with Dad's sister, Veronica **Peterkin** of Pompano Beach, Florida, who I had written to, on and off, since I was a child. We spoke on the phone, and she was delighted by my interest and willingly agreed to send me what she knew.



Sir Gilbert Carter

Aunt Veronica wrote of her paternal grandfather, Sir Gilbert Carter, who had been the Governor of Barbados. On another sheet was a family tree, as Aunt Veronica remembered it, stating that Sir Gilbert Carter was born in the Highlands of Scotland and was a Scottish Presbyterian.

Thinking that I had a relative who had been Governor of Barbados, the optimist in me thought it would be easy to find out more about my father's family. I contacted the Registration Office at the Law Courts in Barbados, who referred me to the Department of Archives, who directed me to the Barbados Museum and Historical Society. They wrote, confirming Sir Gilbert Carter was Governor of Barbados from 1904 to 1911. They sent a photo of Sir Gilbert Carter and a copy of his obituary which gave extensive reporting of his life, including the names of the four children of his first marriage - sons Otho, and Humphrey, and daughters Brie and another unnamed daughter - and a son, Robert, from his second marriage. I was on my way!

Gilbert Thomas Carter was born in 1848, the only son of Commander Gilbert Carter, whose family had a long naval history in Devon, England. In 1875 Gilbert Carter Snr. retired from the navy and was appointed Governor of the Leeward Islands.

Gilbert Carter had a distinguished record of service around the world as a representative of the British Government. His leadership qualities earned him a knighthood and a Knight Commander of St Michael and St George, bestowed on the Queen's Birthday in 1893, "for valuable and important service as Governor of the Colony of Lagos". In 1904 he was appointed Governor of Barbados and remained there until 1911. Who wouldn't be proud to have Sir Gilbert Carter as their great-grandfather?

Having discovered the Barbados link, I joined the Gold Coast Family History Society for guidance on how to research Dad's family in more detail. As my research focused on Trinidad and Barbados, I was directed to the local Research Centre of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints where, with the aid of the microfiche, I began my research.

I discovered that Dad's father, Alfred Clement Carter, was born on 15 July 1867 in Barbados and baptised in the Church of England in the parish of Christ Church on 1 March 1868. His parents were Benjamin Carter and Mary Elizabeth **Roberts**.

Benjamin's father, John Benjamin Carter, was born in the parish of St George, Barbados and his father, Benjamin, was married in the parish of St Thomas in 1779 in Barbados, but we have not been able to find his birth.

I went on to find that Alfred Clement Carter, Dad's father, was the second youngest of ten children, born between 1850 and 1869 in Barbados, across the parishes of St. George, St Michael and Christ Church. It was crystal clear that Sir Gilbert Carter, born in 1848 in Devon England, could not have fathered children born in 1850, and none of the children mentioned in his obituary matched the names in my family. Thus, he was not my great-grandfather as Aunt Veronica had stated.

With the evidence I received from the Barbados Museum and Historical Society, and my own research, I wrote to my Aunt Veronica advising her that, sadly, Sir Gilbert Carter was not our relative and sent her the photo. I received her reply advising that she was delighted to have a photo of her grandfather and had framed it and hung it on her wall. And so the myth lives on.

Sir Gilbert Carter was clearly a man of importance who our family looked up to with pride, as he shared the family surname. This journey was the first of many as I continue to search for the link between the Carters of Barbados and their British ancestors and seek to find the truth and debunk the myths.

Bunnings Fundraising BBQ

The society has many expenses to cover and we rely heavily on the fundraising efforts of the Bunnings BBQ team, coordinated by Carmel Crosby. Their hard work results in much needed funds and we are very grateful to them. The last BBQ was on Sunday 26 April and raised \$2152. Special thanks go to Ann and Trevor Emery who purchase and transport all the equipment and goods to and from the BBQ.

Contact the secretary (secretaryrtfhs1@yahoo.com) if you can spare a couple of hours to help at the BBQ. Dates are 21 June and 19 September.



Trevor Emery, Kerry Walker, Rachel Wright, Carmel Crosby, Judy Cosgrove, Ann Emery



Release of 1926 Irish Census

Those researching Irish ancestors will be interested to know that the 1926 census records have been released as of 19 April on the National Archives website.

<https://nationalarchives.ie/collections/search-the-1926-census/>

Being the first census conducted after the establishment of the Irish Free State, Census 1926 is a significant piece of history, providing a detailed snapshot of life in Ireland at the time. Records include the original census forms containing names, occupations, birthplace and information about marriages.

Accidents, Near Misses and Survival

A Railway Accident

Dawn Lotty – Member 924

My story is about an accident that occurred on 2 July 1902 near Katoomba, New South Wales, on the Blue Mountains rail line. I found the report of the accident when researching my husband Robert's maternal ancestors, the **Aubreys**, with their generations of railway men.

The New South Wales government commenced the construction of the Blue Mountains rail line in the 1860s, reaching Mount Victoria by May 1868, and Bathurst in 1876.

The rail line was a major engineering feat with the original zig-zag rail lines aiding the steep climbs, with tunnels, viaducts, deep cuttings, level crossings and tight curves. The mountainous terrain imposed specific limitations during the steam era, for every freight train had to manage the steep one-in-thirty-three gradients. A train's length was generally limited to twenty-six wagons with a brake or guard's van and a dedicated maximum load the locomotives could safely haul, and crucially brake effectively, on the steep descent toward Sydney.



A railway tricycle.

The events of 2 July are as follows. John **Cliff**, a ganger with sixteen years' experience, called into Katoomba Station at about 11.30 am and enquired about the scheduled train. He was told by the station master that it would leave Katoomba at 12.10 pm. He remarked that he would look out for it and immediately set out on his *tricycle* - a small, three-wheeled track maintenance

vehicle used by railway workers for track inspection and repair work. The train in question arrived at Katoomba station about 12.17 and the guard, James **Jones**, spoke with the station master while they unloaded parcels from the guard's van. The station master did not say anything about a worker being on the line.

Alfred **Squires**, 45, was an experienced engine driver and had previously driven this train - a J class engine - pulling twenty-five loaded wagons full of ballast. As they came around a bend not long after leaving Katoomba Station, Alfred saw John



J class engine and tender.

Cliff, about a hundred and fifty yards away, standing in the ‘6 foot’ – that is the space between two parallel, adjacent tracks – and pulling his tricycle off the line. Alfred sounded the train’s whistle and proceeded to apply the engine

brake.

The train was traveling about twelve or fifteen miles an hour. Despite every effort it proved impossible to pull up the heavily laden train until it had travelled twenty-five yards past where John Cliff had been standing. Alfred thought that John Cliff had seen the train coming and had jumped clear and was safe but thought the train had struck the tricycle.

Frank **Aubrey**, twenty-five, is my husband Robert’s maternal grandfather, described in official records as an engine driver but on this train he was a fireman. The train had only travelled about a mile when Frank was told there was a tricycle on the line. He could not see anything because of the curve in the tracks but applied the engine and tender brake and did all in his power to help stop the train.



Frank Aubrey

Looking over the side of the train, Frank saw a man lying face down in the ‘six foot’. He jumped down from the train and ran back along the track and although John Cliff was unconscious and still breathing, it was obvious by the traumatic

damage done to his body that he had been run over by an engine that weighed sixty-eight tons.

The guard, James Jones, also came running down the track to help. They made a hurried assessment of the situation and knew urgent medical treatment was needed, so with the help of the train driver, who secured the engine, they carried the injured man to the guard's van and then commenced the very difficult undertaking of reversing the train back to Katoomba station, sounding the whistle all the way.

The three men carried the injured man into a room at the station. By this stage you could imagine they would be emotionally distressed and their clothing heavily stained. A local doctor was called, and he found John Cliff unconscious, almost pulseless with irregular breathing and stated that any one of his many injuries were fatal. John died thirty minutes later. John Cliff was fifty-seven years old and left behind his wife Lucy and eleven children, the youngest being eighteen years.

The local newspaper picked up the story, identifying the men involved and where they lived and interviewing the doctor who disclosed all the details of John Cliff's injuries. They then went on to speculate whether alcohol was involved and suggested that as John Cliff had life insurance it might not have been an accident.

In 1902, railway workers involved in accidents received very limited support, often facing immediate suspension, investigation, and potential unemployment without pay. Support primarily came from trade unions like the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. This support was crucial as accidents often resulted in blame being placed on the driver.

On 5 July 1902 a coronial inquest was convened and widely publicised. The judge and jury, after hearing evidence of the accident and testimony from all concerned, conclusively dismissed all the rumours or allegations of wrong-doing and finding "no blame can be attached to any person".

I wanted to know what happened to the three men afterwards. It appears that Alfred Squires, still living in Penrith, continued to drive trains until around 1920. I found a James Jones at Paramatta in 1906 working as a railway porter. Meeting people on the platform sounds far better than being alone in a guard's van. I know Frank Aubrey had left Penrith, married and moved several times by 1907 while driving

trains on the Illawarra and Campbelltown line until he retired to Canterbury at the end of World War II and became a gardener for a string of widowed ladies.

References

THE INQUEST., Mountaineer (Katoomba, NSW: 1894 - 1908), Friday 4 July 1902, page 3

Social Club

Rous Hotel Ballina 4pm – 6pm

Members, family and friends are welcome to come along to the monthly social club gathering, held at the Rous Hotel on the Wednesday following the general meeting. Meals are available from 5.30 and it is a great opportunity to catch up in a casual setting.



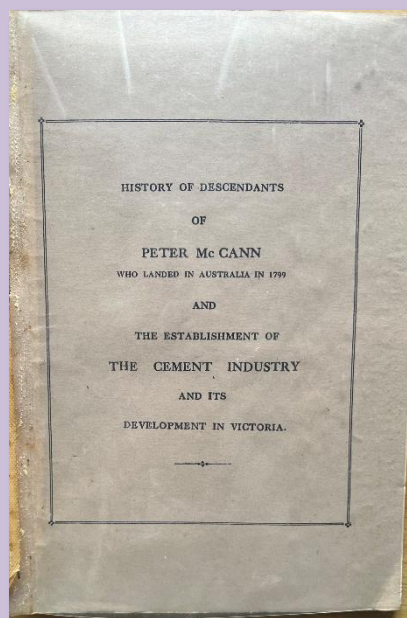
RTFHS on Paradise FM

Listen out for our segment on paradise FM (101.9), airing on the second Wednesday of each month at 10.30 am.

Myths, Legends and Family Secrets

The Myth of Peter McCann

Jill McCann – Member 1010



When I began looking at my family history over forty years ago, I was given some advice by an old friend of my father's, a historian who had written books which uncovered a lot of previously unknown material.

He said, "there are three things that Australians are afraid of finding in their family tree: a convict, an illegitimate birth and an Aboriginal Australian."

Now, you must remember this was a long time ago – about 1982, I think. I am happy to report that I have found all three of those embarrassing things in my research, but even happier to report that they are no longer considered embarrassing!

I think the convict ancestor thing changed with the Australian Bicentenary in 1988 when we started to think differently about our beginnings. Finding a convict now is a bit like finding royalty.

The illegitimacy concern has gradually disappeared as more and more young people don't marry before they have children – in fact marriage itself is no longer seen as the only goal for young women.

And I think our understanding and treatment of Aboriginal Australians – while it is far from ideal – has come a long way too.

I am going to deal with just one of those secrets - The Myth of Peter **McCann** - my husband's fourth great-grandfather.

Myth number one was that Peter McCann, although a convict, had been an honourable one. He had been arrested for his participation in the rebellion of the United Irishmen in 1798 (the Wolfe Tone Rebellion).

The alternative version of this was that he was a political prisoner who had been a soldier in the British Army and had refused to fire on his fellow Irishmen during the 1798 uprising. The descendants of Peter's eldest grandson, Charles John McCann, all heard this story.

Myth number two came from the descendants of another of Peter's grandsons, also Peter McCann, who wrote a booklet called:

"History of descendants Of Peter McCann, Who Landed in Australia in 1799 And the Establishment of the Cement Industry and its Development in Victoria."

It begins like this:

"As nearly as I can calculate, my Grandfather, Peter McCann landed in Australia (then New Holland) in the year 1799; and I believe my Grandmother came out in the same ship. He was a man of splendid physique.

He was six feet three inches in height, stout in proportion, and weighed sixteen stone. As my Grandmother would say, he was as straight as his own ram-rod.

The Governor obviously realised he had in him the making of a good colonist; as he selected him, along with others, to till and work a large area of land. Under the bounty system then existing, he was provided with implements, provisions, seed and cattle until such time as he could make the land yield a return.

Whether any special affection had manifested itself between my Grandparents up to this time, I am not in any position to say, but it seems fairly evident that their marriage synchronised with my Grandfather's first efforts as a colonist.

My father described my Grandmother in terms of never-ending praise. She was his beau-ideal of a wife and mother. It is clearly evident that she was a frugal and industrious wife and an affectionate mother. Because of the fact that my Grandmother had been brought up to farm life and my Grandfather possessed of great physical strength, activity and of great capacity of

industry, together with the high price obtained for their produce, they quickly began to prosper in life.

Their success, however, seems to have been short lived for when my father could not have been more than three years old, my Grandfather in crossing a narrow log bridge over a creek in high flood, missed his footing and was drowned. By this sudden and unfortunate accident, my Grandmother was left a widow with two little children, my Father Nicholas McCann being the eldest.”

Almost all of this is untrue!

1. Peter McCann landed in Australia in January 1800 on the convict ship, “*Minerva*”. This ship also carried many of the rebels of the 1798 uprising.
2. Peter was not a soldier - he had been sentenced to seven years for robbery.
3. His wife, Mary **Fitzgerald** was also transported for robbery. She arrived in 1802 on the “*Atlas I*”.
4. It is extremely unlikely that an Irishman of Peter’s class would be of “splendid physique”, particularly after incarceration in the Dublin Provost, and then on a convict ship. It does seem, however, that he was over 6 feet tall, which was unusual at the time.
5. Peter and Mary married at St John’s Church, Parramatta on 9 January 1804. Their son, Nicholas (born 20 November 1803) was baptised on that day.
6. Like all convicts, Peter was assigned to work by the Government – in his case as a labourer. He was working for Mr Thomas **Jamison** of Parramatta early in 1803 when he was charged with drunkenness, insolence and neglect of duty and sentenced to fifty lashes.
7. Peter’s death was recorded in the “*Sydney Gazette*” on 26 October 1806:
“Peter McCann, a labourer, was unfortunately drowned on Tuesday night at Hawkesbury, in attempting to swim across Rickerby’s Creek.”
8. Mary, a young widow with two small children, quickly married again (the best means of survival in those harsh times) and had two more children. When her

second husband died, she married a third, and then after his demise, a fourth husband. All were convicts.

The branch of the family that this book comes from were builders and stonemasons who became the founders of the cement industry in Victoria. Thus, their business and social positions were such that it is unsurprising that they believed and promulgated the fake story about their heritage.

Even in our branch of the family, the timber-getters and small farmers who were descended from Peter through Charles John McCann did not talk about their origins, and it is doubtful whether they even knew until two of us in my generation began to investigate.

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1828 New South Wales, Australia Census

Australia Marriage Index, 1788-1949

Sansom, Richard. *With Conviction – Peter McCann, Minerva 1800*, (Balgowlah, N.S.W: R. Sansom, 1996)

W. B. McCann, *History of descendants of Peter McCann, Who Landed in Australia in 1799 and the Establishment of the Cement Industry and its Development in Victoria*. (Private print, copy in the State Library of Victoria).

Sydney Gazette, 26 October 1806.



Become a contributor to the Cedar Log

The Cedar Log features articles written by our members, often after presenting their stories at our monthly meetings. If you have any interest in writing an article for the journal, whether based on a presentation or not, please get in touch. Writing

skills are not a requirement, we can help pull it into shape for publication. The important thing is to get your story out there!

Accidents, Near Misses and Survival Wagners and Maritime Mishaps

Robyn Hilan – Member 488

William Wagner Jnr.



William Wagner Jnr

William **Wagner**, the son of William Wagner and Mary Elizabeth **Felsch**, was born at Ulmarra, New South Wales, on 24 February 1875.

Later the Wagners relocated to Woodburn, and it was at nearby Coraki that William married Mary Ellen **Hurley** in 1899. She was 16 at the time.

William Wagner Snr worked as a maritime engineer for **Davis Bros** and **Burgess** of Coraki. The boats carried passengers, milk/cream and other commodities on the Richmond River, mainly between Ballina and Lismore.

His son followed in his footsteps and also worked on the river boats. In 1900 he was registered as a third-class engineer (merchant marine).

At some time between 1901 and 1903 William and his wife and children moved to Sydney and lived in Balmain. William worked on vessels operating between Sydney and Newcastle, in particular the *Maud Weston* and the *Queen Bee*.

The *Maud Weston* was a ketch-rigged steamship built in 1901 at Port Stephens. She was a cargo vessel familiar at Port Stephens, Newcastle and Sydney. She mainly carried coal but was also involved in rescuing two small fishing boats off Newcastle and in several salvage operations, including one at Norfolk Island in 1903.

The wreck of the *Maud Weston*.

With William on board as engineer, the *Maud Weston* left Newcastle on Thursday 11 November 1904 but ran into difficulties after a few hours. Apparently, all went well until the vessel was abreast of Catherine Hill Bay, when she began to leak

badly. Wagner suspected a plank had fallen off the hull. Captain **Weston** ordered the chief mate, the cook, two firemen and four sailors to take to the small boat whilst he and William Wagner stayed behind to attempt to beach the vessel at Boat Harbour.

After the incident, William Wagner was interviewed by a journalist and his report published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. This is part of what I read:

“At this time the water was up to my hips in the engine-room, and it was with great difficulty that we managed to keep her going, as the engine was throwing the water in all directions. We, however, managed to run the steamer on to some rocks which jut out from Terrigal Highland, when the crew in the boat came alongside and took us to the shore.”

“We at once made our way ashore, but the captain decided to remain by the vessel while we made our way home. It was 6 o’clock in the evening when we set out walking for Gosford, which was about 14 miles distant, and as it was raining hard at the time we did not make very good progress. About 9.30 p.m. we reached Erina, where Mr. **Smailier** was good enough to put us up for the night. Early this morning we borrowed a couple of sprint carts and drove into Gosford, from when we came to Sydney by train.”

Phew! What a near-miss! What an escape!

William’s luck did not hold, however. He joined the *Queen Bee* as the engineer. She too foundered four kilometres north of Broken Bay in 1922 – but William was not aboard that time.

The *Queen Bee* – William’s accident.

About midnight on 18 August 1908 William was working on the *Queen Bee* at the coal wharf near Bathurst Street.

It was another wet night! Apparently, he was unloading wood and was stepping from the wharf to the vessel when his foot caught in his mackintosh. He fell backwards, heavily striking his head on the stringer of the wharf, then rolled into the water. William was quickly hauled out and taken to Sydney Hospital but at his request went home a few days later. Unfortunately, his condition worsened and he died at the Balmain Cottage Hospital on 30 August 1908.

The coroner's verdict was - "effects of injuries accidentally received through slipping on his mackintosh and striking his head on a wharf at the foot of Bathurst Street, Sydney." His death certificate states his "death was due to meningitis due to a fracture of the base of the skull."

Curse or Co-incidence?

William Wagner Senior.

William Wagner Snr, also a maritime engineer, died whilst a passenger on a riverboat on the Richmond River. He had been visiting his daughter near Lismore and was returning to Ballina on one of **Davis** Brothers' river boats. The driver, one of the Felsch family relatives, realized he was missing and went back to look for him. He was found at Fig Tree Bend. He had suffered a heart attack, fallen into the water, and drowned before anyone realized he was missing.



William Wagner Snr

William Wagner Junior, also a maritime engineer, escaped one shipwreck only to trip over his raincoat, fracture his head, and fall into Sydney Harbour.

Allen Wagner Hilan

Allen Wagner **Hilan**, my father, another maritime engineer, worked at the Broadwater Sugar Mill. In the cane season he skippered the *Kyogle*, a boat which towed the heavily loaded sugar cane barges to the mill. He had a heart attack while checking a problem with one of the punts and fell into the Richmond River. Some people on the bank attracted his deckhand's attention, and Trevor, who was driving the boat, made a super-human effort and hauled him back on board.

In 1970, while on that same boat, Dad had another coronary episode. He took two paracetamol tablets, brought the boat to the mill, climbed twenty-five rungs of a ladder up to the wharf and was driven (in a five-ton-truck) from Broadwater to Ballina Hospital. He survived a second coronary episode that night but died a year later due to numerous heart issues.

My advice?

If your name is ‘Wagner’ don’t become a maritime engineer and restrict your water activities to fishing from the bank!



Allen Hilan on board the Kyogle.

Resources/References

Various BDM Certificates

Correspondence – Archive Authority of NSW

The Engineer’s Narrative. Sydney Morning Herald (NSW: 1842 - 1954), Saturday 12 November 1904, page 11

Collier Engineer’s Death. Evening News (Sydney, NSW: 1869 - 1931), Saturday 5 September 1908, page 7

Coroner’s Index



Duty Officers Needed

If you have three hours a month to give, we would love it if you could join our duty officer team. The Marie Hart Library is open Monday, Wednesday and Saturday and we need more of our members as duty officers to keep it open as a valuable resource for family history researchers.

Training and assistance is given to new duty officers.

Please contact Jill McCann (jillymccann@gmail.com) if you can help.

Members' Survey 2026 Report

Responses

We received a total of 36 responses, being approximately 33% of the membership. Some surveys were not fully completed and questions were omitted. Hopefully in future we will be able to offer an online version.

What we are doing well

The overall response was very positive with members praising the society and the support it offers for researchers.

Research service was very much appreciated although only 13 respondents had used it.

The Cedar Log is well-regarded, with 28 respondents reporting they read it cover to cover.

Monthly Meetings are very well liked by members, a total of 32 people attending always or often. Comments were overwhelmingly positive. Suggestions for more instructional presentations on how to research echo those above. (Our July meeting reflects this).

The quality of the monthly meetings hinges totally on the members' presentations. We see the same speakers often and need to encourage other members to give it a go. Introducing new audiovisual technologies such as Canva could help those who lack confidence to present.

Things We Could Improve

Marie Hart Library

Usage of the Marie Hart Library appears low with only a handful of members using it more than quarterly. A third of respondents use the resources rarely or never. Some are limited by the distance needed to travel but many are missing out on valuable resources and assistance. Initiatives to promote the facilities eg Open Day, research techniques sessions and articles highlighting resources available could help. Better orientation for new members may also assist with making them comfortable accessing the library. The management committee are developing several strategies to address this issue.

Website and Facebook page.

Awareness and use of these resources is low. Issues with the website has restricted access, while possible low Facebook participation rates in general could explain low usage. We could promote it more at meetings. Obviously, a dedicated Facebook coordinator and website manager will help also.

The website is being addressed and will hopefully be up and running soon.

Members' interests - Capturing and promoting research interests of members, e.g. family names, was frequently suggested. A process has been created to establish a register of members' interests.

Cedar Log - contribution

18 respondents said they would be prepared to write articles, although some members lack confidence. 14 people said they would be willing to write an article with assistance. These people should contact the editor who can facilitate a writing partner to help them. One honest respondent admitted to laziness as the reason they hadn't written an article! Anyone who said they would help with production should also get in touch with the editor who will contact helpers as needed.

Research Focus

New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, Ireland, UK and Scotland all emerged as popular geographic locations for research. Specific resources for these areas will be promoted in coming events and editions of the Cedar Log. In future, we hope to help members form special interest groups to assist each other with any specialised areas of research.

Conclusion

The Members' Survey has provided the management committee with a valuable snapshot of attitudes of the members and will form the basis of a range of strategies aimed at addressing the issues raised. We thank all those members who completed the survey.

Ballina Women in Wartime

Marlene Lester - Member 656

-----1939-----

February.

My mother, Mavis **Dunstan**, a Lismore dressmaker, married my father, Ballina carpenter Jack **Pickup**, in Lismore. On their way back to Ballina after a short honeymoon, they called in to see Nana and Pa Dunstan. Nana gave them lots of seedlings of vegetables and flowers to cultivate in the gardens that they would make in their new home, and some newly hatched chickens. Having helped Nana in the vegetable gardens during the Depression, Mum knew what to do with what.

Mum and Dad moved into a house in Moon Street, near the corner of Burnett Street, Ballina, New South Wales, where Mum began digging garden beds and, in time, my oldest brother Bert, Mum and Dad's first child, was born.

3 September.

World War II began for Australia.

-----1940-----

March.

With the scarcity of building jobs making work unreliable for a carpenter, Dad bought a run-down milk run and cart and horse, gradually building it up, with mate Henry **Faulks** of North Creek supplying him with the milk. During his deliveries to Ballina Hospital, Matron would tell him the sex of babies born during the night and ask him to inform the fathers when passing their houses.¹

-----1941-----

March.

Dad, accepting the offer of a job at the Ballina Slipway, sold his milk run and horse and cart.

July.

My brother Art, Mum and Dad's second child, was born.

November.

Blackout drills began throughout New South Wales, including Ballina, when all residents were to carry out air raid precautions, preparing them for potential night-time attacks. They were to cover windows and doors with heavy curtains or black paint and remove exterior lights. Many volunteers and police patrolled the streets at night to ensure compliance.

13 November.

Ballina's practice blackout test was held, along with most towns in the area. Unfortunately, Dad had to work late that day and was unable to help Mum. She was able to cover the windows, but when it came to covering the fanlight above the front door, she just couldn't get the cover to the top. This was discovered by one of the men patrolling the streets, who very loudly banged on the door, waking the baby and terrifying Mum. After explaining that she wasn't tall enough to cover the fanlight and Dad was still at the Slipway, working, she was severely reprimanded for not telling Dad to do it before he went to work that morning. Colonel **Lorenzo** must have felt sorry for Mum and, at the conclusion of the test, when he phoned the Minister for National Emergency Services, R. J. **Heffron**, he reported: *BALLINA: No lights were to be seen*. Whereas for Lismore, their performance was so bad, Heffron ordered another practice blackout to be held the following Thursday.²

December.

Japan, already at war with China, attacked British, Dutch and American territories in Asia and the Pacific and it was expected Australia would also become a target, because of their support of Britain in the Pacific.

24 December.

A meeting, which all citizens were asked to attend, was held in Ballina Masonic Hall, to discuss what everyone should do if incendiary or other bombs were dropped on or near their houses.

As there was always the possibility of the telephone system being put out of action, a number of volunteers were required to act as runners between the wardens and the chief warden, fire brigade, first aid posts, etc. The town was divided into seven sectors, with an eighth at East Ballina. Dad's mother Pearl Pickup, my grandmother, became warden for Sector Five.³

Because everything was rationed during the war, some men living on farms on the Lennox Head side of North Creek would go fishing for more food. One night Arthur **Smart** and his brother went fishing for blackfish and cod from Flat Rock. It would turn out to be the last time they went fishing there during the war. While using their torches to attract the fish, they saw a submarine close to shore and noisy Japanese sailors were rowing a small boat to the spring where they collected fresh water. After that night the men were too afraid to fish there.⁴

Another evening, keen fisherman Samuel **Hamilton** of Broken Head was fishing on the rocks at Kings Beach, below Broken Head, when he saw a Japanese submarine come in. When he saw Japanese sailors row a little boat to shore, he hid in the scrub while he watched them getting water from the spring.⁵

At a public meeting held in the North Creek School, it was decided that in the case of an invasion by Japan, the families on the farms would go, with their cattle, inland to an area around Tabulam. Two men would stay behind to destroy the houses and machines, should the Japanese arrive.⁶

At that time there wasn't a coast road, so cars travelled along North Creek Road then turned right into Skennars Head Road, driving past the grove of palms and across paddocks to Skennars Head and Flat Rock. It was Sally **Lems'** job to open and close the paddock gates. If it was dark, she walked in front of her dad's car carrying a shielded hurricane lamp so he could see the way. One night a booming voice came from out of the quietness of the dark, "Put that light out!". Sally jumped and shook in terror until her father told her it was the warden on duty on the cliff.⁷

31 May.

Earlier that year, after three Japanese midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour, a torpedo from one of them sank HMAS *Kuttabul*, killing nineteen and wounding ten naval ratings (personnel). When news of this reached Ballina, a warden was employed to watch the sea at night.

As fear of the Japanese spread through towns and villages, all Japanese people living in Australia were arrested and interned, including Ballina's popular Japanese laundryman, Henry **Narka**.⁸

By then almost every harbour in the Commonwealth took part in the Small Craft Program. When Balmain ship repairer S.G. **White**, a member of the committee allocating contracts for the construction of small boats, visited Ballina, he found the Ballina Slipway and Engineering Co. in receivership, and bought it from **Wood & Son**. Included were the existing contracts for building three types of small vessels and repairing US Navy patrol boats.

During the war there were over fifty men, including my carpenter Dad, working full-time and overtime at the slipway, under Stewart **White**, building and repairing vessels, up to seventy-footers, for the US Army and Navy. They included American APc-class small coastal transport and patrol vessels, brought to Ballina to have their timber bottoms replaced due to the effect of teredo worms while on prolonged service in the tropical waters around New Guinea. Other vessels, including 130 feet long US Navy YMS-class mine sweepers, were also serviced. They transported supplies, personnel and munitions in the 'island-hopping' campaign to the north of Australia. Many of the ships were under threat of air, sea and submarine attack.⁹

When the slipway carpenters, including Dad, finished building a seventy-footer boat for the US Navy, a launching ceremony was organised which a visiting American captain was to attend and to which the families of the slipway workers were invited.

Mum took Bert and Art, both dressed in a white suit and tie she had made for them, possibly from her wedding frock, to the launching ceremony. The American captain who was to launch the boat arrived, and when he looked around at all those who were there to watch the launch, he spotted Art and approached Mum, asking if he could hold him. He said he was missing his son in America, who would be around the same age as Art and he hadn't seen him for a long time. Mum of course handed Art to the captain, who held him until the launching was over before returning him to her.¹⁰

November

My sister Joy was born, Mum and Dad's third child.

-----**1943**-----

It was important to maintain a form of normality in the town, particularly for the women, so the Annual Spring Flower shows continued to be held.

-----1944-----

15 September.

At the 14th *Annual Methodist Spring Flower Show*, held in the Masonic Hall, Mum was highly commended for her 'Arranged bucket, without wire', and won first prize for her 'Float bowl without block'; first prize for her verbenas and first prize for her 'Decorated table'. She also won first prize for her strawberries in the produce section. Creating all those garden beds and using chook poo fertilizer was worth it. Nana would have been proud of her!¹¹

Maintaining normality for the kids was also important and, despite some teachers having left to fight in the war, schools remained opened with, if necessary, retired teachers returning to teach and some classes combining into one.

19 September.

My brother Bert, by then aged five, began his schooling at Ballina Infants School. On his first day there he met another boy in his class called Albert. They would remain best friends for the rest of their lives. Dad was still working as a shipwright when Bert started school.

Another normality maintained during the war was Ballina's Baby Health Centre which opened from 2pm-5pm every Friday, while appointments for private visits with the sister-in-charge could be made for Friday mornings.

Between July 1939 and September 1942, 891 babies were taken to the centre, with numbers continually increasing. This was an important outing for Ballina women with babies and young sons and daughters, to have them weighed and to discuss problems with the nurse and chat with their friends, particularly if any had husbands injured, killed or missing at war.

By December 1944 numbers attending the centre had increased to such an extent that the centre was looking for a new, larger, building.¹²

-----1945-----

15 August.

War ended in Australia.

References

1. Wilson, Hilary, *Ringling the Bell Backwards, Memories of Early North Creek and Lennox Head*, compiled for the Lennox Head Heritage Committee, published c.2003, p. 182.
2. *The Northern Star*, 14.11.1941, p.4.
3. Ibid., 23.12.1941, p.7.
4. Wilson, Hilary, op. cit., *The Chilcotts*, by Peggy & Chilcott, p.39.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Wilson, Hilary, op. cit., *Sally Buntine (nee Lems)*, p.145.
8. *Wartime on the Richmond 1939-1945*, Richmond River Historical Society, Lismore, p.17.
9. Ibid., p.33.
10. Ibid., p.33.
11. *The Northern Star*, 16.9.1944, p.5.
12. Ibid., 29.1.1945, p.5.



Distribution of the Cedar Log

Members are encouraged to select the electronic version of the journal, although we understand this is not always desirable. Due to increased postage costs, distribution of the paper copy of the journal in the local area will be as follows:

- Journals will be available at the Players Theatre at the monthly meeting in the month of publication – March, June, September and December (at the Christmas party).
- Uncollected journals will be placed in the Marie Hart Library where they can be collected by members during opening hours in the month following the meeting.
- Any journals still uncollected will be taken to the next monthly meeting for collection.
- Uncollected journals will then be posted.

It would be appreciated if those wanting a printed journal could arrange to collect it promptly.

Gleanings of Journals in the Marie Hart Library

By Janine Thomson – Research Officer

Think Outside the Box - Here are plenty of new strategies to try if you have hit a brick wall.

Asylum Records – explains how to find if your Victorian/Edwardian forebear was in a mental hospital.

Crime and Punishment – A wealth of online records can help you uncover a British forebear's misdeeds.

Around Britain -- Cumbria. Finds new facilities and digital collections for research in Cumbria.

Who Do You Think You Are – November 2025 - Page 14, 28, 35 & 64

Family Trees – discusses whether your tree should be online or offline.

National School Records – explains how to make the most of the massive collection of UK school registers available on Findmypast.

Animal Magic – celebrates the incredible contributions made by animals in WW1

Around Britain – Dumfries & Galloway. Find out about a new heritage hub in south-west Scotland.

Who Do You Think You Are – December 2025 - Page 29, 38, 56 & 64

10 Tips for Common Names – hard won advice to end the nightmare of researching common names.

Christmas in the Workhouse – how our Victorian ancestors spent Christmas in the Workhouse.

Around Britain – Merseyside. Revisits a former industrial powerhouse famous for its maritime heritage.

Who Do You Think You Are – Christmas 2025 – Page 14, 56 & 64

50 Websites to Watch – unmissable online resources that will make 2026 a bumper year for historians.

Who Do You Think You Are – January 2026 – Page 14

The Dual Lives of Sir John Franklin – from the icefields of the Arctic to convict-filled Tasmania, this is a story of discovery, duty and disaster.

A Sip to Silence – In 1829, a deadly dose of arsenic in a bowl of soup destroyed two colonial families.

Traces – Edition 33 – Page 8, & 24

Society and Journal Details

The Richmond-Tweed Family History Society Inc. was established in 1983 to serve the family history needs of researchers, initially with a special interest in north-east New South Wales, Australia, in the area bounded by the Richmond and Tweed Rivers, often referred to as the Northern Rivers.

The Marie Hart Library (MHL) holds numerous local records including the Local Schools Admission Registers, cemetery and burial records, and honour and memorial rolls from many locations within the Northern Rivers, plus death and funeral notices and obituaries from *The Northern Star* (1876 – 2020).

Over the years, the library has expanded and now holds a wealth of information from across Australia including electoral rolls, historical and pioneer records, war records, shipping lists, probate records, landholder returns, Colonial Secretary papers and cemetery books. There are family history journals from within Australia and overseas, in hard copy and electronic form. The latter can be accessed on the computers in the MHL or from home.

Access is available to microfiche, CDs and computers connected to genealogical websites, to which we subscribe, including *FindmyPast*, *Ancestry* and the *Biographical Database of Australia*. We are also a *FamilySearch* affiliate, which gives access to more than the standard *FamilySearch* site. Ask the member on duty during opening hours if you need assistance with any of the library's resources.

Family History Research Requests can be done by the Society for a fee of \$15 per hour. Please email the secretary with your request.

The Cedar Log – Journal of the Richmond-Tweed Family History Society Inc. Published March, June, September and December

The editor would be pleased to accept articles for inclusion in this journal. Members' input is important and makes for interesting and diverse reading and you might be lucky enough to connect with someone who has read your article, either in Australia or overseas. We would love to hear about how you broke through a brick wall, any interesting information you have found out about an ancestor or any research sources or techniques that others may find helpful. Ideally, articles should be sent by email to editorcedarlog@gmail.com but hard copy is also welcomed. Contribution deadline is 6 weeks before the month of publication. The format preferred is Times New Roman font; 11 point; single spacing. Please have any surnames in bold the first time they appear in your article after the heading. Add sources or references at the bottom of your article if possible. Please add your contact details as the editor may need to discuss editing of material submitted for publication. It is your responsibility to ensure that your article does not infringe copyright. The society is not responsible for the views of authors. **Items remain the copyright of the Richmond-Tweed Family History Society and/or the author.**

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Monthly Speakers

February – Myths, Legends and Family Secrets.

Coordinator – Jill McCann.

Speakers – Jill McCann, Jan Ousby, Victoria Evans, Robyn Hilan, Ann Emery.

Myths and legends can arise through a desire to elevate ancestors for purposes of social prestige and personal pride. Family secrets are often necessitated by social stigma of the time. Family history research can uncover the truths behind these stories. We heard how sharing a name can lead to mistaken identity, how modern attitudes to convict ancestors can free up families to acknowledge their true origins and how facts long buried, such as bigamy, will eventually be brought to light. Read about Jill's family myth and also Ann's grandfather's namesake mix-up in this edition.

March - Accidents, Near Misses and Survival

Coordinator – Vicki Evans.

Speakers – Robyn Hilan, Dawn Lotty, John Broadley, Jan Ousby (substituted by Ross Glover).

Traumatic events can define the lives of our ancestors for generations to come. Revisiting these events can throw light on the consequences for families that linger long after the original incident. We heard of tragic workplace accidents impacting our speakers' families and the national tragedy that was the Granville Bridge Disaster. Robyn's cautionary tale is included in this edition.

April – Women in Wartime

Coordinator – Deb Warren.

Speakers –Marlene Lester, Judy Cosgrove, Deb Warren (substituted by Ross Glover).

Australian women played a transformative and vital role during both the world wars, acting as a "home front" army that kept the economy functioning, supporting soldiers on the battle fronts, and, for the first time, entering the paid workforce in large numbers. Women were directly engaged in the field as well, working as nurses and doctors and, in one case highlighted at our meeting, as a resistance fighter. Marlene's story revealed the day to day lives of people in our local area during World War II, when the enemy were a little closer than most of us realise. Read Marlene's interesting memoir in this edition.

May – Creative Family Members

Coordinator – Judy Cosgrove.

Speakers – Jann Rowe and Sally-Anne Donnelly, Jill McCann, Leigh Wilson, Carmel Crosby, Vicki Evans, Ross Glover.

This month we learned of distinguished artists among the ancestors of our speakers with some very interesting presentations about their life and work. We heard about Leigh's maternal grandfather, an eminent butterfly collector (Frank Milton **Angel**); a silhouette artist (Isabella **Beetham**) and her inventor husband (Edward Beetham) from whom Carmel descends; a significant but little recognised colonial artist (Florence Ada **Fuller**) and a somewhat better-known artist (John Constable). We were also treated to beautiful examples of needlework and handcrafts passed down in Jann and Sally-Anne's family by their grandmother, Edna Mabel **Latham**. The life and works of Augustus Welby Northmore **Pugin** was the final item of the day and Ross Glover's presentation did his 3x great-grandfather proud.

Do try to come along to our monthly meetings to share the stories and find out what's happening in the society. If transport is a problem we can help. Just reach out to one of the committee members.



February speakers: Jill McCann, Robyn Hilan, Vicki Evans, Ann Emery, Jan Ousby.

MONTHLY SPEAKERS



March speakers: Dawn Lotty, Robyn Hilan, John Broadley, Jan



April speakers: Judy Cosgrove and Marlene Lester



May speakers: Jann Rowe, Ross Glover, Vicki Evans, Judy Cosgrove, Leigh Wilson, Carmel Crosby, Sally-Ann Donnelly (Jill McCann not pictured).



Society events

Society meetings are at the Players Theatre, 24 Swift Street, Ballina at 2pm on the first Saturday of each month. There is no meeting in January or December.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Contact the secretary or the coordinator if you would like to participate in one of the presentations listed below.

Saturday 6 June Meeting: Cemeteries and Epitaphs: Tales from the Grave. Coordinator Ross Glover.

Sunday 21 June: Fundraising BBQ at Bunnings Ballina 9am-4pm.

Saturday 27 June: Marie Hart Library Open Day 10am-4pm.

Saturday 4 July Meeting: Tips, tricks and techniques - Co-ordinator Ann Emery.

Saturday 18 July: Christmas in July lunch, Venue TBA.

Saturday 1 August Meeting: 2026 Annual General Meeting. School Days - Coordinator Jill McCann.

Saturday 5 September Meeting: – Topic TBA.

Saturday 19 September: Fundraising BBQ at Bunnings Ballina 9am-4pm.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership fees for the year 1 January to 31 December are \$40 individual or \$50 joint membership. Journals will be sent to financial members only.