Armidale and District Historical Society Inc.

'Dumaresq Chambers', Corner Faulkner St and Cinders Lane, Armidale
PO Box 692, Armidale, NSW, 2350

President…….Judy Grieve   6775 1205   Newsletter Editors *Judy Grieve   6775 1205
Secretary…… Robyn Curry   6772 4700   Mick Reed   6773 6555
Treasurer...... .John Johnson 6772 2276   Ruth Thomas 6772 5001

Newsletter for March 2019

The next meeting of the Society will be held at 7.30pm on Tuesday19 March at Dumaresq Chambers, when **Louise Brennan** will present her fascinating research associated with **Sion House,** originally an Armidale hotel 'on the wrong side of the creek' and later served the community in numerous ways. North Hill was known as Sion or Zion Hill for some time and Sion House and the Reverend Johnstone's Presbyterian Church and Manse were the two early structures on the north side of Dumaresq Creek.

Saumarez Homestead: An excellent exhibition of World War One and post war memorabilia has been set up for public display at the homestead and forms part of the 2019 Heritage festival Commemorative Conference on **New England and the Great War** to be held on **Saturday, 27 April** with a workshop on the preparation of displays on the preceding day. Further information and registration forms will be available at Dumaresq Chambers.

The Old Armidale Teachers' College: After considerable angst as to the future Trusteeship for the College precinct, it has been welcome news that the NSW Department of Education has taken on this role. We look forward to the plans for future development and use of the College building with the 'full circle' of the original 1928 concept of the building being a Government Education facility having been achieved.

2018 November Excursion: A day highlighted by history of the Moffatt/Mitchell families and their homes including the recent restoration and developments of 'Invergowrie' Station. Our hosts at Kentucky School provided an insight into the use of drone technology and enthusiasm of the teachers.

Trip Down Memory Lane: The March meeting each decade.
1969 Mr George Atkin: The Introduction of Compulsory Voting to Queensland, 1914
1979 No Meeting
1989 Graham Wilson: Hotels of Hillgrove and Metz
1999 Dr Maxine Darnell: Indentured Chinese Labour Migration to the Australian Colonies
2009 Dr Margaret Rodwell: Women on the pPastoral frontier "Ollera' Station 1839 - 1870

Snippets of History: The Commercial Hotel(s), Armidale

19th and early 20th century hotels were not only places for drinking, but provided accommodation, meals, stabling and venues for meetings and celebratory occasions. Some were obviously better than others and all were subject to the annual scrutiny of the Licencing Board. A recent enquiry regarding the licencee of the *Commercial Hotel* showed that there were two Commercial Hotels in Armidale. One was in Rusden Street, where St Vincent de Paul Store now stands and one in Beardy Street near the corner of Jessie Street which became the *Empire Hotel*. The *Empire* was demolished to make way for the original Woolworths Supermarket opposite where Bing Lee now operates. The Rusden Street *Commercial Hotel* operated from 1875 (when **John Harper** was granted the licence) as a shingle-roofed, two storey timber building with a wide verandah above and facilities for tethering horses in front of the lower verandah. It was well situated to attract custom from the Great Northern Road before the coming of the railway. But in 1881 the *Great Northern Hotel* opened on the south east corner of Rusden Street (became the *Crown Hotel* in *1888*), and in1894 the *Central Hotel* opened on the north east corner *('The Minto'* Boarding House after 1932).

 By 26 June 1896 the *Commercial Hotel* owner, **Mark Turner**, was refused renewal of his licence - 'from the roof to the floor there was not a particle of the building in repair'. In mid- September, around 5am on a windy Sunday morning, fire broke out in the unoccupied building, endangering the store next door run by **Charley Jack** and the corner butchery owned by **George Keifer,** but destroyed the roof and upper storey of the hotel. **Mark Turner** was arrested and charged with 'willfully and maliciously setting fire to the place with a view to defrauding the insurance company', was found guilty and committed to five years goal with hard labour. Taylor, born 1837 in Gloucester, England was at one time a married Selector with a family, living near Gunnedah. He had served 4 months in goal with hard labour in 1891 for larceny, having 'eloped' to Melbourne to assist a lady in fleeing from domestic violence and taking ten pounds of her husband's money.

The unlicenced, badly damaged hotel building was put to auction in 1897 but the name was transferred to the short-lived **Oxford Hotel** (1896-1896), previously the **Prince of Wales**), in Beardy Street which later became the **Federal** (1902 -1914) and then the Empire, which, in a run-down state, was demolished in the 1960s.

Mark Turner retained part of the land on which the old **Commercial Hotel** was situated and on his death in 1926 he had been living in a 2-roomed cottage at the back of the site. He rented a front shop and cottage to the widow **Mrs Cordelia Griffith** which he willed to her for the term of her life, in appreciation for her kindness and attention to him. For many years he had his meals prepared by Mrs Griffiths and on his death, his meagre possessions consisted of 'an old bed and a few boxes'. **Cordelia Griffiths** died in 1947 aged ninety-one.

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