**ARMIDALE AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.**

**‘Dumaresq Chambers’, Corner Faulkner St and Cinders Lane, Armidale**

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**Newsletter for June 2024**

The next meeting of the Society will be held on **Tuesday 20thAugust, 5.30pm at the** **Royal Hotel.** The speaker will be **Wendy Beck,** whose talk is entitled  **Aboriginal Archaeology in New England.**  Wendy has an extensive research background ascertaining aboriginal food resources, studying indigenous and plant archaeology and will share some of her interesting findings from work carried out in North-East New South Wales.

Don’t forget to order meals prior to the meeting.

**Historical Relics Competition:** Applications close on our meeting date, Tuesday, 20th August and it is hoped that the competition has sparked an interest in Armidale people sharing objects, documents, photographs etc. from yesteryear which have been saved and treasured for their historic value. The aim of the competition is to allow the stories of these hidden treasures to be shared and to promote the heritage of our region. Application forms are available at Dumaresq Chambers and various other outlets and the completed forms, a photograph of the object and a $5 entry fee will complete your entry into the competition. Judging will result in prize money for the three most interesting objects and a display will be set up for public exhibition.

**Meet the Candidates:** New England Visions 2030 have arranged for a gathering on Wednesday September 4th, 5.30 at the Bowling Club to meet the considerable number of candidates running for the Armidale Dumaresq Council 2024 elections.  Election Day is on Saturday September 14th.  This event is free and there is no need to register.

**A Trip Down Memory Lane:** Topics for meetings held in August over the decades:

**1964:** and 1974: No meeting

**1984:** Mr Doug Cooper – The Armidale Electorate 1929-39

**1994:** John Ferry – The Gorman Family in New England

**2004:** Dr Lionel Gilbert – The Armidale Diggers’ Queen – Marion Catherina Blaxland

**2014:**  Richard Mills – The Mills Family from Great Grandfather Solomon in Cornwall, to Hillgrove and eventually to Grandfather Thomas in Armidale.

**Snippets of History:** Peter Hoare has submitted a brief outline of some of the findings made by the group researching the convicts of the New England region.

Over the last two years the Armidale and District Historical Society and the Armidale Family History Group have been researching the convicts in the New England District. So far the records of over 1000 local convicts (between 1835 and 1855) have been located. In 1839 the Commissioner of Crown Lands George Macdonald conducted a census of the district and stated that 209 convicts were employed on the squatting runs in New England, including eleven employed on *Saumarez* and twelve on *Tilbuster*. These had been sent by the Dumaresq brothers from their properties in the Hunter Valley. In his 1841 Census, Macdonald noted that this number had increased to 467. In 1846, another full census was taken and showed that the demand for their work was decreasing as more free immigrants were employed as shepherds. In addition, over 340 former convicts had settled in the district and 20 were still employed by the government and private employers.

Between 1839 and 1848, 24 convicts were assigned to the Border police. The majority were ex-British army servicemen, court cashiered from the British Army in India, Canada or Britain. Others e.g. John Trim, had been convicted for theft.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Britain was undergoing vast economic and social changes in the wake of the industrial revolution. This led to an increase in crime and in turn led to changes in the legal system.

Crimes against property increased and offenders could often be hanged for trivial offences. However, these death sentences were often commuted to imprisonment or transportation to penal colonies in Australia where from 1788, over 168,000 men and women were sent. Transportation to New South Wales ceased in 1849 but continued to Van Diemen’s Land until 1853 and Western Australia until 1863.

In the period following 1830, convicts provided an important source of labour in the New England district. Initially they were employed on the large pastoral properties in the district. As pastoral runs expanded so the need for convict labour increased.

As they received their freedom many convicts stayed in the area and became pioneers of the infant settlements where they lived. The majority were emancipated and did not offend again. Some made outstanding contributions to the district – e.g. John Trim as a respected merchant and Robert Kirkwood as a millwright. However, a number continued to offend in the New England District e.g. Charles Rich (cattle theft) and Wright Harrison (for rape).

Primary documents exist for the records of convict trials, imprisonment, and passages on convict ships to Australia. Once arrived, they were assigned to the government or private employers. These assignments were recorded in government registers together with the physical description and location of each felon. Most convicts received their Tickets of Leave for good behaviour and diligence in their work before their sentences terminated.

 We are still looking for information about our convicts. If you have any information about the New England convicts, please contact Peter Hoare at Armidale and District Historical Society or Wayne Hoppe at Armidale Family History Group.