

# *Armidale and District Historical Society Inc.*

'Dumaresq Chambers', Corner Faulkner St and Cinders Lane, Armidale

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## **Newsletter for July 2025**

**The next meeting of the Society will include the Annual General meeting and the monthly meeting at 5.30pm on Tuesday, 15<sup>th</sup> July at the Royal Hotel.**

The speaker at the July meeting will be former Stock and Station Agent

**Michael Fittler -Some reminiscences from being a Stock and Station Agent 1956-70**

Michael will share some of his experiences during this time and mention others who have worked in Armidale over the years as Real Estate and Stock and Station Agents.

**Don't forget** to place your order prior to the meeting if you are staying on for a meal.

**Annual General Meeting:** Financial members will be voting for the 2025/6 Committee and new nominations are welcomed. The Treasurer will be available on the night for renewal and new membership subscriptions.

**Dumaresq Chambers:** With thanks to a benefactor we have upgraded the photographic section to provide shelving and improved access to the growing collection, which is ably managed by David Betts. Our book collection has been increased by purchases from the Rotary Book Fair and donations including two recent biographies - *Archibald Mosman* by Dimity Mortensen and a number of copies of *Alexander Macleay* by Derelie Cherry. We have been donated new filing cabinets allowing for a filing system for the exhibitions we have had over the years. The mapping project and research into local World War Two servicemen and women continue, while the current display for the sesquicentenary of Saint Peters cathedral is attracting visitors.

**A Trip Down Memory Lane:** Topics for July meetings each decade -

**1965:** Miss S. Sullivan – Aspects of Material Culture of Aborigines of the Richmond and Tweed River Valleys.

**1975:** James Garvey – The New England Tourist Potential of Rural Homesteads.

**1985:** Brian Rice – Yesterdays News for Today's Historians

**1995:** Rosemary Sparks – World War I Soldier Settlement- A costly Experiment?

**2005:** Jennie Waters – The Melrose and Postman's Creek Gold Mines

**2015:** Louise Brennan – Alluvial Goldmining on Enmore

**Snippets of History:** The *Armidale Express* in 1960 published an article profiling **Earnest Sidney Purkiss** under the somewhat over-sensationalised banner of

### **Smoke Shop Proprietor Grew Own Opium!**

'A thin trail of opium seed between Armidale and Melbourne was an indication of one of the wartime activities of Mr Earnest Purkiss of Marsh Street Armidale and he came under police notice for his activity.

The police knew all about the poppy seed and its capability to produce opium, but the seed that was grown in the Armidale district was grown for the Commonwealth Supply Department for its morphine content – and morphine was one of the sinews of war.

Selected farmers in the Armidale district actually grew the crops on Mr Purkiss' account. It was baled like hay when cut and loaded into trucks for the Melbourne laboratories. In the bales there was a tendency for the seeds to drop out during the long journey and to fall through the cracks and crevices in the floors of the trucks. Later consignments were sent in wool bales.

With this activity was coupled the growing of soya beans and other food production for Commonwealth contracts and wartime demands changed very considerably the business which Mr Purkiss founded.

He started as an assistant at Richardsons store at eleven and eightpence a week immediately on leaving school at the age of 14. He worked there for twelve years until the opportunity arose of opening the 'Purkiss for Smokes' shop next door to the Post Office, with seeds and confectionery as additional lines.

The business has developed to include the big store on the corner of Rusden and Faulkner Streets (2025 Alpha Furnishings) to supply the man on the land and a bulk store near the railway station.

The customers are spread all over Australia – from Cairns to Melbourne, Perth and Darwin – with popcorn to Karachi and hybrid maize to New Zealand and the islands.

The business, now a private company, of which Mrs Purkiss and the two sons, John and Ross are members, was founded 23 years ago. For the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary (September 1960), Mr Purkiss hopes to have built an imposing produce store on the vacant plot in Dangar Street, opposite the (Ken Jones) Furniture Arcade (now shops). Since leaving school, Mr Purkiss confesses, he has been too busy to indulge in much sport – his original job, then setting up on his own account, wartime demands and shortage of staff and development since, have left very little opportunity for very much else. Building his very successful undertaking has provided all the entertainment, excitement and reward that any hobby could bring.'

From *Armidale 150 years*, the Dangar Street store was leased and has since served a number of businesses. The Barney Street shed was re-modelled and sold to Queensland buyers who continued to trade as 'Purkiss Seeds' and E.S. Purkiss Pty Ltd was wound up in 1984 when Ernie was 75.' He died in 2000 aged 91.