

Armidale and District Historical Society Inc.

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Newsletter for April 2026

The Society will meet at the **Royal Hotel, 5.30pm on Tuesday, 21st April** when the guest speaker will be **Phillip Jones**, who will give a talk on his father's work in the tree-planting programme, **The Beautification of Armidale**. At this time each year we particularly show gratitude for the work of this pioneering team of tree planters who created leafy streetscapes, aiming for and achieving, lasting environmental and beautifying benefits to the city.

Autumn Festival: The ADHS display depicting '**Lost Trades**', alongside the Folk Museum exhibit provided an interesting historical corner for people to browse, enjoy and reminisce. Our display has been transferred to Dumaresq Chambers and complements the newly compiled '**Streets and Houses of Armidale**' exhibition. Well worth a visit! Many thanks to all who have worked to produce these displays.

Missing Books: Books continue to go missing from the library – a number re-appear - but some don't. This is easily rectified if people **fill in a card** so volunteers know a missing book has been borrowed. Our books are a valuable resource and often not readily available elsewhere, so requests for accessioned books which are not on the shelf or on a borrower's card too often create frantic searches and disappointment,

NECOM Homestead Series Concerts 2026: A feast for those interested in historic homes and music. The first concert of the series will be held at the magnificent 'Langford' home at Walcha on Sunday 3rd May at 3pm.

On Friday, 1st May, 5-6pm, NECOM is also hosting 'Dance with Bach' at the Old Teachers' College, featuring a performance with historic instruments.

The Trip Down Memory Lane segment of the newsletter has increased and will now feature the articles of interest you may wish to read from past Journals.

1966 (Journal 10)

R.B. Walker – Presbyterian Pioneers in New England

S. Ellis – Some Aspects of Military History in Australia

T.W. Tanner – The Introduction of Military Training in Australia 1901-1914

B.F. Reece – Early History of Building Societies in Northern NSW

J.S. Ryan – Recent Trends in British Regional Studies

Snippets of History: Some Bakeries in Armidale – Oh! What a tangled web!

Armidale Express (Trove) records well over 100 bakers from 1856 to 1954, the bakeries changing hands at an alarming rate, until prepackaged, named products arrived in shops and supermarkets slowed down local bread manufacture. Bakeries, providing the ‘staff of life’ were established in Armidale town in the early 1850s (pop. ca. 858), gradually replacing home-based bread making using locally grown wheaten flour ground at local flour mills. **Moxon’s** is Armidale’s remaining private bakery.

In 1856 Mr **Spicer** advertised that his bakery was in ‘Beardie Street’ and in 1860 John **O’Brien** thanked his customers for their patronage at the bakery next to the Assize Hotel in East Beardy Street where Charlie **Selmes** had an even earlier bakery. John **Murray**, baker, left the Rocky diggings to set up beside the Joint Stock Bank in 1860. In 1857 an anonymous visiting journalist for the SMH sampled breads from the 3 or 4 Armidale bakeries describing the ‘indigestible lump that they called a 2 pound loaf’, as being ‘the most execrable unwholesome looking mass such as a Sydney baker would not present to the poorest customer’. Bakers placed the blame on the millers (**Kirkwood**, James **McLean**, Peter **Green**, John **Moore**) who ‘did not clean, grind or bolt the flour properly’ in the old and inefficient steam mills. Only Moore’s, which became **Richardson’s mill** remained by 1891.

John **Dunkin** and his wife Mary ran Arnold **Rothschild’s** New England Bakery on Dangar Street (opposite the New England Hotel) from the early 1860s until 1879, making bread, cakes, biscuits and confectionary, providing a catering service for functions, selling fresh fruit and vegetables, and by the 1870s, selling aerated water. Initially (1863), their bread was 7 pence a 2 pound loaf, then 9 pence (1864), 6 pence (1865), 4 pence (1866), and in 1868 one could buy 4 loaves for 12 pence. These prices represented the fluctuating price of flour but stabilised to 5 or 6 pence by 1870s.

William Henry **Stevens** owner of the Railway Hotel (ADHS Journal 47) purchased two blocks east of the hotel in 1897 from Elizabeth **Craigie** and when he died in 1904, these blocks were still vacant. The two similar post-1904 brick buildings standing on them today are known to have been a butcher shop and a bakery (298 Rusden St). The trail goes cold until William **Coutman** opens a bakery in Marsh Street around 1919, but after her gambling husband went bankrupt Mrs Coutman re-opened beside the Railway Hotel in 1924. She sold to **Adrian C. Plunkett** in late 1930 and Plunkett’s traded into the 1940s as the ‘**Peoples Bakery**’, the sign still just visible on the building. Adrian Plunkett was the brother of well-known schoolteacher **Peter Plunkett**, (headmaster of Ben Venue and West Armidale).

Another bakery which is still standing is the solid 2 storey building now incorporated into the TAFE grounds, built in 1922 by **Sourry Brothers** as the **Great Northern Bakery**, but provides no clues to its origins as a bakery.