

Armidale and District Historical Society Inc.

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Newsletter for June 2026

The next meeting of the Society will be on **Tuesday, 16th June, at 5.30pm** at the Royal **Hotel**. The speaker will be **Graham Wilson OAM**, whose talk will cover his **research on the Chinese in Hillgrove**.

This follows his interesting talk on the Chinese in Armidale and compares their life on the goldfields, not as miners, but as shopkeepers and market gardeners, sad and unhappy, away from their families.

Please place dinner orders prior to the meeting. **The talk will commence at 5.30pm**

Armidale Folk Museum: After a complete refurbishment, which has included the addition of a water supply, kitchen facilities, toilet and bathroom facilities, heating and disabled access, the Folk Museum will re-open. The 1863 Council-owned building, which for 163 years has faithfully served the city in numerous ways, has been introduced to the conveniences of the 21st century! It will be open to the public with new displays and using the original Rusden Street entrance, at the advertised hours from Friday, 18th June.

Museum of Education: Work is soon to begin on user-friendly access to the Museum of Education in Kentucky Street.

Kings Birthday Honours (July 2026): Excellent news that the Society's Patron, **William (Bill) Arnold Oates** has been awarded the **Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM)** for his **Service to History Preservation**. Bill's knowledge, ability to research information and tenacity in following every lead to its end has taken Armidale's history down many new paths. He continues to uncover and gather facts and record and share his findings to enrich the knowledge of our local past. Congratulations to Bill on the recognition of his work and generosity in sharing his findings.

Confucious quote: "By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is the noblest. Second by imitation, which is the easiest. Third by experience, which is the bitterest."

Snippets of History: In ADHS Journal 49 (2006) is published the late **Jean Cooper's** detailed research on the building south-west of Armidale where the Uralla Road meets the New England at the roundabout, titled *'Farley': a house and its people*. Today **'Farley'** is **Piddington's Funeral Home and Crematorium** with the grounds housing the ashes of many of our friends and family members. This precis of Jean's article provides an insight into the 'Farley' story. **Originally part of the 'Saumarez'** holding, four portions comprising 121.5 acres (52h) were purchased by **Joseph Scholes snr.** Following his death in 1884, they were sold from his estate to **Eliza Branston**, possibly the daughter of dairyman **Thomas Branston**. By 1901 she had sold to **Oswald Henry Carter** of 'Linton', Upper Manilla, who employed the **architect Philip Rancloud and builder Moses Hern** to erect the fine house, described in Jean's article, naming it **'Farley'**. Here Henry and his wife **Jane nee Scholes** (a niece of Joseph Scholes Jnr) lived, with 6 children attending TAS and NEGS. (**George Baker** of 'Laura', Bundarra, also employed Rancloud for **'Birida'**, SW corner Marsh and Brown St). By 1908 Carter had sold 'Farley' to **Jane and Christopher Mather of Casino**, whose children also attended NEGS and TAS and they in turn sold to **Frank White of 'Saumarez'** and his wife **Mary ('Molly')**, daughter of **George Baker of 'Birida'**. They had a son and daughter and enjoyed the social activities in Armidale until tragedy struck on 30 June 1930 when Molly found Frank in their garage with a fatal gunshot head wound. The inquest returned an open verdict on the cause of death. Frank had assisted his father in the management of **'Saumarez'** and his position as manager was taken over by **Toby Brett** until 1969. Molly and her family lived on at 'Farley' until 1940, when she sold to **Norman Plummer** from South Africa and moved to Taylor Street. **Robert and Norma Rhodes-White** were raised by their paternal grandmother, **Mrs Lily White** and attended TAS and NEGS. The Plummer-Whites sold the property in 1945 to **Clara Allingham**, who re-sold the following year to three clergymen who were acting as **Trustees for the Marist Fathers**. 'Farley' became **Mount St Mary's Seminary** and a two-story building was added to the rear of the house to provide 25 small bedrooms with facilities for the **Marist novices**. The 120 acres were utilised to allow the institution to be mainly self-sufficient and a further 100 acres was purchased from adjoining **'Rutherglen'**. They ran sheep, grew grain, established an orchard and in 1958 set up a dairy and Jersey Stud, employing **Des Harris**. Marist Brothers left in 1970 and **Jim and Sheila Rogers** took over the dairy. In 1972 the property was leased to the **Dept of Education**, hosting students from **Wagga and Hawkesbury Agricultural Colleges** and in 1974-5, from **Armidale Teachers College**. The sale to **Gerry and Cheryl Corrigan**, then **Vapona Pty Ltd**, with **John and Marcia Fields** created a hostel for clients of the **Association for Socially Deprived Adults**, which closed in the early 1990s. After much work the gracious building was opened in 1988, to become today's elegant setting for funerals.