

Armidale and District Historical Society Inc.

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Newsletter

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Newsletter for August 2026

The next meeting of the Historical Society will be at the **Royal Hotel, 5.30pm on
Tuesday, 18th August**

The speaker will be **William Oates OAM**, who has researched

The Dreadnoughts Scheme

This scheme was started in 1911 prior to WWI, halted during the War, re-started in 1921 and ceased in 1940. The aim was to bring young men from Britain wishing to undertake farmwork in Australia, give them a short period of training and place them on farms. They became known the 'Dreadnought Boys'. There is a plaque at The Rocks, on the corner of Kendall Lane and Argyle Street placed there by the Dreadnought Old Boys Association in 1984, commemorating the fact that most of these hundreds of young men would have walked past that spot on arrival from the ships which carried them to a new life.

Armidale and District Historical Society AGM: Results of the elections held on 21st July by Society Patron William Oates OAM were as follows; President: Judith Grieve OAM, Vice- Presidents: Graham Wilson OAM, Wayne Hoppe, Lyn Thompson and Julie Harm. Secretary: Sue Tanner (minutes) and Pat Curry (membership), Treasurer and Public Officer: John Burrell, Committee: Caroline Chapman, Peter Hoare, Denise Towns and Alan Wilkinson. Journal Committee: Alan Hardaker (Editor), Graham Wilson, Judith Grieve.

Key to The City: This honour is to be bestowed by the Armidale Regional Council on WWII veteran, Ron Vickress, to celebrate his **One Hundred and First Birthday**.

The ceremony at the Town Hall on Tuesday, 11th of August will pay tribute to Ron, a war veteran from the RAN, a teacher, lecturer at the Armidale Teachers College, playwright, poet and author who has added much to Armidale as a worthy citizen.

ADHS Banner: A design for a banner and logo has been drawn up by AOK signs and can be viewed at Dumaresq Chambers for your comments. We have been donated the portable pull-up structure to use for advertising our presence in Faulkner Street and at events.

Snippets of History: Thomas John Oliver. In the early 1800s the Colony was in need of tradespeople and professionals, with surveyors in particular demand to mark out the towns and carve up the countryside to accommodate the influx of settlers. One surveyor, 26-year-old **Thomas John Oliver** boarded the *Chowringhee* at Southampton on 18 July 1855, bound for Sydney. The 291 passengers included twenty-three other surveyors bound for the Colony. Thomas' 'Native Place and County' is listed as St James, Middlesex, on the outskirts of London, but this may have been his workplace as he had completed his training and carried recommendations from high-ranking surveyors. His father was dead, mother was living and he had at least one sibling, a brother **Alfred**, also a surveyor who later joined him in Armidale.

Thomas' first appointment (eight days after his arrival in November 1855) was **Assistant Surveyor on the New South Wales Government Railways**, on an initial salary of 400 pounds per annum. This was increased to 580 pounds in March 1858, when he was appointed **Second Class Surveyor**. This position also gave him 100 pounds in lieu of equipment (he must have brought his own) and two and sixpence per day for his horse. A year later, he was surveying in the Gwydir region as a **First Class Surveyor** on a salary of 655 pounds.

His presence in Armidale was first recorded in a letter to the Chief Commissioner of Crown Lands on 13 January 1859 which included his report on the Aboriginal population of the district. He noted his recent arrival in the district and still more recent, his appointment as **Commissioner for Crown Lands for New England and Gwydir**, replacing **Abraham Moriarty**.

As Surveyor First Class, on 14 January 1862, Thomas selected Portion 367, a 200-acre block on the south east of Armidale, adjoining **Arthur Hunter Palmer's 'Palmerston'** on the south. This was after missing out on the purchase of two 100-acre lots north of 'Palmerston' adjoining a block (320) purchased by his brother Alfred. These were purchased by Palmer, who owned land east and west of 367. Palmer objected to a surveyor selecting prime land which was marked for subdivision, naming him a 'jobber'. Thomas married **Elizabeth Scholes** some weeks after the purchase and built a stone cottage naming it '**Gainsborough**', to live on lot 367 and comply with Conditional Purchase requirements. However, Palmer and his solicitor **Robert Forster MLA for New England and the Macleay** continued the legal wrangling, with the result that Crown Lands ordered Thomas to remove immediately to **Fish River** on the **Macquarie River near Oberon**. Thomas had requested and received permission from the **Surveyor General** to purchase the land and the relevant correspondence was published in the *Armidale Express*, but Thomas was trapped. He resigned. His father-in-law, **Joseph Scholes Snr** appointed him to take over the management of his **New England Hotel**, which allowed Thomas and his family to move to the hotel, alienate his house and land to carrier, **William Tweddle** in October 1863 and start up business as a private surveyor. However he kept stud stallions and advertised their services at '**Gainsborough**' during the 1860s.

The family grew and Thomas was an active member of the community. In February 1869 he was **elected to the Borough Council**, in November sold '**Gainsborough**' to **Joseph Daly** and in 1870 he was **elected Mayor**. He travelled to Sydney on council business in September 1870 but suffered a heart attack at the **Post Office Hotel in York Street**, where he was staying. Elizabeth travelled to Sydney and was with him when he died the following day. The entire contents of the hotel were auctioned on 18th and 19th of October and Elizabeth set up '**Melrose Boarding House for Gentlemen** in Beardy Street. In 1886 she married **George Hosmer** who was managing the **Commercial Hotel in Rusden Street**. Later (1897), he was living in a rented council house and in charge of **East Armidale Park**. Elizabeth had a (Scholes family-given) life tenancy in a Marsh Street house but sold up her household in 1905 and died in 1926 in Randwick. **Oliver Avenue** between Taylor and Marsh Streets and Beardy and Dumaresq commemorates Thomas as Mayor of Armidale. (Ref: Judith W.M. Grieve, 'Gainsborough': The Story of a Paddock (1862-2013) ADHSJ 57 2014).