



Bowral



Mittagong



Berrima



Moss Vale

BERRIMA DISTRICT HISTORICAL & FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY Inc.

Founded 1960

Located in the Wingecarribee Shire,
Southern Highlands of NSW

ABN 29 362 616 937

NEWSLETTER

No 596 September 2026



From the President's Desk

There was first a river, then a dam and later a popular swimming pool. As a dam, it kept the locomotives of the Great Southern Railway supplied with water.

When steam power faded, the dam found a new life as a favourite spot for swimming and recreation.

So, where did all this clever transformation happen? Right here in the Highlands of course. Follow the fascinating story of Mittagong swimming baths on pages 3 and 4. What might its future hold?

At our August General Meeting, Chris Thompson shared her exploration of the early roads that crossed the hills and ran down from Wingecarribee into the tablelands. She made us aware of how much planning and effort went into turning narrow tracks into roads that early settler communities relied on.

Our peaceful wander along those old roadways may take a darker turn at this month's General Meeting, when Peter Smith introduces us to long-forgotten bushrangers who may once have stalked those same paths.

Peter will share stories of the notorious Clarke Gang, whom he describes as among the worst and most disruptive bushrangers in Australian history. It promises to be a gripping afternoon, and perhaps not one for the faint-hearted. See page 3 for a taste of what is to come.

Pages 6 and 7 bring us the next episode in the story of the Missingham family of Robertson and how they built logging into a successful family business while actively protecting the environment around them. Yes, they really did.

It is also the story of a hardworking family whose senior members gave time and energy as leaders in the Robertson community. Looking at that photo of their loaded truck, I can't help wondering whether electric vehicles will ever manage work as tough as that.

Our October General Meeting will be held at Mittagong RSL, where Richard Reid, the Australian War Memorial's project officer for the 1993 reburial in the Shrine of Remembrance, will tell the story of Australia's 'Unknown Soldier' and their journey from France to Canberra in 1993. Members of neighbouring sub-branches will also be invited, so please follow the booking advice on page 3 to secure your seat.

On a lighter note, you may enjoy our Wine and Cheese evening on 29 October. A gentle launch for our museum's 50th anniversary celebrations. See page 2 for booking details and more museum news.

Please give some thought to applying for the Museum Manager's position. It is an important and prestigious role which offers a rewarding chance to work alongside friendly, knowledgeable volunteers who would be very pleased to welcome you.

Stuart Handley

GENERAL MONTHLY MEETINGS and SPEAKERS 2026

SEPTEMBER: Thurs 24 September at 2:00pm, Civic Centre Theatrette, Moss Vale

Peter Smith, Braidwood & District Historical Society, a talk on its museum and bushrangers

AFTERNOON TEA served after the meeting

OCTOBER: Thursday 22 October at 2:00pm, venue is the Mittagong RSL Club

Richard Reid, on moving Australia's 'Unknown Soldier' from France to Canberra in 1993



Museum's 50 Years celebration

Members are invited to a special Twilight Wine & Cheese function

at Berrima District Museum
on 29 October, 5 to 7pm

This is exclusively for members of our Society to celebrate 50 Years since the museum was established at Berrima and to acknowledge all those who have supported the museum. RSVP by 20 October to bdmuseum@bigpond.com

Museum Manager vacancy

Our much-loved, award-winning museum in Berrima is looking for a new volunteer Museum Manager — someone who enjoys working with people, supporting a friendly team and helping share the remarkable heritage of our region.

John Schweers has given more than thirteen years of dedicated and highly valued service as Manager. He now feels the time is right to step back and give another member the opportunity to take up the reins, with the support of an experienced and welcoming group of fellow volunteers.

The Museum Manager oversees the day-to-day operation of the museum. The role includes offering leadership and encouragement to volunteers, liaising with the Roster Leader and Collections Manager and helping keep the museum open to the public during advertised hours — currently Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 10.00am to 4.00pm.

This is a rewarding role for someone who would like to be part of a supportive team, welcome visitors and help create a warm and engaging front-of-house experience at our museum.

Please email

John at bdmuseum@bigpond.com or Stuart at bdhsarchives@gmail.com if you would like to apply or have a chat about the role.

Moore Memorable Musings



Never fear, Bruce has not been sacked, his popular column will return in next month's issue.

Membership Fees for 2026-27

The BDHS's financial year period ends on 30 September. The Membership Renewal Form is attached with this issue or is available from the Society.

The BDHS Management Committee has this year decided that from now on BDHS will drop the \$10 Joining Fee for new and lapsed memberships, a discounted Student Fee will no longer be provided and 'Family Membership' will be defined as "more than one person living at the same address".

Single and Family Memberships are to remain at the current level, which ranks in the mid-range compared to other similar historical organisations. Our Society is happy to not increase the burden on members, particularly at this time when the overall cost of living seems to be on an endless rise.

One such cost is postage, and so we appeal to the members who receive our newsletter by post to consider the option of email instead, if that is possible, as this will save us from a hefty increase in our postage bill, as well as the cost of paper and toner.

For those who require a print copy or who don't use email, never fear, the newsletter will continue to be posted to you. For local members who enjoy reading each issue as a print booklet, extra copies will be available at our Moss Vale Research Centre/Archives.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

Our **Family History Group** meets in the Moss Vale theatre on the first Wednesday of each month at 1pm. Convenor: Denise Mackey.

Our **DNA Interest Group** meets in the Moss Vale theatre on the third Thursday each month at 1pm. Convenor: Robyne McKinnon

BERRIMA DISTRICT MUSEUM

1a Marketplace cnr Bryan St, Berrima

OPEN: FRIDAY to SUNDAY

10.00am to 3.00pm

throughout the year including school and public holiday periods. Closed Christmas Eve, Christmas Day.

Groups welcome at other times by arrangement. Ph John 0434 623 402

Museum: Phone 4877 1130 or email bdmuseum@bigpond.com

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

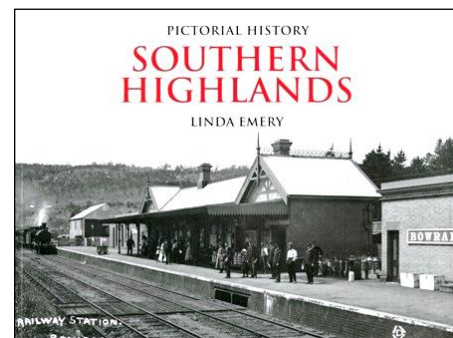
That time again!!

Renewals due from 1 October

A Renewal Form is provided with this September newsletter.

We are happy to receive payment by cash, cheque or credit card, OR funds can be deposited to our bank account, details of which are shown on the Renewal Form.

NOTE: If depositing funds to our bank account, please ensure that your initial and surname are used as reference and **PLEASE RETURN YOUR FILLED-IN RENEWAL FORM AND BANK RECEIPT BY MAIL OR EMAIL**, as this helps us keep track of the many payments.



PICTORIAL HISTORY SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS by Linda Emery (140pp illustrated), one of the Society's best-selling publications, has been available in soft and hard cover since 2008, but last year all stock sold out except for a few hard-cover copies. The good news is that we now have bulk stock of a reprint but available only as soft cover, cost **\$30**.

The reprint contains some updates to the text but otherwise is an exact reproduction of the original high-quality book, with over 200 historic photos from the BDHS collection along with brief histories of all the towns and villages in the Southern Highlands. It also covers the local district's prior occupation by Aboriginal people, plus European discovery and settlement.

Being an ideal "coffee table" book, the publication makes a wonderful gift for welcoming newcomers to the district, or to give to anyone who wishes to learn more about the Wingecarribee Shire's history, perhaps as a birthday gift or for the stocking at Christmas time.

September General Meeting speaker

PETER SMITH

Author, President Braidwood & District Historical Society, and President Arms Collectors Guild of NSW

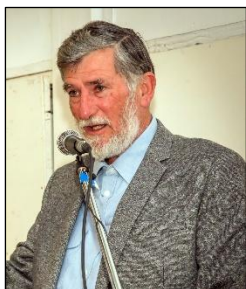
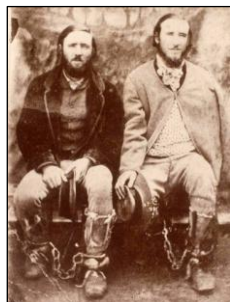
Topic: The Clarke Gang:
Outlawed, Outcast, Forgotten

From 1865 to 1867, the Clarke gang terrorised the region from present-day Canberra to the coast, intimidating, assaulting, robbing and murdering both police and civilians. They are suspected of carrying out the largest mass murder of police in NSW history, which led to the biggest reward ever offered by a single government for the capture of bushrangers.

They were arguably among the worst and most disruptive bushrangers in Australian history, **outlawed** by an act of Parliament, **outcast** by society and, unlike some other bushrangers, largely **forgotten** after their execution.

Peter's talk will examine the roots of the bushranging outbreak, the outlawing of Tommy Clarke and Pat Connell, and the murders that made them outcasts. It will also explore why they have been largely forgotten while Ned Kelly became one of the best-known figures in Australian history.

Photo: Thomas and John Clarke in Braidwood Gaol after their capture



SEVERAL BOOKS WILL BE AVAILABLE TO BUY: Peter will have copies of his Clarke Gang book for sale at the meeting and our member **Chris Thompson**, who was speaker at last month's meeting, will have two books for sale: *Before Cobb and Co: Coaching in NSW 1823-1863* and, hot off the press, *Travels through History: a Travelogue of the Roads around Goulburn* (both \$20)

Invitation to visit Baxter's museum

SAVE THE DATE

On Sunday morning, 8 November, Society members are invited to visit David Baxter's Moss Vale Museum.

David has amassed a most amazing collection of memorabilia relating to his town and the Southern Highlands in general, all displayed in purpose-built sheds on his property. More details will follow in next month's newsletter.



Our October Meeting at Mittagong

A talk by **RICHARD REID** at **MITTAGONG RSL CLUB**
Thursday 22 October 2026 at 2:00pm

TOPIC: "He is not missing: he is here" – the journey of Australia's 'Unknown Soldier' from France to Canberra, 2-11 November 1993

Richard Reid, who was the Australian War Memorial's project officer for the 1993 reburial in the Shrine of Remembrance, will speak about the Unknown Soldier.

The Carrington Room at the RSL Club is the venue and it has a capacity of around 200.

The RSL's online booking system will be used and invitations extended to the other local RSL sub-branches and community groups. Afternoon tea will be provided by the RSL Club.

Preferential booking is available for BDHS members, so if you wish to attend, please let us know by phone, email or in person as soon as possible, and we will add you to the list.

On 24 July 1927, British Field Marshall Lord Plumer ended his speech dedicating the famous Menin Gate Memorial in Ypres, Belgium. Relatives of the dead came forward looking for the name of a lost loved one. Those names, the names of the 'missing', 54,888 of them, were visible on panels on the Memorial, the names of British and Commonwealth soldiers, men with 'no known grave' who vanished in the great battles fought in Belgium in World War One. Among them were some 6,000 Australians.

Why, so long after the end of World War One, did Australia in 1993 repatriate the remains of a 'missing' soldier? Most of the answer, as this presentation will show, lies with the institution charged at national level with commemorating the nation's war dead, the Australian War Memorial.

What it achieved was a dramatic refocusing within the Memorial of the institution's ceremonial recognition of Australia's war dead. Symbolically, the physical presence of this 'missing' soldier at the Memorial, a soldier killed on the battleground of greatest loss Australia has experienced in war, honours every man and woman from all wars and conflicts on the Roll of Honour.



Mittagong Swimming Pool: a history

Currently on show at Moss Vale Library is a display case featuring a history of Mittagong Swimming Pool, with information cards, photographs and objects.

Compiled by Linda Emery, this is the second themed display at the library provided by our Society and is indicative of the closer ties that have grown between the BDHS and Wingecarribee Library Service since our Research Centre/archives relocated to Moss Vale.

It is well worth a visit to Moss Vale Library to check out the display – you might be amazed at what took place in the evening of the Bath's opening in 1931.

To provide some extra background, following here is a brief history of Mittagong Swimming Pool/Baths.

The Mittagong Baths, opened in 1931, was the first municipal swimming centre in the district; and it was upgraded to an official Olympic Pool in 1959.

It owed its existence to the Southern Railway's need at Mittagong from the late 1860s for water for steam locomotives. To provide an adequate supply, a dam was built on Nattai Creek near where it was crossed by the rail line at Braemar. A concrete wall some eight feet high was constructed across a natural shelf of rock in a nearby gully. The water in the dam was pumped through a pipe into a water tank built on a stand beside the rail line. This supplied locomotives until the railways switched to the town water supply when it became available in 1910.

In 1875 the Fitzroy Inn, located near the dam, was de-licensed and opened as Oaklands Boarding School for boys. The boys soon made use of the dam to enjoy themselves and this encouraged others so that it became a popular swimming place for males of all ages. A diving board was wedged into an overhanging rock and a rope from a tree enabled local 'tarzans' to launch themselves into the muddy depths.

No longer maintained as a water supply after 1910, the railway dam gradually filled with debris and by the 1920s would not have been suitable or safe for swimming. Other popular swimming spots were Lake Alexandra and the smaller deep pool formed by the 10-foot falls at Gibbergunyah, west of Mittagong. This pool was regarded as for experienced swimmers only, although some paddled in the shallows. Tragedy struck in 1928 when Jackie Dobson, the son of the Exchange Hotel's proprietor, dived into the 10-foot falls pool and failed to surface. Perhaps goaded into action by this incident, Mittagong Municipal Council that same year purchased the old dam from the Railways to create a town Baths.

With the enthusiastic help of local volunteers, trees, logs and accumulated rubbish were cleared out (some quite gory, as it had become a dumping ground for unwanted pets). Prominent among the team of volunteers were George Boswell and his son Reg who worked with Council from 1930 to create the pool and build dressing sheds and a kiosk. They helped with ongoing maintenance and formed a Swimming Club.

Mittagong Baths was officially opened by Alderman W G Worner, Mayor of Mittagong, with 400 people in attendance, in the afternoon of Saturday 7 February 1931. It was a very formal and important event in the history of Mittagong. An inaugural swimming carnival and diving exhibition was held that same afternoon and well into the evening.

A lengthy article describing the occasion appeared the following Tuesday in the *Southern Mail*:

"The picturesque site set amongst the beautiful bush which clothes the hills around the Mittagong Golf Links impressed all visitors. To the beauty of the natural surroundings was added the supreme beauty of youth gaily clothed in ordinary dress or wearing orthodox swimming costumes which vie with Joseph's coat in the variety of their colours."

Mark Morton MLA addressed the gathering, saying that Mittagong was fortunate in possessing so many natural beauties and a remarkable band of citizens who made a happy family whenever anything was to be done for the town.

To finalise the official proceedings, Reg Boswell, President of the Swimming Club, handed a pair of golden scissors to the Mayor who cut the ribbon and opened the Baths amidst resounding cheers.

Paths and landscaping were completed a few years later and concrete pylons supporting a timber walkway were extended across the pool to separate the shallow and deep ends.

An unusual and decorative rustic front entrance to the Baths was completed in 1932. It was designed by Reg Boswell and Swimming Club members carried out the work, assisted by a number of unemployed relief workers, it being during the Great Depression. This facade remained largely unaltered until 2003.

During the 1930s a small zoo was created near the Baths entrance with pens holding an emu, several kangaroos, a goanna, parrots, and other native animals. Picnic tables and seats for visitors were positioned along paths, with ferns, shrubs and palms interspersed among the gum trees. It was a theme park on a local scale and became a magnet for young

people. The pool and picnic area was subsequently named Boswell Park, after George and Reg Boswell.

Mittagong Municipal Council drained the dam and concreted the side walls in the early 1930s. The bathing pool was connected to the town water supply in order to maintain a constant water level, and a large pipe was run underneath the pool base to allow the water of Nattai Creek to flow downstream. This method was only partly successful because, when the creek flooded, it overflowed into the pool, which in extreme cases had to be drained so that silt and debris could be removed.

In 1959, Mittagong Shire Council restructured the bathing facility at considerable cost. The old dam wall was demolished to make way for a modern Olympic Pool, one of the first in the state to be built in a country area.

That same year Bill and Phyllis Goodwin took over the lease of Mittagong Swimming Pool and nearby Caravan Park. Their daughter, the late Leonie Knapman, became well-known as a local historian and an active member of our Society. She had an avid interest in the history of the Baths. The photos shown with this article are from her collection.

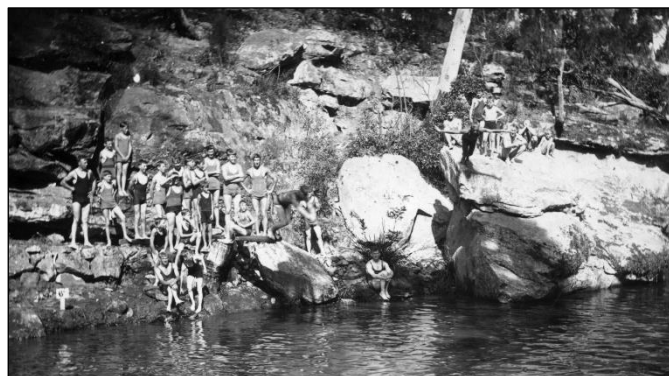
The late 1970s brought renewed concern for council when it was found that the pool's base had sagged a little and cracked, allowing water to escape. A channel was dug beside the pool allowing the creek water to flow past rather than underneath. Once repairs were done, the top of the channel was covered and a carpark replaced the old zoo area.

From then, Mittagong Swimming Pool was open to the public each summer until further issues forced its closure several years ago. Council staff are currently working on the 'rewilding' of the Pool and its leafy setting may yet once again become a summer haven for locals and visitors.

- adapted from text compiled in 2014 by Leonie Knapman and Philip Morton for a history series in the local paper



An early view of the dam, this photo was obtained by locals from the Railways Dept in 1928.



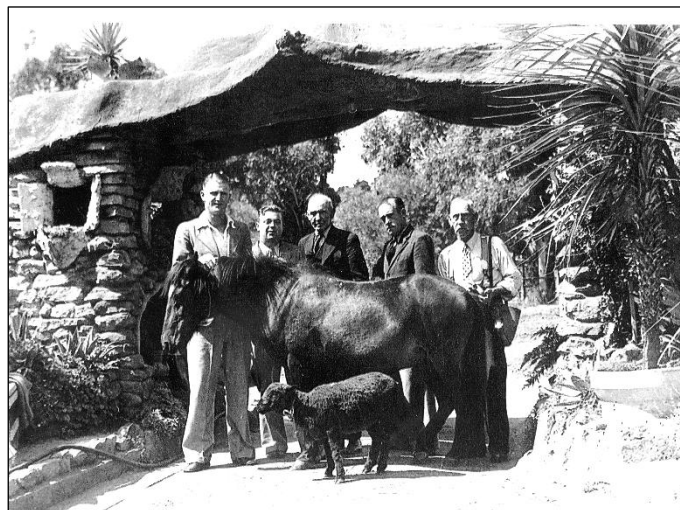
By 1930 the old dam had been cleared out and Renwick Home boys gathered there before the new pool opened.



In 1931 the old dam became a swimming pool.



The rustic-style entrance to the Mittagong Baths that remained in place largely unaltered until 2003.



Some of Mittagong Baths' zoo animals with Swimming Club members including George Boswell (on right).

A local Missingham family history

A history of the Missingham family continues here, having commenced in last month's newsletter. The family moved to the Robertson area on the Berrima District's eastern side in 1883. Settlers had initially taken up land there from 1860 and begun clearing the heavily forested country, known the Yarrawa Brush. Several generations of the Missingham family would contribute greatly to the area's development.

John Noble Missingham married Mary Turner in 1880. He was 21 and she 24 years old. Both grew up in Jamberoo near Kiama. John's parents, David and Priscilla Missingham, had taken up a farm there in 1863, when John was four years old. After brief schooling, from age six he assisted with his father's bullocking business between Jamberoo and Kiama. From his father he developed a great love of the bush and learnt about farming and timber-getting.

John and Mary moved in 1883 with two young sons, John (b.1881) and Robert (1882) from Jamberoo to *Carrington*, a farming property they selected in the Pheasant Ground locality not far from Robertson. John planted a large orchard and initially found work building stockyards and farm fences. By about 1900 he had built a substantial homestead, where they raised five more sons – David (1884), Henry (1886), George (1888), William (1891) and James (1893) – and a daughter, Mary (1899).

The two oldest sons, John Jnr and Robert (*pictured*), enlisted in 1902 to serve in the Boer War and sailed to South Africa as troopers in 'A' Squadron. Both were single, and perhaps the urge to see the world lured them into participating in the war with all its risks. They would return, however, at first back to their parent's property but both soon established their own independent lives.

John Jnr married Florence Garrett at Bellingen, NSW in 1912. On the electoral roll of 1930, the couple are listed as living in Bong Bong St, Bowral, with John still being employed as a teamster, the occupation that was noted on his enlistment papers. They were registered as living at Robertson in 1936-1937. Florence died in 1940 and John passed away some time after that, and prior to his own father's death in 1949.



Robert, when he enlisted in 1902, was recorded as working as a labourer and living in Robertson. He married Essie Feltham in Robertson in 1913 and is listed as a hotel keeper at Robertson from 1913 to 1917. They had several children and later the family moved to Queensland, where Robert died in 1955.



Robert 'Bob' Missingham's Royal Hotel, Robertson

Meanwhile, back at the *Carrington* property in the early 1900s at Pheasant Ground, John Snr attended Hanrahan's night school to gain a formal education, walking up to Robertson. Later he enjoyed reading in the evenings from a library of classics he built up.

The Missingham family history that you are reading here was initially compiled in 2018 and provided by the BDHS to the *Southern Highland News* as a 4-part series, running in the Monday issue during May 2018.

Back then a Missingham family descendant, Quentin Waters, allowed the BDHS to include extracts from a history of John Missingham and family that he had posted on Facebook and also provided several photos to accompany the series. Some of the following text and the photos are from Quentin's history collection.

Missingham & Sons: local timber providers

In 1906 John Missingham Snr purchased a nearby sawmill, established the year before beside Kangaroo Creek. John became the operator but unfortunately lost all but the thumb and little finger on his right hand in an accident there. Not to be outdone, he trained several of his younger sons in sawmilling.

To obtain raw timber for the mill, at first John cut and removed trees from his own lands, which extended from Fountaindale Rd right across Pheasant Ground to Knight's Hill, then from other properties and later from Crown Lands, including in the valley around Carrington Falls, for which he obtained the necessary licenses. He also acquired land at Wallaby Hill and his brother James owned a property on the other side of Carrington Falls. John drove a team of bullocks to haul timber along the rough-hewn mountain tracks.



Rather than clear-fell cutting, John established a family tradition of selective timber getting and careful management of the bush. He would mark the trees he wanted, selecting mature ones suitable for milling and leaving the saplings to grow up in their place. Ideal trees for milling were tall and straight, without a twisting grain down the barrel, hence he often went down below the escarpment where trees, reaching for sunlight above, grew straight. The axemen made sure to cut down only those marked by John and, lest he rebuke them, carefully did so without damaging nearby growth.

In 1913 Missingham & Sons purchased a motor lorry, the first in the Wingecarribee district. It took milled timber to Bowral for sale. It was not until the 1940s, however, that they used trucks for hauling logs.



Missingham & Sons truck at Bowral, c1920

Their sawmill was powered by a steam engine until it was converted to electricity in the 1960s. It closed in 1989, having operated for 84 years. Four generations of the family ran the business, supplying timber for buildings all over the district. John was succeeded in turn by his son William, grandson Gordon, and great-grandson Douglas. Other family members and many Robertson locals worked for them.

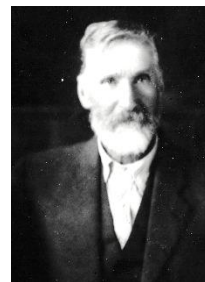
The third son David, like his two older brothers, left the local area. He died from pneumonic influenza at Lismore, aged just 35 years. The *Robertson Advocate* noted the sad passing in August 1919 and stated that "whilst at Robertson he was a prominent player in the football club and took an active part in all sports". He left a widow, two sons and one daughter.

The family patriarch, John Missingham Snr, as well as being orchardist, timber getter and sawmill owner, was also active in the local community, serving as a councillor on Wingecarribee Shire Council, a trustee of Carrington Falls (from 1909), president of the Robertson Show Society for ten years (see details below), congregation member of St John's Anglican Church, Robertson, and a lobbyist for a railway through the area (albeit a different route to what was eventually built).

Until a proper school building was established at Pheasant Ground, John and Mary Missingham kindly allowed the local teacher to board with them and hold school at the homestead. They were also keen dancers, as noted in the *Southern Mail* on 20 April 1937: "The old-time dance in Burrawang on Saturday night proved that enthusiasm can still be infused into the good old dances. Over 50 couples were present, and the evening was full of life and fun. Jackson's orchestra supplied the music. John and Mary Missingham, who are indispensable for the old square dances, obliged the company till they were obliged to cry enough." Not long after, in September 1938, Mary died at Bowral Hospital, aged 82 years.

In *The Winds of Change*, the Robertson Agricultural & Horticultural Society's 1979 centenary publication, it is noted that John Snr became interested in the Show Society in the early 1900s, serving as a gatekeeper, then as a committeeman and as president from 1924 to 1934. He is described as being quietly spoken and generous with donations of timber for cattle sheds, pens and railings and keen exhibitor in the fruit section.

John Noble Missingham died at his home at Pheasant Ground in April 1949, aged 90 years. In an obituary, the *Southern Mail* described him as "one of the pioneers of the district who was held in the highest regard throughout the South Coast and Southern Tablelands areas. His interest in local affairs, and the confidence of the public in him, was shown by his long term of service on Wingecarribee Shire Council as a representative for the C-riding sub-division of the electorate."



John's son William, and grandson William, followed in his footsteps, both serving on Wingecarribee Shire Council. As well, William Snr was Robertson Show Society's President for 29 years and served also on Berrima County Council. Missingham & Sons sawmill was run by John's sons and grandsons until 1989, supplying timber for buildings in the local district.

*compiled by Philip Morton,
with thanks to Quentin Waters*

Berrima District Historical & Family History Society Inc

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RESEARCH CENTRE and ARCHIVES	Wingecarribee Shire Council, Civic Centre 68 Elizabeth Street Moss Vale OPEN: Mondays, Tuesdays 10am-4pm and Saturdays 10am-1pm. Closed Public Holidays. Library collection contains reference books, journals and a general collection.
MUSEUM	Market Place, Berrima. Tel: 02 4877 1130. Email: bdmuseum@bigpond.com OPEN: 10.00am to 3.00pm, Fridays to Sundays. This includes during school and public holiday periods.
MEMBERSHIP	Any person wanting to join the Society may do so at any stage during the year by completing a form and paying the appropriate fee: Single \$25.00; Family \$35.00
AFFILIATIONS	Royal Australian Historical Society, Museums Australia Inc and NSW & ACT Association of Family History Societies.

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BERRIMA DISTRICT HISTORICAL & FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY Inc.

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