



The PIONEER



Wyrallah House Brackenridge

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OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE
ALSTONVILLE PLATEAU HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.
December 2017 • Volume 17, No.4



December 2017

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Crawford House Museum Exhibition Program 2018

8 December - 14 January 2018

Christmas at Crawford
Decorative Christmas decor of
international standard by five local artists

11 February - 20 May 2018

Watersports and Athletics in Ballina Shire
All forms of water sports including
swimming, water polo and surfing.
Stories, photographs and memorabilia
associated with people of Ballina Shire



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Please send all contributions to: karen@pristinepublications.com.au



Alstonville Plateau Historical Society Inc.

Established 21 October 2001 • ABN 14 079 187 469

Affiliated with the Royal Australian Historical Society

CRAWFORD HOUSE MUSEUM & COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTRE:

10 Wardell Road, Alstonville—02 6628 1829 (Fri & Sun)



Email: info@aphsmuseum.org.au

Website: www.aphsmuseum.org.au

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Crawford-House-Museum/237678339768274>

Museum: Open Fridays 10–4.00 pm and Sundays 1–4.00 pm

Research Centre: Open Fridays 10.00–4.00 pm

PATRONS: K Hogan MP, T George MP, Cr D Wright, Mr P Silver

SOCIETY'S AIMS:

To collect, preserve, display and provide documents and photos of a historical nature of the Alstonville Plateau and Ballina Shire for current and future generations. We welcome stories, photos and family histories for our records and newsletter publication.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETINGS:

3rd Sunday of each month at 2.00 pm
Alstonville Community Resource Centre
Crawford House, 10 Wardell Road, Alstonville
(Guest speaker and general meeting)

CORRESPONDENCE & ENQUIRIES:

The Hon. Secretary, Alstonville Plateau Historical Society Inc.,
PO Box 65, Alstonville NSW 2477
Phone: 02 6628 1829 (Fri) • Email: wmryan1@gmail.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

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(Please add \$5.00 if newsletters are to be posted)

Corporate Membership: \$100.00 p.a.
(Incl. newsletter advertisement and full membership)

President: John Sim - jdsim47@yahoo.com.au

Past President: Ina le Bas - macbas@iprimus.com.au

Vice President: Ian Kirkland - iankirkland@bigpond.com

Hon. Secretary (Mins): Liz Marshall

Hon. Secretary (Correspondence):

Margaret Ryan - wmryan1@gmail.com

Public Officer:

Brian Worthington - bnbworth1@gmail.com

Hon. Treasurer: Lyn Green - lyneth51@hotmail.com

Volunteers Co-ordinator: Jane Gardiner - gardiner2488@gmail.com

Research Officer: Alison Draper - alisondraper@bigpond.com

Publicity Officer: Cathy Cohen - kerrycohen@bigpond.com

Committee: Gwen Clark, Belinda Burnet

Crawford House & CRC Booking Enquiries:

John Sim - jdsim47@yahoo.com.au

Webmistress: Liz Marshall - ltmarshall41@gmail.com

Past-Presidents:

Marguerite Fuller, Jane Gardiner, Ian Kirkland, John Sim, Ina le Bas

VALE CHARLES WILLIAM MASON (1928-2017) Member No. 85

I met Charles William Mason known as Bill shortly after I arrived 11 years ago, when I asked him if he would like a cuppa. Over this cuppa we got to talking and I discovered that he was a fascinating man with an insatiable love of history not only of Australia but also England. He used to bring in stories that he had read and transcribed so that he could pass these on to anyone who was interested. I took on the job of typing these up and printing off a copy for Bill and keeping them in a file called "Mason, Bill." My thought was that when we needed an extra story for the Pioneer then we had it waiting and Bill told me that was fine.

I was researching my family when they moved to Dalwood and Bill told me that when he was about 4, his Father took him to Walter James's property and what he could remember was that you could see the sea from the paddocks. So I took a drive as he told me roughly where to look and Lance Kennaugh confirmed Bill's view. So many thanks to Bill for his memory.

Excerpt taken from Bill's own work on his Father Charles William Mason (2008).

I started school when I was 5 ½ years of age at the little school at Tucki Tucki. I walked 2.5 miles with other children to school and 2.5 miles home. My first teacher was a Mr R G Denning and all the children thought that he was rather strict. When he left Mr R Munday arrived and everyone liked him very much. Every year we celebrated Arbor Day with a big tree planting at the school and guess what we planted?

'Camphour Laurels' of course. And to make sure they survived, we buried empty jam tins with holes punched in the bottom. One beside each tree. Every school morning we would go around and fill the jam tins with water.

I remember one school inspector one day asking us children if we survived and he was greeted with a whole lot of blank faces. No, we didn't think we had. At the time that I left Tucki Tucki school to go to Lismore High School, Mr Munday also left. He joined the Royal Australian Air Force in February 1941 and went to the War. Unfortunately he did not return.

When I went to the Lismore High School I travelled on Arthur Ford's Broadwater to Lismore Bus Service. As there were not many cars in those days it was always packed to the hilt. Mr Ford was licenced to seat 30 passengers and he often had 100, they were standing in the aisles and everywhere. For some years after the war, he used to run his bus to Lismore on Saturday nights and sometimes he would have 110 people on board. Some of the more agile ones would ride up on top. He would never go right into town with the people on top. He always pulled up in Conway Street and those up on top had to get off.

One morning a week, I had to get off Ford's bus in town and attend woodworking classes at what was then known as the Rural School (c1930's). This was on the corner of Keen and Magellan Streets where it changed to the Lismore High School, then Lismore Teachers College, the Conservatorium of Music, now it houses the Library. At 11 o'clock we had just 10 minutes to walk from the Rural School to the high school at North Lismore. It was almost impossible and we would be wandering into the classroom there during the lessons, to the annoyance of teachers. One teacher, a Mr Foster was always talking about awarding the "Order of the Falling Wand".

As we walked along Keen Street on our way over to the high school, I remember walking past the air-raid shelters that were there. These consisted of large concrete pipes about 6 feet diameter and about 20 feet long. They were laid over on their sides and placed end to end and half buried in the central car parking area in the middle of Keen Street. There may have been others around the town too that I didn't know about.

Many is the time Bill would talk about his volunteering at the Jondaryan Woolshed which is a 150 acre property leftover from the original 300,000 acres which is only 30 mins outside of Toowoomba. Bill told me that he enjoyed being a part of the team of volunteers there and there was many a job that he could turn his hand to. One day he came in and got me to copy some pages out of a book called 'Jondaryan Sketches' by Ron Edwards and on page 14 there was 2 sketches of our Bill, one was dated 1996. He also wrote out the history of the woolshed for me which included a poem called 'Bunny's Gentle Giants'.



Mason Bill 2010 playing the saw



Alstonville 2004

He told me that when he was volunteering there he met his wife Rikki. He was very proud of her artistic talent and brought me in photos of her work. Bill also had a love of making working timber models. One of the first that I saw was of the Rocklea Post Office and the last one that he brought in was of the weed machine that was used on the Tuckean swamp. He was a very clever man with timber, tools and his hands and then he would also write out the history of what he had made.

Some of his other many talents were that he could play the saw and button accordion. One of the many bands that he played with was the Harry Venn band as he was very musical and a born entertainer. He also had a great love of the classic movies and many times there was a chat about them over a cuppa. Every meeting that he attended he was always in the front seat on the right which has not been claimed by anybody yet. Bill will be sorely missed by his many friends here at Alstonville Plateau Historical Society.

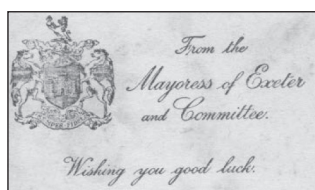
Alison Draper

1917 XMAS AT THE GUN PITS - LEFT SECTION

The postcard below was located in the belongings of my grandfather, Henry Alexander Cooke, born 1895 at Wollongbar, fourth son of Dixon and Fanny Cooke (nee Alexander). During his early years Harry, (or sometimes "Snow") as he was known, attended Alstonville Public School and, no doubt, helped out on the farm where all the boys received a thorough grounding in farming and cattle breeding.

With the outbreak of WW1, and with his two oldest brothers William (Willy/Billy to some) and Alfred (Alf) both enlisting earlier in 1915, at age 20 and single, Harry and another older brother Arthur Dixon (Dick), both enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) on 9 November 1915. Enlisted as 2332 Harry Alexander Cooke, he and Dick were sent to camp at Enoggera, QLD, for training before heading to Sydney to embark on 5 April 1916 for the Middle East on Transport A47 "Mashobra" with the 16th Reinforcement group of the 5th Light Horse Regiment.

Disembarking in Alexandria, Egypt, they were sent to different camps. Following training Harry set sail with 2300 troops for England. A letter from Harry to his mother, Fanny Cooke, published in the Northern Star on 26 August 1916, provided a detailed account of his view of life in Egypt, to landing at Tilbury Docks from where they entrained immediately for an unknown destination. At a stop in Exeter locals boarded the trains, filling their water bottles with "beautiful hot tea, cow's milk and finally a paper bag containing a bun and a card from the Mayoress of Exeter & Committee wishing you good luck".



A gesture no doubt much appreciated by the troops. He also described what he viewed from the train of "this glorious country" including the hedges, green grass, flowers, and crops – even a few bunnies! It was also a time when these Australians first encountered daylight saving, with quite an enlightening description provided.

After detraining at the end of the line at around 2:30am they were informed camp was four miles distant which they had to cover on foot – "a shock after a fortnight on little tucker and no exercise". Nevertheless, they did it, finishing the last mile or so in daylight.

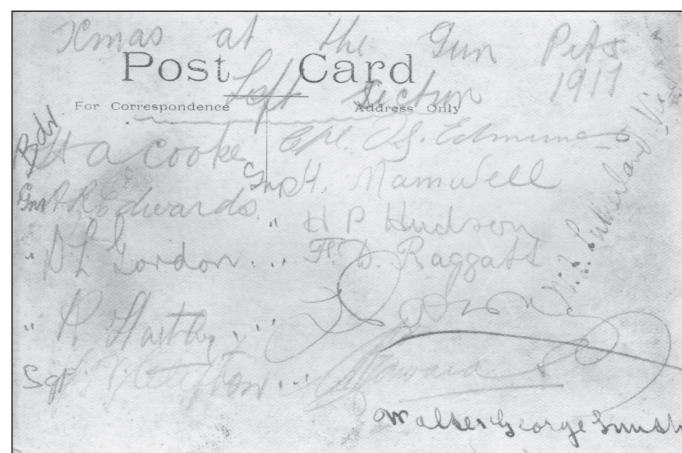
Harry went on to be involved in operations as a Gunner in France and Flanders, and later as Sergeant with the 112th Howitzer Battery, 12th Field Artillery Brigade of the 4th Division, seeing actions in Ypres, Somme and Hindenburg lines.

One can only imagine the hardships suffered by troops in the appalling conditions in the trenches, which were of

usually around ten feet deep and six feet wide, particularly during the bitter winter months. There was little protection or warmth from the extremely low temps in the trenches, especially at night. It has been reported that clothes and blankets froze and the muddy trench walls becoming hard as brick. Even food and water became almost impossible to eat, with reports of hot tea ending up with a layer of ice on top before reaching troops at the end of the trench. During these extreme conditions many soldiers suffered from frost bit and exposure.

When it rained water accumulated quickly in the bottom trenches, turning them into squalid mud baths infested with rodents and insects; lice were also a problem encountered by soldiers. Planks were placed along trenches and around camps so troops could traverse the areas out of the mud, at least for a little while.

Not until the improvement of wet weather conditions in the trenches, due to better drainage and more waterproof footwear, did the condition of "trench foot" improve for troops. The muddy conditions caused blisters, open sores and fungal infections which eventually led to gangrene and ensuing amputation.



It's hard to imagine what conditions the troops in the Left Section of the Gun Pits experienced that Christmas in 1917 – hopefully, as they had time to sign the back of Harry's photo-postcard, they had some respite from the hostilities during that period – and maybe a hot cuppa!

Comfort packages from home were always greatly appreciated. An excerpt from

a letter from Gunner AD (Dick) Cooke to the Alstonville Red Cross (printed Northern Star 1 April 1919) expressing

continued on page 5

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continued from page 4

just that, "It is with the greatest pleasure I pen these few lines, firstly, to assure you that your good work has not been in vain, and secondly, to acknowledge receipt of a parcel forwarded to me by Mrs S Brown through your society. Please convey to your society my very best thanks for the comforts which arrived in good order, except for a slight accident to the 'itchy coo' powder. Yes, the distance on high seas proved too strong for the receptacle in which it was contained, so it sought refuge in along with the coffee and milk; still that did not make it any the less welcome."

For his actions during service, Harry was award a Military Medal for bravery in the field (gazetted 2 November 1917), but unfortunately to date I have been unable to locate the recommendation details. However, also located amongst Harry's memorabilia was a clipping of an article from The Anzac Bulletin – "An Australian Mobile Artillery Brigade. Fine Work Finely Recognised" by FM Cutlack, War Correspondents' Headquarters, France, June 6th, who wrote concerning a certain (not named) Australian Mobile Artillery Brigade which "possesses a fighting record of which any regiment would be proud". Cutlack goes on to write, "...They played a great part in helping to hold up the German advance north of Bethune; their efficiency, smartness and discipline at work or on parade makes them, as a British artillery general recently said, equal to any gunners he had ever seen. They are the pride of the Australian colonel commanding them, who has trained and led them." Cutlack further writes the Brigade was ordered out of action south of Armentieres and to march to support the famous 51st Division north of Bethune. Arriving at the end of the second day of battle to assist a gallant Scottish Division which had managed to keep the Germans at bay, which the Australians say was a miracle, Cutlack writes, "...When the Australian gunners arrived on the scene the position they meant to take up was in the hands of the Germans. They were ordered a little farther north, and clattered through the streets of Robecque under enemy fire at a steady trot up the road to the north in perfect order, dropped trails, and settled into action as if at drill. Some of their officers took command of the British infantry whose officers were all casualties; **one Australian artillery officer temporarily commanded a battalion of the Black Watch.**" Further, "...There was a critical little moment at the outgoing. It was necessary, in order to remove guns from their position, to advance 150 yards towards the enemy. Swamps lay behind the position and the road out lay in front. **The batteries made for the road at a gallop under the protection of rifle and Lewis-gun fire. The few gunners and the seven British infantrymen then escaped down the road with the rear-guard following.** The fire on the road was severe, and a few horses were lost from the teams as they galloped out, but every gun was saved and again came into action farther to the rear. The Corps Artillery Commander, when thanking the Australian brigade for their splendid success, wrote:

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"I do not say this because you are Australians, but because you are one of the finest brigades I have ever had the honour to command."

For some reason the highlighted passages above were marked on the clipping and a notation on the back of the envelope in which it was located suggested these actions may have resulted in the awarding of Harry's Military Medal.



2332 Sgt Harry Cooke, MM., MSM.

Harry was also later awarded the Meritorious Service Medal "in recognition of valuable services rendered with the Armies in France and Flanders" (gazetted London 18 January 1919) following recommendations raised by Brigadier-General WA Coxen on 27 September 1918. The Citation reads, "*For constant loyalty and cheerful performance of duties at all times. As No. 1 of a gun detachment this N.C.O. has on three separate occasions shown great gallantry. By courageous and able execution of orders, he at all times sets a high and worthy standard to all.*"

Following the cessation of hostilities and return to England, Harry embarked on board HMAT "Ulysses" on 18 Jan 1919, returning to Australia on 15 March 1919. Harry was discharged from service on 17 May 1919. In fact, all the Cooke brothers returned home, all heading back to the Alstonville area, at least for a time. Story has it Harry was asked to take up a position at Duntroon Military College, no doubt due to his high standards and ability to lead and execute orders. Harry declined, choosing to return to working the land.

We know he remained in Alstonville for a time as newspaper reports have him involved in the organisation of, and participation in post war celebration activities before heading south for the next stage of his life.

Harry enlisted again in WW2 and served between 19 August 1940 and 13 May 1946 as Staff Sergeant with 1 Base Postal Unit. There is more to Harry's story but that's for another time.

Bev Felton

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From The Nook



The Wyrallah Story

By The Late Charles William Mason ('Bill')

The name comes from two Bundjalung words meaning hungry and Yerella meaning cold and hungry.

The first sawmill on the Richmond River was erected in the early 1860's at Wyrallah on what was known then as the North Arm. In 1862 Mr William Lane and his son, Albert, landed from the schooner Josephine and erected the first slab hut. They then went to work making bricks for the mill chimney. They brought shells from Ballina by the boat load to make the lime for the mortar.

Shortly after, the paddle steamer, owned by brothers James and Captain Robert Breckenridge arrived from Port Stephens with the machinery. Work pushed on with James Breckenridge doing the engineering work and within a year the mill was operating. Other engineers who followed were: Chambers, J. E. James, John Thompson and F. B. Allen.

The Rainbow was only a small paddle wheeler of 89 tons. She made several trips to and from Port Stevens carrying machinery and the families of the workmen until the 2nd June 1864, when she foundered in a gale near Seal Rocks.

Robert Breckenridge now fades from the story. The sawmill at Wyrallah was always referred to as Breckenridge's sawmill, but there was in fact another partner named Keep. James Breckenridge was part owner and manager.

The mill hands experienced all the hardships of pioneers and sometimes ran low in provisions owing to the ships being bar-bound.

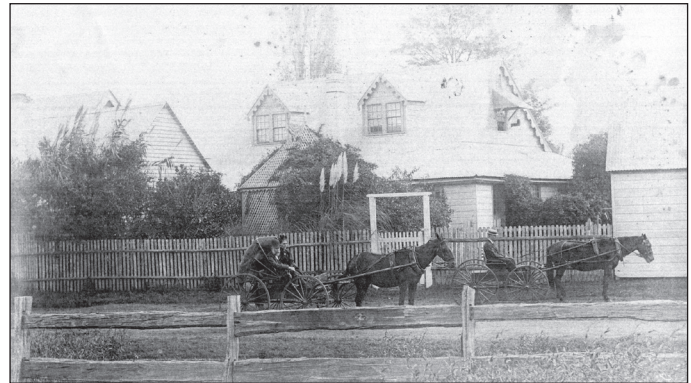
A tramway was laid from the mill, across the flat country right to the scrub and pine logs were drawn in to the works on a four wheel carriage. Sometimes bullocks were used to do the hauling. Sometimes horses were used.

Breckenridge and Keep had their drays, horses, teams of bullocks and other cattle bought overland from Port Stephens via the Northern Tablelands and Grafton. The late John Webber made two trips for them.

The mill employed a good number of men and great quantities of dressed pine were shipped to market.

Before the advent of steamers, the timber was taken away by sailing ships. Some of the ships were – Lavina, Lizzy Colson, Alpha, Edith, Keep, Grace, Saucy Jack, Peri, Wallaby and Commerce. The river was tidal and the sailing ships were towed along the river by rowing boats when the tide was with them and when the tide turned, they tied up and waited till it turned again. When tugs Appeared, the first of them were – Challenge, Index, Athletic and Tom Fenwick. Often a tug would tow as many as six sailing vessels at one time.

One of the first Church men to visit the sawmill as the settlement was then known, was Abbe Schurr, the Roman Catholic Priest who was then stationed at Coraki and in December 1892, he placed a notice in the Coraki Pink Paper. It stated – "Boys and other thieves trespassing on my ground will be prosecuted or fired at with rough salt or small shot." He must have had his



Wyrallah House Brackenridge

love of children sorely tried in Coraki.

Wyrallah was strongly protestant and so there was never a Catholic Church there.

The first Church at Wyrallah was the John Knox Free Presbyterian, which was officially opened by Rev. Duncan McInnes on 24th July 1880. A short distance beyond the southern end of the settlement, there is a small creek which flows into the river and the John Knox Free Presbyterian Church was situated on the bank of the creek near where it enters the river on land that was later occupied by Mr Ron McPherson.

In 1867, Mr William Munroe, Mr James Breckenridge and Mr D.J. McPherson, applied for and had granted by the government, the site for the Presbyterian Church on the hill adjacent to the little creek. That building was not completed until 1887. Later it was officially named Scots Presbyterian Church.

The John Knox Free Presbyterian was destroyed by fire in 1903, so that for about 15 years Wyrallah had two Presbyterian Churches. Early Presbyterian ministers were the Rev. John Thorn and Rev. Faulkner.

The Anglican services were held from approximately 1876 to about 1907 in the School of Arts building which was on the river bank next to the sawmill and towards the southern end of the settlement. This building fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1907 and so it was necessary to erect a new church building.

It was opened in January 1910. Early Anglican ministers were the Reverends Porter, Iola and Newton.

The Methodist Church was established in 1885 on the hill in Bridge Street. An early Methodist clergyman was the Rev. Meikeljohn.

The present road from Lismore to Woodburn comes close to the river at Wyrallah, and almost the entire early settlement was in a narrow strip between the roads and the river because that is where the highest land was. On the other side of the road, (the eastern side) except for a small hill at the northern end, the land was flat and low and it would have been very logical for a tramway to run from the sawmill out into the forest as the land that it traversed would have been very boggy in wet weather. The distance from the northern end of the settlement to the south would have been about 2 kilometres or in the old measurement, about 1¼ miles.



It is sad to report that another member of the society has passed away.

Pearl Cooke died on the 18th August in Canberra aged 93.

She was a generous supporter of Crawford House Museum giving many exquisite fibre items made by her grandmother Isabella Cooke. Crawford House is extremely proud to have Isabella's wedding gown among its collection which is sited on the Australian Dress Register. Isabella's quilting, sewing, tatting and yatting exhibit her fine needlework skills. Pearl's wish was that her Ashes be returned to Alstonville.

Ina le Bas (Cousin)

Professionalism

At a recent Executive Meeting I was reporting on a meeting of the North Coast Chapter of Museums Australia when a member said what a shame she couldn't attend. Yes it was a shame because she, or any member of APHS, was welcome to attend. I suspect in our haste to run day to day activities we have neglected to tell our members about the organisations that help our Societies to manage our Museums and Archives professionally. There are two main organisations who meet regularly in our area.

The first is the Royal Australian Historical Society a professional organisation aiding historical societies across NSW. At one end of the spectrum they provide our insurance at a competitive rate and at the other end they offer grants for writing local histories. In addition they produce a magazine and run events including lectures on historical subjects, which members can attend if in Sydney. Also under their umbrella historical societies from the Tweed River to the Clarence River hold one meeting each year. Because of its central location the Richmond River Historical Society (RRHS) hosts the meeting but different societies nominate to run and set the agenda for the day. Next year the meeting is on 5th May 2018 and the RRHS will host the day.

The second organisation is an informal group who meet under the banner of Museums Australia. Membership is made up of museums in same catchment as the historical societies. However not all historical societies manage museums. Meetings are held twice a year in March and September at participating Museums. The venue is changed regularly from north to south so that drive times are equally shared. The aim of this organisation is to educate members about the museums sector. Often presenters are sourced from the larger museum such as the Powerhouse (MAAS) but not always. Our last session at the Port of Yamba museum a member described how the local museum had engaged with their local indigenous community.

At meetings of both organisations we have the opportunity to network, develop our specialised knowledge and our competencies. I encourage members of our Society to attend meetings and leave you with a proverb "Remember professions don't make excuses but focus on finding solutions!"

Jane Gardiner



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APHS Monthly Meetings

Community Resource Centre
10 Wardell Road, Alstonville
2.00 pm third Sunday of the month

21 Jan / 18 Feb
18 Mar / 15 Apr

Christmas at Crawford

8 December 2017 -
14 January 2018

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Crawford House Museum



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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

As we approach the end of another year, it is entirely appropriate to convey thanks to some of our (often unacknowledged) members. First a big vote of thanks to Christine Johnston for organising an excellent array of guest speakers for our monthly meetings. Her job, I know, involves lots of phone calls but her persistence brought us, for example, Kevin Munro and Peter Thorpe, two speakers who have been on our "wish list" for a number of years.

PHOTO BOOK

Another feature of our November meeting was the launching of the "Crawford House Museum" photo book put together with considerable skill by Jan Regan. The book covers (in black and white) the early years of the Crawford's house, its conversion into a museum, then a series of interior and exterior shots from exhibitions and special events at the House. Right from the start, the intention was that several copies of this book would remain in the museum for guides and visitors. Make sure you seek out a copy when you are on your next rostered duty.

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

At the meeting though, additional copies were presented to certain members. One went to Dorothy Crawford (acknowledging her generous help to Jan in putting the book together), one to Eion Johnston for Ballina Shire Council (in recognition of our on-going partnership) and another to foundation member Marguerite Fuller. John accepted Marguerite's copy sent with our best wishes to her after a brief spell in hospital.

Jane and I had previously delivered a copy to Margaret Sloan while she was busy packing up house at Maranoa prior to her move to Sydney. She was most appreciative of this gesture and assured us that the book would provide a strong link to her many happy years in Alstonville.

Jan was able to take us through an electronic copy of the publication on our TV screen and this resulted in ten extra copies being ordered. Many thanks, Jan, for this wonderful initiative.

I am writing this report on the day that new floor covering is being put down in the Breakfast room and laundry. This is yet another project we have been able to undertake with money raised at the Airing of the Quilts event. A solid proportion of this year's profits came from the quilt raffle which was won by regular visitor Janet Fernie who works at Alstonville High School.

October brought significant birthdays for Gwen (80) and Dorothy (99) and we all enjoyed helping them with the cake. This time of year will see other family gatherings, so it just remains for me to wish you all Happy Christmas and a pleasant transition into 2018.

JOHN SIM



Janet Fernie



The Birthday Ladies

Alstonville Plateau Historical Society provides a service to the public to research enquiries into the history of people, places and events relevant to both the Alstonville Plateau and Ballina Shire.

The Research Centre is open Fridays 10.00 am to 4.00 pm or by arrangement, and it is recommended that prior to a visit you contact us either by email (info@aphsmuseum.org.au) or at the Research Centre so we can send you our research form and ensure we have a member to help you.

