



Newsletter

School Visits

The recent school visit by Mawarra Public School Years 3&4 students is an example of cooperation and collaboration between three cultural institutions in Camden.

Society member Kellee Cordina coordinated the visit for the students between the **Camden Museum**, the **Alan Baker Art Gallery** and **The Estate Camden**.

This type of cooperation and collaboration between Camden's cultural institutions was encouraged at the recent tourist forum **Macarthur Together**.

Trish Clark writes

The most recent school visit was from Mawarra Public School on Tuesday May 19. With a group of 100 students, Dianne Matterson, Diane Massey and Carla Hill assisted alongside teachers and support unit assistants. The group included students with additional needs assisted by Student Learning Support Officers, who thoroughly

enjoyed the day.

They were all interested and well behaved and would go on to rotate to Alan Baker Gallery and Crookston house then lunch up at St John's Church.

The society has encouraged school visits to the museum since it was opened in 1970.



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From the President's desk

Peter Riordan writes:

On a recent Thursday afternoon, when the Museum was open and students from the alma mater were using the seating in the Galleria, three Year 7 students were busy reading their phones. A member of the Museum walked by, and said: "Men, have you been inside the Museum?"

The response was "No", and a shake of the head.

"Interested in having a quick look?"

"Okay."

After entering the Museum, Leonie introduced them to Graeme Clark, and then invited them to wander around. After a short time, they finished their visit.

"Did you find it interesting?"

"Yes". They nodded their heads, and left the Museum. They appeared impressed, but also a little bewildered by what they had seen.

We live in an age where knowledge and understanding is distorted and twisted. There is so much misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, lies, false facts and fake news. Social media has a lot to answer for, as do people with "vested agendas".

Barry Jones AC, is now in his 90s. In his latest book, he argues that one possible solution (for which he does not claim originality) is to encourage our young people to limit the use of their phones, and to develop a lifetime practice of reading books. In particular, the books and writings of people who are learned and objective in expressing their views. The next step is for the young people to develop their own ability to draw conclusions as to what are true facts and opinions.

There is much to be said in favour of taking this step. A visit to the Museum is visual reading of our story, of a high order. An opportunity to appreciate the hopes and efforts of our forebears, and a signpost to the future.

General Meetings

- 10 June
- 8 July
- 12 August

Meetings are held on the 2nd Wednesday of the month at 7.00pm

40 John St, Camden. All welcome

During closure meeting places will be advised on Camden Museum Facebook and email.

Ph: (02) 4655 3400

All correspondence to: secretary@camdenhistory.org.au • Editor: Dr Ian Willis OAM • President: Peter Riordan • Vice Presidents: Jo O'Brien & John Wrigley OAM • Treasurer Fletcher Joss • Secretary: Vacant • Immediate Past President Dr Ian Willis OAM • General Committee: Robert Wheeler, Julie Wrigley, Ian Ramsay, Dianne Matterson • Volunteer Co-Ord: Dawn Williams & Leonie Jackson • *Webmaster*: Warren Sims *Facebook*: Jo O'Brien

Editor's Notes

Planner for 2026

Upcoming events and meetings:

- 12 June Museum re-opening with Mayor
- 5 September Unlock Camden in John Street

5-13 September History Week Keeping Stories

25-28 November Write Out West Writers Festival

Time After Time Exhibition



Jo O'Brien writes:

This new exhibition of historic photographs, pictures, articles and stories illustrated the change over time of several iconic buildings in the heart of Camden – the Library/Museum complex, Macaria, the Foresters Hall, and the AH & I hall. Six panels were displayed in the Old Fire Station, which was one of the featured buildings. It was fascinating to see the changes over the years, both in the structure of the buildings and the various functions and occupants. The exhibition was presented by Camden Historical Society, Camden Area Family History Society, and Camden Library, as part of the 2026 Australian Heritage Festival, with the theme for this year, 'Change'.

Macaria... Home... School... Dr West... Library... Council... Art Gallery



Henry Thompson, a prominent local miller, built Macaria as a showhouse about 1835, but when the intended schoolmaster moved elsewhere, it became a family home. The brick residence with a shingle roof was constructed in the Picturesque Tudor-Gothic style. Henry was killed in a fall from a horse in 1875. Several years later, the Thompson family left, and Macaria became home to other families. In 1886, Macaria was leased to G.B. Crabbie, who converted the building to the Camden Grammar School for young boys. The school closed in 1894.



Dr Francis West lived and worked at Macaria from 1902 until his death in 1952 at the age of 58. Dr West was a prominent citizen and much admired doctor, known for his community work and generosity, and his funeral was attended by more than 1000 people, who followed the cortege along John Street from Macaria to St John's church. An extra wing was added to Macaria in 1910.

A series of doctors and dentists occupied the building until 1965, when it was purchased by Camden Council. Their intention was to knock down Macaria to construct a new council administration building and Civic Centre on the site. Despite the National Trust recommending preservation of the 150-year old building in 1970, the council's Town Clerk declared that Macaria had no architectural or historic value. Thankfully, due to the efforts of Camden Historical Society, Miss Ursula Davies, and the community, the building was saved, although the stables and outbuildings were removed to construct the new administration building.



Council used Macaria as Camden library from 1967 until 1982, and as council offices until 2016. The building was extended in 1978, with offices behind and beside Macaria.

When Camden Council moved to their new building at Oak Park, Macaria was sympathetically restored, and converted to an art gallery which opened in 2018.

Today, Macaria is home to the Alan Baker Art Gallery, a much loved centre for art exhibitions, cultural activities, and events including the annual Heritage Festival 'Unlock Camden'.



Camden News, 2 September 1870
Camden News, 19 November 1870
Images: Camden Images, Camden Museum, 2019, Peter Allen, Camden Council



New Exhibition to be launched by the Camden Mayor

Illustrative Panel

THE STORY OF THE CAMDEN MUSEUM

Welcome

Camden Museum is open again. For 69 years, Camden Historical Society volunteers have collected, cared for and shared Camden's stories. This exhibition celebrates the Museum, its collection, its archives, its volunteers, its building and its place in the Camden community.



Begin here

Museum, people, collections and community

Camden is more than a local story. Shaped by the river, First Nations history, colonial settlement, farming and a rare, planned townscape, it has produced people and ideas whose influence has reached across Australia and, at times, the world.



A planned town built around its church

Thank you for being part of the Museum's next chapter.



People

Nothing is possible without you

The Museum is more than a building and a collection. It lives through the people who volunteer, visit, donate, remember and share. Their gifts of time, objects and memory keep Camden's stories alive.

Thank you for helping continue that story.



Community

Too many to name

Rotary and many other local service groups, clubs and associations have supported the Museum across many years.

Too many to name here, they have given practical help, encouragement and community spirit, helping strengthen Camden Historical Society and keep local history alive.

Thank you.



Camden Council

Thank you to Camden Council

Camden Museum has been sustained across many years by the continuing support of Camden Council.

Council's financial and practical assistance, the support of Camden Library staff and the Local Studies Librarian, and the Memorandum of Understanding that enables the Museum to operate have all been essential.

Belgenny Farm Pioneer Farm Day

Karin and Peter Riordan writes:

Belgenny Farm was a happy place on Sunday, 24 May. The weather was kind, and a large number of visitors, mostly families with young children, enjoyed a relaxing, autumnal day at the historic Macarthur home farm. It was a day run by volunteers, assisted by staff from the DPI. Camden Historical Society was represented by Jo, Ian, Dianne, and Dawn and with Lee at the entrance. Their table was located in a prime position – the verandah of the 1814 cottage, where John Macarthur without doubt sat and watched the sun set, over 200 years ago.

There was much to enjoy: live music by the OJs, quality stalls of hand crafted goods and produce, steam engines. Tours were organised, and there were activities such as “Become a Belgenny Farm Hand” for the kids, “Have a go Croquet” and “Disc Golf”. The Nepean Scouts had a selection of fun adventure activities as well. The event was organised by The Friends of Belgenny Farm, an organisation of volunteers who encourage the use, enjoyment and benefit of Belgenny Farm by the community. They ran a delightful tea room, with scones baked by The Menangle Store. [The subsequent fire at The Store is a tragedy, and our thoughts go out to Shane and Marcel.]

Once again, the Drover’s Camp Fire was a highlight. Clancy’s Jake and John brought to life “the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended”, and left the visitors to ponder a night campfire and “the wond’rous glory of the everlasting stars”.

A big thank you to everyone involved. A fitting conclusion to National Volunteer Week 2026: “Your Year to Volunteer”. Next event: “Back to Belgenny” on 8 August.

Pics: Belgenny Farm Entry Karin Riordan. CHS Infor Table Ian Willis

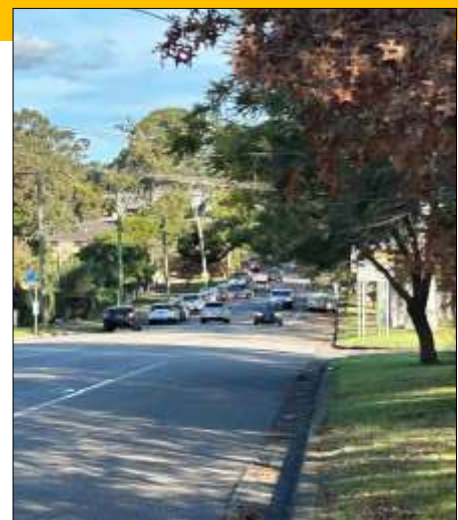


Appeal for local knowledge- Real Flood Level

Fletcher Joss asks:

Does anyone have family recollections or stories of floodwaters covering the Old Hume Highway near Camden South Public School?

The low saddle in the road suggests that flood levels during some of the major 1800s floods may have approached, or perhaps reached, the present road level. Did this ever happen? Are there any family stories, photographs, or local memories that mention it?



Volunteer Training 2026

Dianne Matterson writes:

On Thursday 14th and Saturday 16th May, a total of 33 volunteers (approximately 67% of our volunteers) attended Volunteer Training at the Museum with Dawn and Dianne as trainers. Unfortunately, Leonie, our other trainer, was unable to join us due to ill-health. The training included: Emergency procedures; Volunteer’s Folder; Use of the Research Room by visitors; How to use the photocopier and replace paper; Opening and closing the Museum; Preparation of the Museum for opening in the morning; and How to use the EFTPOS machine.

Each volunteer also received a two-page leaflet that summarised the important training points covered during each session. This can be used by the volunteers for future reference.

It was a successful training activity that will be repeated in the future, at which time other ‘topics’ may be included. After the training was completed, a number of volunteers stayed for a cuppa and a chat.



Dianne Matterson training volunteers at the Camden Museum 2026 (I Willis)



Dianne Matterson operating laptop for instruction video assisted by Jo O’Brien (I Willis)



Dianne Matterson (I Willis)

Camden High School History to be Recognised

Fletcher Joss writes

Camden Historical Society recently put a case to the Camden Local Planning Panel for a historical archive for the former Camden High School site at John Street and Elizabeth Street.

The society was concerned that an earlier condition requiring a photographic record had been removed through a previous modification. The former school was an important part of Camden’s educational and community history, and its story should still be recorded and shared.

On 19 May, the Panel approved modification DA/2008/644/12, but added a new condition requiring

an **Interpretation Strategy** before occupation certificates are issued for Buildings A, B and C.

The strategy must include a photographic record and concise written history of the school, to be displayed in publicly accessible locations within the development.

While this is not a complete heritage archival study, it is a welcome recognition of the school’s place in Camden’s history. The Society will continue to lobby for an archival study.

CAMDEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC



PO Box 566
Camden NSW 2570

Camden Museum & Camden Library
40 John St, Camden.

General Admission Free

Opening Times

Thursday– Sunday 11.00am – 4.00 pm

Phone: Museum 02 4655 3400

<http://www.camdenhistory.org.au>

<http://camdenhistory.org.au/cmindex.html>

email: secretary@camdenhistory.org.au

ABN 84 182 869 026

MEMBERSHIP 2025-2026

Individual \$20, Family \$25

The Camden Historical Society

The society was founded in 1957. Its aim is to promote the local history and heritage of Camden. It primarily does this through managing the Camden Museum which opened in 1970. General admission to the museum is free, although visitors are encouraged to leave a donation. The museum is conducted entirely by volunteers. It also receives substantial and continuing assistance from Camden Council.

Historic Precinct

The museum is located in Camden's historic precinct. It is part of the Camden Library Museum Complex. It provides an ideal start for a walking tour of the town area where the visitor can observe the charm and character of the town centre.

Research

The Society's archives are open to the public. General enquiries are free. Specific research by our volunteers attracts a fee plus photocopying. Extensive use of the Society's records is by negotiation.

All donations to the Camden Historical Society Inc over \$2 are tax deductible. The accredited value of objects donated to the society are eligible for tax deduction.

Nepean House

Nepean House, located on Mitchell Street in Camden, is a picturesque early Victorian Gothic home built between 1855 and 1859. Originally part of the Camden Park Estate, the property was purchased in 1855 and construction commenced for Camden surgeon Dr. John Bleeck. In 1884, it was sold to William Packenham, a builder from The Oaks, who added a sweeping verandah, cast-iron lacework, and a corrugated iron roof. Packenham's family occupied the home until 1944.

The site features 19th-century timber-slab stables with a loft at the rear. In 1973, Camden solicitor Paul Bowring—who owned the home at the time—commissioned Sydney architects Fisher Lucas to add a single-storey pavilion to the historic structure. Today, Nepean House is a prominent local heritage item on the Camden Heritage Walking Tour. While local lore has occasionally sparked imaginative, modern rumours of trapped spirits on the verandah, historical experts and residents describe the house as purely a site of deep colonial significance. For more details on its architectural features or to explore local history, you can visit [Camden History Notes](#).



Nepean House Mitchell Street Camden. The house is item 22 on Camden Heritage Walking Tour. (I Willis, 2021)