

The Camden Historical Society Inc and Camden Council Library Service present

# **Just Keep Digging: An Introductory Workshop Examining Sources in Local History**

Ian Willis

## **Abstract**

An introductory workshop that provides an overview of sources for researching local history, with particular reference to Camden.

## **Date:**

Saturday 12 April 2008

9.30-10.30am

## **Location:**

Camden Library

40 John St

Camden.

## **Cost:**

Free

## Workshop prepared and presented by

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## Just Keep Digging: An Introductory Workshop Examining Sources in Local History

Interest in local history has been growing for some time. For example, there are over 360 local history and special interest societies affiliated to the Royal Australian Historical Society.

So what is this interest based on? What is local history?

Local history is generally considered to be the study of history in a geographical context, and often concentrates on a local community. It usually incorporates cultural and social aspects of history, although can extend to incorporate a number of other factors, for example, geographic, economic and political considerations. That is, it is the history of a locality.

So what locality are you interested in?

The locality I have chosen for this workshop is Camden. I will define the local history of Camden as that which includes Camden as a country town undergoing change on the outer fringe of Sydney. The town was founded in 1840 and its wealth and material progress were built on farming (dairying, mixed farming and orchards) and mining (silver and coal). Camden's characteristic landscape is defined by the Nepean floodplain and the hinterland has been a mixture of large estates, owned by the gentry, and smallholders. The townscape reflects the dairy town of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with a population that was dominated by social rank, conservatism and a rural ideology. In recent years Sydney's urban growth has engulfed the local area and challenged the very identity of the country town, the community's sense of place and the notion of a rural landscape.

So what now?

The next step is find the sources of information relevant to this area. This is no easy task as there is no single index or catalogue that will list all the references relevant to Camden. A comprehensive search by you for all the sources of information could several months to complete and is beyond the time and resources of most people.

So how much time do you have?

For those with lots of time and patience you can still use the tried and true methods of researching by visiting libraries and institutions but it is slow, can be expensive and frustrating. For those who are time poor, that is most of us, the easiest way to located sources for local history is on the internet. It is much easier than in the past. These days you can make your fingers do the walking, rather than using lots of shoe leather.

What type of sources of information are you trying to find?

Local history sources on Camden fall into two categories: primary and secondary sources.

Secondary sources are the most accessible source, but only provide general information. Secondary sources are those that provide information that is reconstructed by others about a locality. It includes books, journal articles and a range of other sources. If you only have a limited amount of time then secondary sources may be the best approach.

A number of secondary sources are listed in the [Camden Bibliography](#) on the [Camden Historical Society](#) website. The bibliography is only meant to be a starting point for any researcher looking at the local area. It is an overview of sources related to Camden and is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all references. The bibliography also has useful links to other websites that might be useful in your search.

How do you get hold of the books listed in the Camden Bibliography?

The first job is to find out where they are held. In the past that would have meant visiting various libraries and searching their card catalogues. This can now be done on the internet in the comfort of your home or visiting the local library, saving time, effort, money and much frustration. Some of these secondary sources are located in local council libraries, for example, [Camden Council Library](#) or [Campbelltown Council Library](#). Many others are not located in Camden and to obtain these you will have to go to other locations, for example, the [National Library of Australia](#), or the [State Library of New South Wales](#). An often overlooked source are academic libraries, for example, the [University of Wollongong Library](#) or the [University of Western Sydney Library](#). To obtain these sources you could organise an inter-library loan through your local council library or visit the particular library yourself.

Another location of secondary sources are local Camden organisations that have history pages. These can be very useful, for example [St John's Church](#), which lists the church history and also provides hyperlinks to other websites. The [Camden Historical Society](#) website provides an extensive list of links to other websites that might be useful.

Local government websites can provide useful secondary sources of information, for example, [Camden Council](#) or [Macarthur Region Organisation of Councils](#).

Primary sources are the best source and provide the most reliable information, but are harder to access. They provide the 'voice' of the original source such as individuals involved in the local event. This extends to the landscape and an examination of sites around the local area. If they are examined with a keen eye they will 'talk' to you. Primary sources are the most original available information about the locality. They can include:

- 1. Manuscripts:** Diaries, Letters, Posters, Official records – government records (eg: birth certificates, death certificates), Newspapers, Memoirs, Personal records, songs, poems,
- 2. Images:** Maps, Sketches, Paintings, Photographs, Etchings, cartoons, advertisements,

**3. Other:** sites, artefacts, objects, ephemera, memorabilia, anecdotes, ephemera, human remains (skeletons), interview (oral testimony).

Where are they found?

These primary sources are found in many locations. Manuscripts and many images are located in a diversity of archives, both government and private, while the remainder might be located in a variety of museums and galleries. As local historians you might have to do some field work and examine the original site of local events. Locally primary sources of information can be found in the archives of the [Camden Historical Society](#). For the convenience of researchers the society provides a list the file headings and key guide words on its website.

Other larger archives provide sources of information on a range of areas and a search of the indexes on their websites provides a guide for Camden sources. Some of these provide specific guides for local history for the intrepid researcher. There are specific guides for local history research, for example, the [Local History Research Guide from State Records of New South Wales](#) which lists records, indexes and other useful information on the Camden area in government records, eg, National Emergency Services correspondence of the Second World War. Other libraries have guides, for example, the [City of Sydney Library Local History Webpage](#) which lists holdings which might be useful, and databases may be able to help, for example, the [Dictionary of Sydney Sources on Sydney](#), which lists information on the Camden area. For the personal papers and records of state based organisations then the [Mitchell Library](#) is a useful source, eg, Macarthur Papers or the state records of the Women's Voluntary Services.

For those seeking information about the activities of the Federal Government and its departments, agencies and instrumentalities on Camden, then a search of the holdings of the [National Archives of Australia](#) is essential, eg, wartime records of Camden's military installations. Further wartime records are held by the [Australian War Memorial](#), eg, which lists records of local servicemen from the various wars. , Other government sites might be useful, for example, the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#), [Bureau of Meteorology](#) or the [Australian government portal](#), which directs you to the web pages of the Federal government, the state government and local government.

A useful source of archives in Australia is the [Directory of Archives in Australia](#). This will direct you to archives related to Camden.

Images can be located on [Picture Australia](#), which lists millions of images around the country, including those of Camden. It is a database that has the collections of many of the large collecting institutions from around the country.

There are lists of personal papers or many newspaper articles that have been written about Camden, as well as artefacts, objects, works of art, photographs and other elements which are held in various locations that make up Camden's material culture and fabric. To find these will take time, determination and money. Researchers on Camden will come across references to the local area in many obscure places that you would not even think of and will be useful.

## Other Histories

The local historian may find lots of useful information in other areas of history, for example, genealogical sources of information (family history). The number of primary and secondary sources in the area of family history is enormous. For those interested consult the Camden Family History Society located in this building. Another area that can be useful but is often overlooked by local historians is academic histories, such as doctorates and master degree. These can be difficult to access and are located in university libraries and some are located on the Camden Bibliography.

Other areas of history that can yield useful sources of information include:

- Military history
- Organisational history
- Political history
- Biographical history
- Women's history
- Migration history
- Others.

## Other disciplines

Other disciplines may be useful for the local historian. They may provide useful leads and clarify issues related to local studies of Camden. They include areas such as heritage studies, architecture, sociology, women's studies, philanthropy, law, and so on.

## **Useful overview of the process of finding local history sources of information**

1. Define: What do I really want to find out?
2. Locate: Where can I find the information I need?
3. Select: What information do I really need?
4. Organise: How can I best use this information?
5. Present: How can I best present this information?
6. Assess: What did I learn from this?

## A short list of useful websites.

[Australian Bureau of Statistics](http://www.abs.gov.au/)

<http://www.abs.gov.au/>

[Australian government portal](http://www.gov.au/)

<http://www.gov.au/>

[Australian War Memorial](http://www.awm.gov.au/)

<http://www.awm.gov.au/>

[Bureau of Meteorology](http://www.bom.gov.au/)

<http://www.bom.gov.au/>

[Camden Bibliography](http://www.camdenhistory.org.au/camdenbibliography.html)

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

[Camden Council](http://www.camden.nsw.gov.au/)

<http://www.camden.nsw.gov.au/>

[Camden Council Library](http://www.library.camden.nsw.gov.au/)

<http://www.library.camden.nsw.gov.au/>

[Camden Historical Society](http://www.camdenhistory.org.au/hsindex.html)

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

[Campbelltown Council Library](http://www.campbelltown.nsw.gov.au/default.asp?iSubCatID=121&iNavCatID=1)

<http://www.campbelltown.nsw.gov.au/default.asp?iSubCatID=121&iNavCatID=1>

[City of Sydney Library Local History Webpage](http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/Library/Collections/LocalHistoryBooks.asp)

<http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/Library/Collections/LocalHistoryBooks.asp>

[Dictionary of Sydney Sources on Sydney](http://www.dictionaryofsydney.org/www/html/75-sources-on-sydney.asp)

<http://www.dictionaryofsydney.org/www/html/75-sources-on-sydney.asp>

[Directory of Archives in Australia](http://www.archivists.org.au/directory)

<http://www.archivists.org.au/directory>

[Local History Research Guide from State Records of New South Wales](#)

<http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/archives%5Fin%5Fbrief%5F6%5F1397.asp>

[Macarthur Region Organisation of Councils](#)

<http://www.macroc.nsw.gov.au/>

[Mitchell Library](#)

<http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/>

[National Archives of Australia](#)

<http://www.naa.gov.au/>

[National Library of Australia](#)

<http://www.nla.gov.au/>

[Picture Australia](#)

<http://www.pictureaustralia.org/>

[State Library of New South Wales](#)

<http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/>

[State Records of New South Wales](#)

<http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/staterecords/>

[St John's Church](#)

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

[University of Western Sydney Library](#)

<http://library.uws.edu.au/>

[University of Wollongong Library](#)

<http://www.library.uow.edu.au/>