

DUIDGEEANA

(From the Nyungar language - Duidgee, a place of plenty)

The Newsletter of the Toodyay Historical Society Inc. Issue No.46 (Autumn 2017)

For more about us see our new website: <http://www.toodyayhistoricalsociety.org.au/>

APRIL EXCURSION SYRED'S COTTAGE & LUNCH AT BOLGART HOTEL Saturday 29 April 2017

Assemble at Drummond House, Stirling Terrace carpark for car pool at 10.30am.
BYO morning tea at Syreds Cottage (bring chair) followed by 12.30pm lunch at
Bolgart Hotel



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AGM Sunday 9 April 2017 St Stephen's Church Hall proved to be an excellent venue for this year's AGM. Business included our Revised Rules of Association being accepted, with an additional amendment allowing for the roles of Secretary and Treasurer to be combined. Changes saw Wayne Clarke step down as much "treasured" Treasurer, and Linda Rooney taking on the dual role of Secretary/Treasurer. There was a warm welcome for new committee member Rev. Peggy Ludlow. Our guest speaker was Dr Sue Graham Taylor talking on 'The Swan-Avon River system - learning from the past?'. The topic attracted members from the Toodyay Naturalists Club and Toodyay Friends of the River, and they were not disappointed. Sue gave a comprehensive and interesting account of the history of the Swan and Avon rivers from first settlement, the misconceived health threats from waterways (those poisonous miasmas!), and the plan to make the Swan River foreshore more beautiful by straightening it. Thankfully that idea was rejected! Also of interest was Sue's account about the introduction of 'useful' wildlife to WA such as foreign species of fish into our waterways, and kookaburras to make the sounds of WA's bush more interesting.



Guest Speaker Dr Sue Graham-Taylor receiving a thank-you gift from President Robyn.
Photo: Beth Frayne

Committee 2017

Standing: Peter Robinson (Vice President), Milton Baxter, Len Leeder (Patron), Beth Frayne, Linda Rooney (Secretary/Treasurer), Rev. Peggy Ludlow, Wayne Clarke, Colin Kendall. **Seated:** Jenny Edgecombe, Robyn Taylor (President), Desrae Clarke.



Photo: Vicki Warburton

February Feature Speaker - Desraé Clarke presented the oral history she taped in 1994 with Vivienne May D'Orville Whitfield (nee Hussey) (1903-1996), daughter of Toodyay's Dr Bertram Hussey. Desraé selected the section of Vivienne's interview that dealt with her musical education in Toodyay and Perth. This delightful presentation highlighted the rich collection of stories we are gathering.

Oral History Committee - a new committee has been formed with Linda Rooney as Coordinator, Beth Frayne and Jenny Edgecombe. Beth has created a comprehensive listing that will help in the process of collating all the tapes and documentation. We have a goal of deciding how THS might interact and share our collection with the State Library.

Accredited Oral History Training Course. THS generously provided funding for Linda Rooney and Robyn Taylor to attend this 2-day course. The goal is to increase the number of our oral histories. If you have an interest in helping with transcribing or would like to recommend someone to be interviewed, please contact the committee through secretary.2j.ths@gmail.com

A DAY WITH ALPACAS and the Fibre of the Gods spinning mill.

Sunday March 26 excursion - exploring a local industry. This was a very enjoyable day starting with *Toffee Woods Alpacas* where Melinda provided us with a fascinating tour and talk about her alpacas and the farm's history. This was supplemented by member Beth providing background research on the history of alpacas in Australia and WA. It was then off to Michael and Hazel McKone's impressive alpaca fleece processing plant and spinning mill, the first such plant in WA. Michael related the frustration of trying to get the fleece from their 'Lavender Hill Mob' processed, which led to sourcing their own equipment and setting up the mill. Our retired sheep farmer members Colin and Peter appreciated the fine fibres, while the rest of us thought the alpacas were just simply adorable.

Alpaca Excursion continued



Melinda and Alan showing us a baby alpaca.
Photo: Jenny Edgecombe



Michael McKone explaining the processing of alpaca fleece. Photo: Linda Rooney

NEWS IN BRIEF

BIG WELCOME to new member Deborah Haggitt.

BIG THANK YOU to member Bill Mattin for his donation of items of furniture which have now been installed in Drummond House.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

Historical Encyclopedia of Western Australia - this out of print book is a must for anyone interested in all things to do with WA. Good news, it can now be downloaded as a pdf. Go to: https://ap01.alma.exlibrisgroup.com/view/delivery/61UWA_INST/12333028790002101

Australia's Last Convicts - reprobates, rogues and recidivists - this book of rare photographs dating from the late 1880s to c.1912 of transportees to WA was launched in March. There are short biographies on the convicts. Published by the Friends of the Batty Library Inc. Cost \$20.

Lois Tilbrook's *Nyungar Tradition. Glimpses of Aborigines of south-western Australia 1829-1914* is a much sought-after book, with a Toodyay connection, that has long been out of print. Now available on-line - google the author and title. On page 148 is a story about Annie Stack 'The Queen of the Aborigines'. The photo we have is titled 'Queen of Toodyay'. There is a delightful ditty about her that was sung by the schoolchildren of Toodyay which was enjoyed by Annie. The first line gives you a hint about the tune: 'There's a track winding back/And there goes Annie Stack/Along the road to Dewars Pool...'

A PLACE TO CALL OUR OWN DRUMMOND HOUSE - TOODYAY ENVIRONMENT & HISTORY CENTRE compiled by Desrae Clarke

It was exciting news in late 2016 when the current Toodyay Shire Chief Executive Officer suggested to the board members of the Shire-owned Community Bank that perhaps the vacant adjacent section of the building could be sub-leased, jointly, to three community groups.

The Toodyay Naturalists' Club (TNC), established April 1968, The Toodyay Historical Society (THS), established 1980, and the Toodyay Friends of the River (incorporated 1998) were the trio of community members who have sought premises for many years.

Since establishment, the TNC members have moved the monthly meetings from the Anglican Church Hall, 1968 till 1989, the Uniting Church Hall in Duke Street, 1989 till 1995, the Avondown Catholic Diocese building, 1995 till 1998, the Toodyay Kindergarten building in Hamersley Street, 1998 till 2006 and to the Country Women's Association (CWA) Hall, 2006 till the present. With no firm roots TNC assets have been spread far and wide to be kept at the homes of members.

The THS fared a little better. A group of like-minded folk commenced their meetings in private homes to be eventually given the use of a small area in a former doctor's surgery. Once again, assets were housed at various locations.

It was an exciting move forward when a small worker's residence, known as Donegan's Cottage, was rescued in early 1993 from pending demolition. Funding was successfully sought and Donegan's, as it is lovingly known, was rehabilitated. It is used, to this day, as both a cramped working area for researchers and meetings and the storage of valuable documents, a library, maps, display material and such like. Donegan's will continue to be our headquarters and research centre, while Drummond House will be our 'shopfront'.

The seeds sown for the formation of the TFOR commenced in 1994 to become a reality in 1998. The TFOR has never had a home. As with the former two groups assets, archive and library material, documents contained in steel cabinets have been dispersed at members' homes and sheds, etc; assets spread in such a manner places a great responsibility on the individual.

The three community groups have formed a small subcommittee to work together, report to their individual member groups and to share the much needed 'shopfront' in the main street of Toodyay to advertise the place each holds in the community. This will be achieved by volunteers offering to staff Drummond House to interact and promote the valuable information they hold to the wider community as an important educational tool.

Why the name Drummond House?

James Drummond, 1787-1863, arrived in Western Australia in 1829 as the Government Naturalist. This was an honorary position which was to be abolished in 1834 by the Colonial Office. When Drummond resigned, he retired to his grant in the Helena Valley. In 1836 he transferred this grant for one in the recently explored Toodyay Valley in the Avon Valley region.

As with all early settlements water was especially valuable and the Drummond family built their home, 'Hawthornden', in the valley through which flows the Toodyay Brook. From here Drummond travelled extensively gathering wildflower specimens and seeds for overseas collectors, while his second son James Jnr ran the farm. Drummond's youngest son Johnston collected birds and animals for the famous ornithologist and artist John Gould.

The outstanding contribution of the Drummond family to the Avon Valley region historically, botanically and in farming, is well documented and acknowledged by the three Toodyay community groups.

At last - a place to call our own!

PLEASE NOTE: *We need members to volunteer some time to be at Drummond House during opening hours. Saturdays 10am - 2pm; third Sunday of month (Farmers Market Day) 10am - 2pm.*

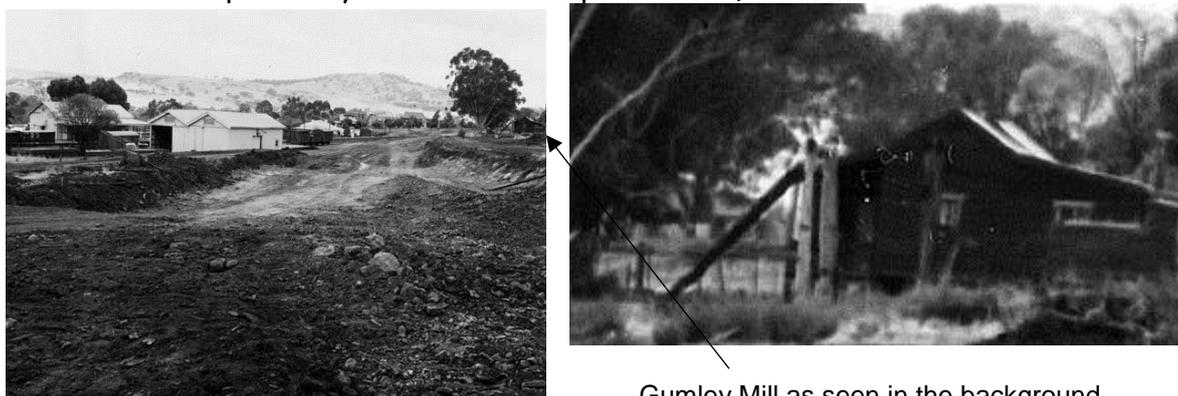
FROM THE ARCHIVIST - Jenny Edgecombe

There have been some intriguing stories from the research front, and one certainly proved the need to always approach an enquiry with an open mind and no assumptions! Recently we were shown a Clackline photograph called 'Annie's Cottage': a small but tall corrugated iron building covered in flowering wisteria. We tracked the image to the website of a professional Perth photographer. Beth and I couldn't place it through our records and usual sources, so we contacted our Clackline guru, THS member Don

Carter, who has been studying and photographing the area for many years. A day after receiving a copy, Don did some great detective work and triumphantly announced that it was, in fact, an ablution block at the derelict Clackline Refractory: showers, toilets and latrines. So much for Annie's little house!

Incidentally, the original Annie's Cottage enquirers mentioned a Toodyay link just as they were about to leave. How delighted we were to find that the man was the grandson of Tony and Blaguna Paull, who ran a fish and chips shop/café in Toodyay during the 1930s and 1940s. Blaguna's daughter Marina had married ER Wiltshire, of the Caddy and Wiltshire Drapery store in Toodyay. They have since sent us lovely photographs of the store with Wiltshire and Caddy standing outside it.

I have been searching for a photograph of Gumley's Mill for years, and a chance remark of Beth's sent me back to the Standard Gauge construction images we had noted and copied at Battye. I looked carefully at the backgrounds and sure enough, there seemed to be a large building in the right place just at the very edge of one photo, but too blurry to be sure. I ordered a proper digital copy and when I enlarged it, I was very excited to find that it was indeed the Gumley's Mill building. Not the best photo, but the only one I have so far. I also obtained permission for THS to use the image in displays and publications. (*See Life & Times of Wally Chitty* for the story of the mill. Please note that the archivist has no pecuniary interest in this publication!).



Gumley Mill as seen in the background

FUTURE EVENTS

Sunday 30 April: Art Exhibition: 'Artists' Voices from Shire of Toodyay Art Collection', Wicklow Shearing Shed, opposite Old Gaol Museum in Clinton Street, - 10am to 3.30pm. Organised as part of the National Trust Heritage Festival.

Sunday 7 May: Moondyne Festival. We will be setting up in front of Drummond House.

Wednesday 17 May: General meeting at Drummond House.

Saturday-Sunday 20-21 May: Heritage Festival, Northam, York and Toodyay

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TOODYAYESTERDAY

Alma Beard: the nurse who didn't come home

by Jenny Edgecombe

Alma Beard is usually remembered as the WWII nurse from Toodyay who was tragically killed in the Bangka Island massacre during the evacuation from Singapore. However, she also grew up on a Toodyay farm, was a nurse in two states and served her country overseas before this terrible event took place. Read on and meet Alma Beard...

Alma Beard's family

Alma was the daughter of Edward William Beard and Katherine Brennan. The Beards and Brennans were well-known families in the Toodyay-Newcastle district.

Alma's great-grandfather on her father's side, William Beard, was a Parkhurst Boy,¹ sent from England on the *Ameer* in 1849. He worked at Culham near Toodyay. In 1854, he married Mary Heavy, an Irish girl from the Toodyay Emigration Depot. She had arrived in 1853 on the *Palestine*, one of the so-called 'Bride Ships'.

The Beards took up Avon Location 1433 of 100 acres near Culham, adding more to the farm over time. Today, Rockdale Road passes through part of this block. In 1907, Edward Beard married Katherine Brennan from Nunyle and took over the family farm.

On her mother's side, Alma's great-grandparents were Peter Brennan and Patience Maguire, who had arrived in Western Australia as assisted immigrants with their parents in the 1840s.

Her grandparents were James Brennan and Catherine Bourke. Their daughter, Katherine married Edward Beard. Alma, b.1913, was the fourth child born to Edward and Katherine Beard.

The Beard Children

Edward and Katherine were very active in local community organisations, including Toodyay Agricultural Society, the Toodyay Club Cricket Club and Red Cross. They also obviously encouraged their children to follow their interests and to take part in the social and civic life of Toodyay and the wider world.

Kathleen, the eldest girl, did particularly well at school and became a teacher. Arthur was a fourth generation farmer on the family property. He joined the RAAF during WWII and married a NSW girl in 1942. Doreen was aboard the bus which was involved in the 1930 crash with a train, giving evidence at the Coroner's Inquiry. She married Eric Johnson in 1940 and moved to Nedlands.



Alma at school, 1926

Alma attended the Toodyay State School. In 1927 she won awards for Most Popular Girl and a General Proficiency Prize. She also danced at the Toodyay Children's Ball.² As she grew older, Alma attended parties and dances with other young people in the Toodyay area. By 1938, Alma was nursing at Perth Hospital. In 1940, she moved to NSW to gain experience working at Sydney Hospital.

Enlistment and deployment to Singapore

As war crept closer, Alma returned to Western Australia and in 1941, at the age of 28, she enlisted in the AANS (Australian Army Nursing Service), service number WX11175.³ In August 1941 Alma was sent to the Camp Hospital at the army base in Northam. From there, she was seconded to the 2/13th Australian General Hospital (AGH), AIF, as a Senior Nurse.

After a brief pre-Embarkation leave, on 16th September Alma joined others of the 2/13th AGH who had sailed to Perth from Melbourne on the Hospital Ship *Wanganella*. The unit had been formed on 11th August 1941 in Melbourne to assist with medical services in Malaya.

The nurses disembarked in Singapore on 20th September 1941. They were accommodated in buildings at St. Patrick's School on the southern shore of the island.

Service in Malaya

A recent unofficial history of the 13th General Field Hospital sketches life for the Australian personnel.⁴ The tropical conditions were enervating and staff suffered from heat exhaustion, sunburn, tinea and the ever-present risk of malaria.

There were compensations, with sporting activities, 'Singapore leave' for shops and cinema, plus amenities from the Australian Comforts Fund, such as biscuits, cigarettes and soap.

Nurse Beard was detached from her unit on 13th October 1941 for a period of service with 2CCS (a Casualty Clearing Station), which was stationed at Port Dickson on the coast near Kuala Lumpur on the Malayan peninsula. Here they set up a 50 bed hospital.

On 25th November 1941, Alma apparently returned to 2/13AGH, now housed in an unfinished mental hospital at Tampoi, seven miles from Johore Bahru. The Sultan of Johore provided a large amount of the equipment used in this facility.

The nurses spent much of their time training orderlies in nursing and theatre techniques. It appears that Nurse Beard returned to the Casualty Clearing Station on 6th December.



From Alma Beard's Service File, 1941

War with Japan

On 8th December 1941, the Japanese began their invasion of Malaya, with troops landing in Kota Bharu and an early morning air attack. War was officially declared on Japan. Then on 12th December: 2/13 General Hospital received secret orders to double its capacity. Within four days, two new wards had been created and 643 beds were available for the increasing casualties. From this point on, there are conflicting accounts of dates of events and numbers involved.

The Japanese advanced rapidly down the peninsula. The Hospital was ordered back to Singapore Island and around 16th January trucks began the evacuation of patients and equipment. This was carried out by convoys of 20-30. The hospital returned to St Patrick's school.

On Saturday 31st January 1942 the causeway from the peninsula to Singapore Island was blown up to slow the Japanese advance.

Evacuation plans for the nurses to leave Singapore were implemented. The first small group left with a large number of wounded and sick patients on 10th February. By the following day, the Japanese were already infiltrating onto the island. A further large group of nurses left on the *Empire Star*. Most of those on board eventually reached Fremantle on 23rd February.

SS Vyner Brooke and the Bangka Island Massacre

Alma Beard was amongst the remaining 65 nurses who left on the *SS Vyner Brooke* late on 13th or 15th February, with up to 300 civilian men, women and children. The ship was small and crowded, with little water or supplies.

Their ship was attacked that night, with little damage. It survived the next day hiding behind islands. The next evening the ship received three direct hits, on the funnel, bridge and aft section, injuring scores of civilians. It began to sink and the captain gave orders to abandon ship. Enemy pilots returned and began shooting at those who made it into the water.



Commemorative coin issued by the Australian Mint, 2017, depicting the Vyner Brooke sinking.

Many managed to make it ashore on Bangka Island. Earlier survivors, including Matron Drummond, lit a fire on the beach to provide a beacon for those still coming ashore. Almost 60 men, women and children plus 22 members of the Australian Army Nursing Service from the *Vyner Brooke* and other vessels had struggled ashore. A small search party of six nurses was turned away from a nearby village through fear of Japanese retribution. They did manage to find fresh water springs at the end of the beach.

Later, a lifeboat with around 20 British servicemen managed to get ashore. As a group, they decided to surrender to the Japanese, so a small group set out to make contact.

Meantime, the women and children also left for the village, because the children needed food.

When the Japanese troops arrived, they marched the men off in two groups, beyond the headland, where they shot and bayoneted them. The Japanese returned, with blood on their bayonets. They marched the women into the surf, the nurses still wearing their Red Crosses on their sleeves. As they faced the horizon, the women were shot from behind by machine gun.

Nurse Vivien Bullwinkel was the sole survivor of the massacre. A bullet hit her in the hip, pushing her over in the water. She managed to stay afloat, but was unable to move for fear of drawing attention to the fact that she was still alive. She managed to stay still until, much later, she was washed up onto the shore. She was quite alone, and walked a short way from the beach into the jungle, where she found a place to lie down.

When she woke, she was able to stay concealed when a line of Japanese appeared on the beach. Later, Vivian returned to the springs, meeting Private Pat Kingsley, a British soldier who had survived the slaughter. Sadly, he would die of his wounds almost a fortnight later. They gave themselves up. Vivian was welcomed by the surviving *Vyner Brooke* nurses and was with them in the camp for the remainder of the war.

After the War

Alma Beard's file shows her as, 'Missing believed killed on or after 11.2.1942' until 13th April 1945 when she was declared, 'reported became missing and for official purposes is presumed to be dead on 14.2.1942'. She was awarded the rank of Sister Group 1 on 4th August 1942 and was appointed as Lieutenant although the latter was later withdrawn.

The town of Toodyay mourned her loss and later honoured her memory by naming the new Toodyay Community Health Centre in her honour on 27th April 1992. Her nephew, Graham Johnson, supplied a citation and photograph of Alma Beard. These are still displayed in the waiting room.

After the war, Vivian Statham, née Bullwinkel, returned to civilian nursing, later becoming Director of Nursing at Fairfield Hospital in Melbourne. She worked tirelessly to commemorate the sacrifices made by nurses, touring and fundraising for memorials of various kinds. She was an honoured guest at Toodyay at the opening of extensions to the War Memorial in 1988.

For additional details and illustrations, visit the Toodyay Historical Society website.

¹ These boys were sent by the British government from Parkhurst reformatory on the Isle of Wight to provide labour for the colony prior to the official convict era.

² *Toodyay Herald* reports 5 November 1927, p. 2, 23 December 1927, p. 2 and 5 November 1927, page 2.

³ Details of Alma's service are taken from her official Service File, National Archives of Australia, NAA B883, WX11175 sighted on National Archives of Australia website, 24 April 2017: <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/>

⁴ A.C. (Lex) Arthurson VX61276, *the story of 13th Australian General Hospital 8th Division 2nd A. I. F. 1941 – 1945*, unofficial history, sighted 22 April 2017 at <http://www.pows-of-japan.net/>