

PATERSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

50th Anniversary

1974-2024



“The aim of the Paterson Courthouse Museum is to hold items in trust for the Paterson community, the Hunter Valley and Australia”



Paterson Historical Society 50th Anniversary, 1974-2024

by

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Cover image: Paterson Courthouse July 2025

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Foreword

I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to write a foreword to this important publication marking the 50th anniversary of the Paterson Historical Society. Fifty years is a long time in terms of the history of Europeans in Australia, so the Society's operation has spanned a significant period of time as well as looking back and recording the history of this district both from an Indigenous and a European perspective.

Members of the Paterson Historical Society are proud of its museum and its contribution to the community and beyond. This has only been possible through the support and generosity of its members, volunteers, the community, Dungog Shire Council, New South Wales and Australian governments. Collaboration between all the sources of support makes it easy to achieve what one sets out to do. From reading Robyn's narrative, I believe that the Society has achieved what those farsighted individuals who set it up dreamt of it doing. We can all take credit for this and as a result hope that the initiatives will be continued well into the future.

The Society works on many fronts and has to spread its resources across these areas, including conservation of the building itself, curation and presentation of its exhibits, preservation of documents and photographs, making the museum accessible to the public, responding to local historical and family history queries from researchers across Australia and elsewhere in the world. The Society also works to raise funds through opening the museum on Sundays and for group tours on demand, as well as researching and publishing books. It takes an active part in the affairs of the village, such as addressing threats to the village's integrity by the Martins Creek quarry, and the list goes on. While the Society numbers are modest, the contribution over the 50 years has been significant and it is wonderful to have the skills to record the happenings at the museum over these 50 years. My sincere thanks to Robyn, for her diligent and thorough research and her own contribution to the operation of the Society. I hope everyone will find it as interesting as I have.

AC Archer AM

President

August 2025

Preface

This book showcases stories from fifty years of the Paterson Courthouse Museum and Historical Society [originally Paterson Preservation Society]: from 1974 to 2024, with reference to some of the significant objects in its collection.

The Society was formed with the aim of preserving the heritage of the area. However, the histories the Courthouse Museum carries through items, displays, books and talks - and the building itself - are always embedded in wider developments in the Hunter Valley region and the history of Australia more broadly. These links between the local, regional and national speak to the value of the Museum's collection and the work of its volunteer members.

The human focus of the Society means this is not a history of the natural environment, though every aspect touches upon the significant impact the area's landscape, waters and weather have on life in the Paterson River valley.

What follows is based on material in the Paterson Courthouse Museum and the Paterson Historical Society archives including minutes books, newsletters and photographs; newspaper clippings; and research by Society members [always attributed where possible], as well as new research undertaken in 2025.

I would like to acknowledge the following for interviews, information and support in the production of this book: Cameron Archer, Kathy Lyall, Brian Walsh, Val Anderson and Allen Dunlop, and other members of the Paterson Historical Society past and present, for advice and encouragement to undertake the work.

Aboriginal Presence in the Paterson Valley



Image: Scar Tree on Tocal. Photograph by Cameron Archer, 2018.

Aboriginal people have inhabited the east coast of Australia for tens of thousands of years. When Europeans arrived and occupation began in the eighteenth century, the Paterson Valley was probably home to three Aboriginal groups: the Worimi (saltwater people); the Wonnarua (freshwater people who also occupied most of the mid and upper Hunter Valley); and the Gringai who were associated with the upper Paterson Valley and the Dungog region. These boundaries and affiliations are contested. Paterson Historical Society member Brian Walsh's *Before and After 1822: Aboriginal and European People in the Paterson Valley* examines the significant shift in the area following the large-scale European land grants in 1822, which led to the dispossession of Aboriginal people. It explores Aboriginal life in the valley before European arrival, sketches the initial interactions between the two groups, and

describes the subsequent impact of European settlement on Aboriginal communities. Building on the earlier work by Boris Sokoloff – *Aborigines in the Paterson-Gresford District: Effects of Settlement* – it also highlights the resilience and survival of Aboriginal people through to today.¹

Traces of Aboriginal life can be seen in the landscape. There are several scar trees in the Paterson district, for instance. Well-established eucalypts more than a century old, they are distinctive for having large curved sections removed from their trunks. Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council sites officer Steve Brereton explains that such trees are culturally significant: "canoes cut out of ... [trees] were used on the river and during times of flood as a mode of transport" by Aboriginal people. Bushfires and land clearing has reduced the number of trees and they are now rare. "The number of scarred trees is dwindling and the remaining ones need to be protected," Brereton said in 2016. The scar trees "are important to our community as they tell the story of our culture".²

As well as scar trees, grinding grooves sites along the river and creek banks are signs in the landscape that record Aboriginal occupation of the Paterson area. "Aboriginal axe grinding grooves are grooves or hollows," archaeologist Elle Lillis of Virtus Heritage explains, and are "most often found in sandstone, where Aboriginal people have sharpened or manufactured stone axes and other implements on stone outcrops, and in some cases, ground food in the sandstone which formed 'bowls'." In a riverbank boat survey Virtus Heritage conducted in 2020, hundreds of individual grinding grooves were recorded in the Hunter, Paterson and Williams Rivers areas.³

In Paterson's Courthouse Museum are objects and stories which are another way of preserving the past in the present.

¹ Brian Walsh, *Before and after 1822: Aboriginal and European People in the Paterson Valley*. Paterson Historical Society Inc, 2022. Boris Sokoloff, *Aborigines in the Paterson-Gresford District: Effects of Settlement*. Paterson Historical Society Inc, 1995.

² "Rare Aboriginal 'scar tree' discovered on Hunter Valley farm." ABC online, 2016. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-25/rare-aboriginal-scar-tree-discovered-on-hunter-valley-farm/7783742>

³ The survey was part of a Virtus Heritage project for the Cessnock Local Government Area Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Study. Virtus Heritage e-news, February 2021.

Creating a Museum

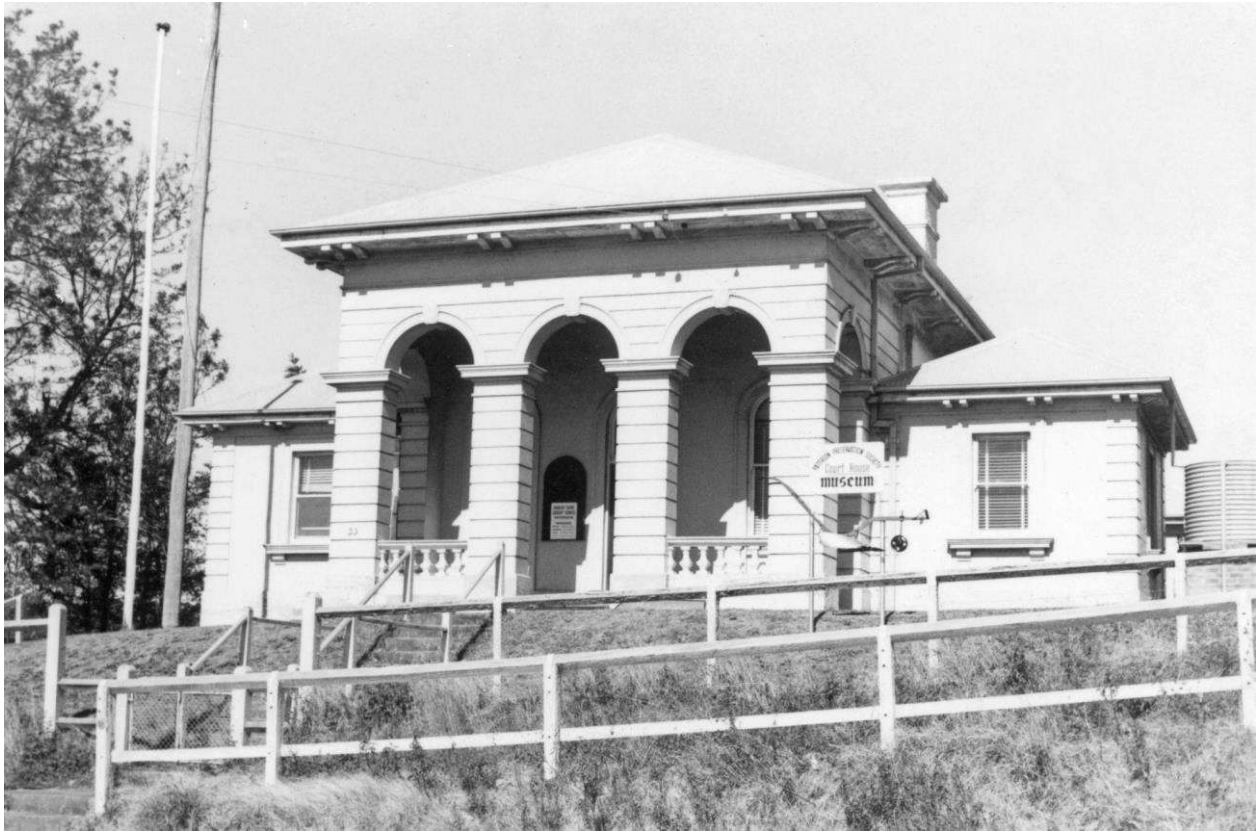


Image: Paterson Preservation Society Courthouse Museum 1974, formerly Paterson Courthouse, courtesy of Paterson Historical Society Flickr site, PHS1078

To signal the opening of the Paterson Courthouse Museum in 1974, a wooden sign was erected out the front, above a plough. As foundation member William (Bill) Keppie remembered 25 years later, someone had the idea of having a plough below the sign. Bill recalled: “I had a small one at the farm and it looked right at home when we put it up.”⁴

Although the Museum was housed in an old courthouse building, the presence of the plough signalled from the start that this museum was about more than law and justice: it was collecting and telling the local social, agricultural and economic stories from the recent past. This wide scope and fidelity to the local community have been maintained as defining characteristics of the Museum and its Historical Society for fifty years.

On 21 March 1973, a public meeting was held in Paterson’s School of Arts hall and a new society was formed with the aim of creating a local historical museum. In a nod to the

⁴ “Slice of Valley’s History,” *Maitland Mercury*, 16 August 1999.

changes that were taking place in the area, they named themselves the “Paterson Preservation Society”.

From the mid-1960s and into the 1970s, the small village of Paterson was changing. The opening of Tocal [Agricultural] College in 1965 was bringing more people to the area, while the closure of the Paterson Courthouse as a Court of Petty Sessions in 1967 removed a major government office from the area. Properties once run as large farms were being subdivided, and new homes were being built on smaller parcels of land. The Dungog Shire Council was drawing up a new plan for Paterson, re-numbering the town and allowing for future subdivision and development. Also catering for community growth was a new Paterson Public School, opening in 1971 and replacing a 94-year old school.⁵

At the same time, there was evidence of increasing interest in Paterson’s heritage. Historian Cecily Joan Mitchell wrote about Paterson in the late 1960s, observing that: “At intervals the town is completely invaded by parties of architecture students, members of the National Trust, historical societies, parties of school children... At the weekend Tucker Park is filled with visitors”. “The churchyard of St Paul’s Anglican Church,” she continued, “is the most visited graveyard in NSW”.⁶

Dungog Council was interested in preserving the old courthouse building as a tourist attraction. Built in the 1860s, it was in reasonable condition. The Council approached the Paterson Progress Association for suggestions about its potential use, but while the Progress Association was interested, it was wary of the cost involved in maintaining a heritage building.⁷ For several years the idea stalled. The police used a room in the building, and the local rural fire brigade met on the site. Otherwise the place remained empty.

The creation of the Paterson Preservation Society in 1973 met a need for people who were interested in the heritage of the area. Almost as soon as it had been created, the Society began receiving donations. Some of the earliest items were from Bill Keppie’s family. The Keppies had come to Paterson from Scotland in 1831 and descendants were still living in the area. As well as the plough, their donations included photographs and other objects representing rural and domestic life in the Hunter Valley. A call for more photographs went out, and more donations were received. They captured images of industry now gone (such as

⁵ “Numbering at Paterson,” 15 February 1969, unnamed newspaper, Paterson Historical Society [PHS] archives; “New Paterson Public School Opening,” *Dungog Chronicle*, 11 November 1971.

⁶ Cecily Joan Mitchell, *Hunter's River: A History of Early Families and the Homes they Built in the Lower Hunter Valley Between 1830 and 1860*. Newcastle West: Administrator of the Estate of Cecily Joan Mitchell, 1973; 2nd ed 1984, p. 142.

⁷ “Turning Paterson Court House Into Museum,” 25 May 1968, unnamed newspaper, PHS archives.

river craft and wharves; old bridges, flour and saw mills; horse-drawn wagons with crates of oranges), old shops, former residents (Mr and Mrs John Tucker, who donated the land for the town's Tucker Park), groups of people (picnickers on the river bank; school children; staff in front of a packing shed) and vistas of the township, the river, and the railway. Objects were also being donated. However, initially there was nowhere to store or display them.

The Preservation Society had been formally established, with a president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer.⁸ After some months' wait, Dungog Council formally recognised the Society and granted permission for it to use the courthouse building as a museum. The Shire President officially handed over the building's key to the Society on 27 July 1973.⁹ The Council remained the Trustee of the building, but ever since, the Society and the Council have worked together cooperatively to maintain and preserve the heritage of the building.

The Society spent its first year working on clearing, cleaning and securing the building. This included electrical work and painting. As well as photographs, items donated ranged from a plough shear and a 10 pint kettle, to candle lamps, a mangle, maddocks, picks, axes and cleavers, flat irons, a pair of fire dogs, a hay knife and a child's play hoop. The bell used by a teamster on bullocks had been received, along with sheep shears, a bicycle lamp, a carriage lamp and hand-made nails. Sale notices for major local properties such as "Gostwyck" and "Cintra" came in. A block of cedar from "Duninald" was donated. All of these items were like pieces in a mosaic, beginning to form a picture of farming life in the valley from the 1820s onwards.

Locals came to see the results of the new initiative on the first public open day of the Museum: Sunday 4 August 1974. The official opening took place not long after. This was a bigger event, where Society members dressed up in 1800s costumes (borrowed from Maitland Repertory Theatre) and people came in Veteran Car Club vehicles (pre-1919). The Society's patron, the Hon. Milton Morris, then Minister for Transport in NSW, and the President of the Dungog Shire Council, Cr. John Hawley, performed an official opening. As part of this they planted two weeping bottle brush trees in front of the courthouse building. Those two trees are still standing there, fifty years later. President Hawley predicted that the Museum would become a tourist attraction in the town, and this too took root: as much as the Museum has showcased the area's history, it has also shaped the fabric of the town and its

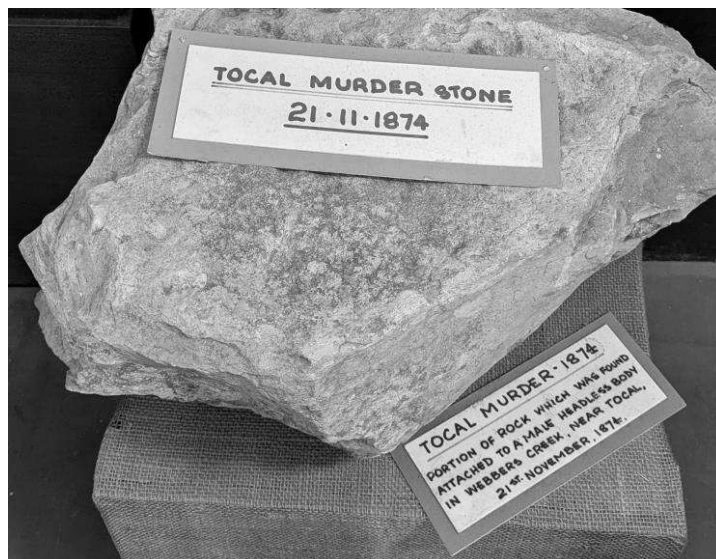
⁸ *Maitland Mercury*, 28 March 1973; cited in P. Clements, "25th Anniversary Celebrations," *Maitland Mercury*, 10 Nov 1999. PHS archives.

⁹ A branch of the Council library was also housed in a room in the courthouse for many years.

reputation as a historic village.



Image above: Stan Priestly, Bill Keppie and Milton Morris, Museum official opening, 1974. PHS archives. Image below: “Murder Stone,” mounted on block; 1874. Photograph by Robyn Dunlop.



One of the most interesting items belonging to the Museum is known as the “murder stone”. In October 1874, a stockman named Edwin Wilks was going to take a drink of water from a creek at the back of Tocal estate and discovered a body submerged in the water. It was strapped to a large stone, which weighed the corpse down. The head had been

removed. After his discovery, he went into Paterson and informed the local constable, who came back out with him to the site. Constable Wells cut the strap and they removed the body and part of the stone from the water. The head was later found nearby. The stone was taken to the Courthouse as evidence. Though several people were arrested and accused of the murder,

no conviction was ever made, and the identity of the murdered man remained a mystery.

The stone sits on display in the Museum today. It attracts great interest in visitors, and the story of its significance and the unsolved crime still have the power to unsettle. In a gesture of reparation, at the annual Heritage week town walk in March 2000, Society President Cameron Archer unveiled a memorial stone in Paterson's St Paul's cemetery to the man who was murdered. Created by members of the Paterson Historical Society, this stone bears a plaque that commemorates the person whose identity was never discovered.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Museum News*, vol 7 no.2, 2000.

Beyond the Building

The Paterson Preservation Society was formed by a mix of local residents (people born in the area as well as newcomers) and people with an interest in the heritage of the Paterson Valley. They were all volunteers with a variety of skills, but no one had a museum or heritage background. From the start they began working with local tradespeople and the Council to restore and care for the old courthouse building. With the opening of the Museum, members began learning about accessioning items, creating displays and opening the Museum to the public. Very soon the Society's activities also included researching and communicating local history.

At the annual meeting in 1981, Society members debated changing its name. Member Shirley Threlfo argued that the term "preservation" was potentially confusing and did not encompass the Society's historical focus. Years later, foundation member Pauline Clements explained that "it soon became clear that certain local persons were expecting their buildings to be preserved and that idea had [to] be dispelled quickly". While the Society was committed to preserving the Courthouse and lobbying for the value of heritage in the village, it was not giving restoration advice or assistance. The people present voted to change the name, and it became the Paterson Historical Society [PHS] from then on.¹¹

The first publication by the Society was a brochure about the settler history of Paterson. Several members worked on researching, writing and printing a pamphlet for Museum visitors and in August 1978 there were records of sales of "Paterson: The Early Years" [20 cents].¹² In 1981 this developed into a guided walk around historic buildings and places in Paterson. A map was made, and on 29 March 1981, member Steve Vautier led the first Heritage walk of the village.¹³ The walk was repeated the following year by new president Cameron Archer, and became an annual fixture, attracting locals and visitors alike. It brought publicity to the work of the Society; was a major fundraiser; and it was an opportunity for the Society to give back to the community by communicating some of its history.

¹¹ S. Threlfo, Annual Meeting minutes 5 February 1981. P. Clements, "25th Anniversary Celebrations"; 10 Nov 1999 *Maitland Mercury*. PHS archives.

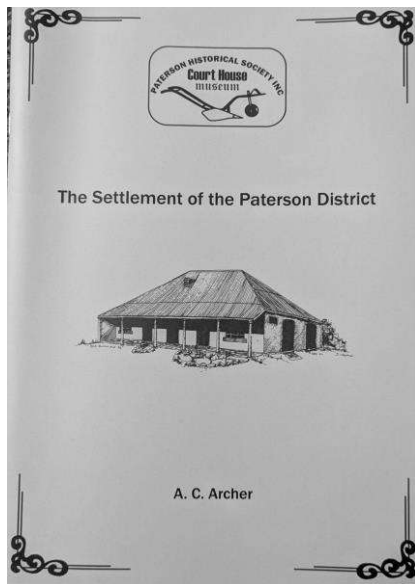
¹² Museum Visitors book, March 1978-April 1982. PHS archives.

¹³ Museum Visitors book, March 1978-April 1982. PHS archives.

The Society was also expanding its activities in other ways. There was a sense of camaraderie amongst the members, who supported one another to try new things and develop in different directions. Some members were giving guided tours of the Museum to tour groups and schools. At its monthly meetings, the Society began hosting guest speakers, from historians to local community members with long ties to the area. Stan Fry was one, talking about his childhood memories of his family's horse-drawn coach business, based in Paterson. The Society was also trialing more social events, like an evening where members could bring in an object connected to the past and talk about its significance. It had good relationships with other historical societies in the region, including those at Raymond Terrace, Dungog, Morpeth and Newcastle. Visiting other museums and attending other Societies' meetings, members would come back with new ideas and suggestions.

The 10th anniversary of the Paterson Courthouse Museum was marked at the end of October 1984. The whole town was invited to a Museum open day, along with patrons and guests. Historian Harry Boyle gave a talk about local history. Foundation members Bill Keppie and Pauline Clements planted new trees on the Museum grounds, and a birthday cake was shared.

Publications



Given that the Courthouse Museum and the Paterson Historical Society's activities were run entirely by volunteers, fundraising was a critical aspect of being able to keep up with maintenance, conservation and museum displays. Along with a small Museum entry fee, a minor cost for brochures, and the annual Heritage walk, the Society trialled other ways of making money, such as selling postcards with old views of Paterson village and souvenir spoons. In the mid-1980s, a new step was taken when the Society began to publish its members' historical research. Pauline Clements' history of "St Paul's Church" was first printed in 1984, followed by "The Settlement of the Paterson District" by Cameron Archer (1986). Both sold out and were reprinted. This was the beginning of its successful and ongoing book series that both document and communicate local history, as well as raising much needed money. The efforts of the Society in this direction were appreciated locally. "There is a good deal of goodwill between the village and the Society," it was recorded at the Annual General Meeting in 1985.¹⁴

The Society's publications started modestly, using the technology of the day. Over time it has increased dramatically with each publication reflecting the skills and interest of the author. The Society has always been flexible regarding the style of publications and what authors wish to write about.

Pauline Clements assiduously researched and wrote about St Paul's Church of England, Paterson Parks, Vacy and the district in general. She also meticulously researched and recorded the headstones in St Paul's Cemetery, all undertaken before the digital age, which is an amazing contribution.

Jack Sullivan's prodigious research and writing about a number of the colonial estates has been a cornerstone of Society publications. These large and detailed books remain sought after by family historians and locals alike.

¹⁴ Annual General Meeting minutes, 7 February 1985. PHS archives.

Shirley Threlfo researched and wrote about several families and properties, and her intricate knowledge of family history and land titles has been a great asset to the Society.

Val Anderson authored some publications and also strongly supported and encouraged many others. Harry Boyle was also a great supporter of the society and its research, and generously provided anything he could give to authors. He also wrote for the Society.

Val Anderson was able to source printing services through Keith Rudkin, Newcastle businessman and then operator of a printery. This enabled short print runs at a reasonable cost. The opportunity afforded by short print runs opened up many opportunities for the Society.

The Society's research output was strengthened by two doctoral theses: Brian Walsh's about the convict history of Tocal and Cameron Archer's about the environmental history of the Paterson Valley.¹⁵

In recent years publications have continued to emerge from the Society. Short run print publications are still undertaken, now through Kent Rowe who are now owners of the Keith Rudkin business. However, a new style of publication is now possible given the digital age and the skills of Brian Walsh. These are printed by the Book Printing Company which operates totally online for all contact, with books being forwarded to them laid out and print-ready by Brian. As a result, in the past few years a significant number of books have been published on local properties and localities including Largs, Woodville, Paterson, Paterson lands, Paterson River lands north of Vacy, and shipping on the Paterson and Hunter Rivers.¹⁶ A full list of publications is recorded in the appendix.

A considerable amount of the Society's income is now from the sale of publications. Each publication in recent times has included a launch attended by up to 100 people and the sales on the day of publications of around 80 or 100 books. Online sales contribute to the success of the Society's publications.

¹⁵ Brian Walsh, *Heartbreak and Hope, Deference and Defiance on the Yimmang: Tocal's Convicts 1822-1840*, PhD thesis, University of Newcastle 2007. Cameron Archer, *Social and Environmental Change as Determinants of Ecosystem Health: A case study of social ecological systems in the Paterson Valley NSW Australia*, PhD thesis, University of Newcastle 2007.

¹⁶ For example: Helen Russell, *My Largs*. Paterson Historical Society Inc, 2022. Brian Walsh, *Woodville Uncovered*. Paterson Historical Society, 2021. Brian Walsh, *Vacy to Gresford: People & Places*. Paterson Historical Society, 2024. Brian Walsh, *Gresford to Carrabolla: People and Places*. Paterson Historical Society Inc, 2025.

Volunteers

In its second decade, the Paterson Historical Society became involved in more community activities. It participated in a celebration of the centenary of Paterson village with a display of historic photographs (March 1985); Society members began volunteering at nearby Tocal homestead's first open days; and they organised a dinner at the Paterson School of Arts to mark the nation's bicentenary in 1988. Visitor numbers at the Museum and on the annual walk were increasing, and guest speakers were a regular feature of PHS meetings. The Society now held annual social events, such as progressive dinners and Christmas parties, and members went on outings together to visit other museums and historic houses in the Hunter Valley.

As well as meeting minutes, visitor numbers and a small income, the Society archives reveal the dedication of volunteers. This is exemplified in the long service - often over decades - of key stewards of the Paterson Historical Society, such as Cameron Archer, President since 1981; Pauline Clements; Shirley Threlfo; Bill and Mabs Keppie; Mac and June Mayne; Val and Bill Anderson; Maurice and Mary Dunlop; Allen Dunlop; Kathy Lyall; Helen Russell; Jean Archer and many more. Dedication and service are also apparent in the less well-known volunteers, people who helped in building works, for instance; or those who consistently showed up to open the Museum for visitors every Sunday (and on request). The "Museum Attendance" book for April 1987 through to February 1991, for instance, records weekly openings. Only rarely was it closed: on 4 February 1990, when local flooding prevented member Clive Corbett from collecting the key to open up. The following Sunday the Museum was opened as usual, but the volunteers [A. and K. Eather] "Left early as did not wish to be flooded out".¹⁷ Even in extreme weather, the volunteers would show up. The commitment of the people involved in the Paterson Historical Society and the Courthouse Museum - for however long; and in many, varied ways - is the real story behind any list of the Society's achievements and milestones.

¹⁷ Paterson Historical Society, Museum Attendance: April 1987-February 1991; 4 and 11 February 1990. PHS archives.

Courthouse Building



Paterson Courthouse Museum 1985, courtesy of Paterson Historical Society Flickr site, phs521

As the Paterson Historical Society expanded its activities, attention was also turning to the courthouse itself. After visiting another local history museum in the district, PHS members decided that both the Paterson Courthouse building and its Museum displays needed work.¹⁸ Concern had already been raised about damaged flooring in the courtroom and on the back verandah; about downpipes and guttering; and in February 1987, a snake had been spotted in one of the Museum rooms. The Council replaced rotten boards and the Society organised the installation of non-slip flooring for the courtroom, but the 1860s building needed more expertise - and finance - than volunteers alone could provide. In 1988, the Society invited the regional architect of the state Heritage Commission to inspect and advise on the courthouse's conservation.

In the interim, members installed glass showcases and updated signs, improving the Museum displays. Member Clive Corbett researched the history of the building. When a report from the regional architect came through, a conservation plan for the building was

¹⁸ Paterson Historical Society Minutes Book Sept 1983-May 1990: 7 April 1988; 5 Nov 1987. PHS archives.

drafted by members and submitted to the Dungog Council.¹⁹ This plan signalled the focus of the Society's work in the years to come.²⁰

As they waited for a response from the council, members of the Society continued their work. Volunteers showed visitors and tour groups through the Museum, hosted guest speakers and arranged outings. In administrative matters, the Society became aligned with professional bodies in its field, joining the Museums Australia association, and becoming affiliated with the Royal Australian Historical Society (RAHS). (This affiliation ensured it had public liability insurance.) A member also successfully prepared the documentation for the Society to become Incorporated in 1989. A new brochure was created for Museum visitors, and the Society also had two new town signs made to mark the entrance ways to the village. "Welcome to historic Paterson: First land grants 1821," they announced, highlighting that the colonial heritage was not limited to the Museum but was a feature of the village itself.²¹

In September 1989, the Society's efforts were rewarded when Dungog Council informed the PHS that it had been awarded a substantial grant to restore and maintain the Courthouse building, from the National Estate Grants Program. This affirmed the value of the Society's work, and enabled them to take their efforts to the next level.²²

The restoration work on the heritage building was extensive, and began with the exterior. Member Pauline Clements later recalled that this involved "the clearing of the years of accumulated soil, gravel etc which was blocking the very efficient airways which had been placed in the foundations of the building to prevent rising damp." In 2025, President Cameron Archer wrote that: "The enhanced drainage system, which was installed approximately 30 years ago, has proven its worth during recent years of severe weather conditions. Following recent inspections of the building's basement after periods of heavy rainfall, the area has remained completely dry despite exceptionally high rainfall levels, demonstrating the effectiveness of these improvements."²³

As well as improving drainage and air vents, significant interior work took place. This included removing and replacing stairs, flooring and installing picture rails. It took "many weekends of work," recalled Pauline. The funding from the grant was necessary but "the

¹⁹ Paterson Historical Society Minutes Book Sept 1983-May 1990: 7 April 1988; 3 Nov 1988. PHS archives.

²⁰ Paterson Historical Society Minutes Book Sept 1983-May 1990: 7 April 1988; 5 May 1988. PHS archives.

²¹ Paterson Historical Society Minutes Book Sept 1983-May 1990: The signs were erected by Feb 1990. PHS archives.

²² Paterson Historical Society Minutes Book Sept 1983-May 1990: 7 April 1988; 7 Sept 1989. PHS archives.

²³ Paterson Historical Society News, 24 June 2025. PHS archives.

money never matched the long hours of voluntary work put in by our members,” she wrote.²⁴ “Our membership has never been large,” and “new members were welcomed”. Everyone’s efforts were deeply appreciated. As well as local contractors such as Lindsay Kidd, many members were involved, in particular Bill Anderson, Cameron Archer, Mac Mayne, Graham Martin, Bill Keppie, Wayne Patfield and Allen Dunlop, who supplied workers and machinery from his own business to address the drainage issues. The efforts of Val Anderson, working on the interior of the building and Museum displays, were officially recognised by the Society with the title “Curator”.²⁵

²⁴ Pauline Clements, “Paterson Courthouse Museum: 30th Anniversary Celebrations,” *Museum News*, vol 11 no.4, Oct 2004.

²⁵ Paterson Historical Society Minutes Book Sept 1983-May 1990: 3 May 1990.PHS archives.

Village Heritage

The Paterson Historical Society worked at telling histories in many different ways. As well as the Museum, there was the annual Heritage walk; the welcome signs at the entrances to the village; and its history books. While the Society did not give restoration advice, it did debate getting involved in restoring heritage structures on public land in Paterson: specifically, the hearse shed and the corn staddle in Tucker Park.



Image: Hearse shed, Tucker Park, 1988. Bill Anderson photographic collection, PHS archives

By the mid-1980s, the hearse shed in Tucker Park had fallen into disrepair. There were cracks in the wall and some bricks had fallen out, tree root growth was causing damage and it had been vandalised. The subject was raised for consideration at a Paterson Historical Society meeting, where members debated the cost of getting involved in its preservation. However, they were clear on the structure's value. One member argued it was significant because it was a physical link with Fry's Coaching Enterprise. Another agreed, and "considered the site was the historical past". It was also suggested that it had value as possibly "the only hearse shed on public land in Australia". Though uncertain about where it

would find the funding, the Society members decided to try and restore it.²⁶

From the 1860s to the 1920s, Fry's Coaching Enterprise was run from Paterson village, on the edge of what is now Tucker Park. Henry Fry and his family emigrated from Kent, England, to Australia in 1862 and set themselves up as coach builders and cabinet makers (or carpenters) in Paterson, as well as maintaining a small farm with horses. Around 1865, the Frys began to offer a coach service, taking mail and passengers up and down the valley, and further throughout New South Wales. Coaches were also available for hire.

Historian and Society member Lesley Gent wrote: "As was the custom of the time, carpenters were usually the undertakers in the district and the Fry family also filled this role".²⁷ A cabinetry and undertakers' business was run from West Maitland from the late 1880s.²⁸ As Gent explained: "To accommodate the beautiful horse-drawn hearse the brick and iron hearse shed was built" at Paterson. The hearse was used across the district, however, when the North Coast Railway was opened in August 1911, the broader coach business declined rapidly. Coaches stopped running from Maitland to Dungog, though they connected with trains at Paterson to provide a service to nearby Vacy, Gresford and Allynbrook, which were not on the rail line. Surplus coaches were taken apart and sold for use as rabbit carts on properties. They were valued because of the tough leather springs and their overall durability in rough conditions, descendent Stan Fry recalled.²⁹ The Frys shifted their focus onto farming, and the old hearse shed was left to fall into disrepair.

In the late 1980s, the PHS was able to secure a grant to restore the hearse shed, with Council support. With some finance to hire contractors, and many hours of voluntary labour, the building was stabilised. Another grant was obtained a decade later to restore the building's roof, guttering and doors. The PHS constructed a sign communicating the original purpose of the building and its significance.

²⁶ Paterson Historical Society Minutes Book: Sept 1983-May 1990: 1 September 1988. PHS archives.

²⁷ Lesley Gent, "Fry's Hearse Shed," *Museum News*, vol 18 no.1, April 2011, p.12.

²⁸ "Fry Bros" Advertising. *Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser*, 10 August 1889, p. 1.

²⁹ *Museum News*, vol 4 no.4, August 1997.



Image: Corn staddle, Tucker Park, Paterson. Photograph by Cameron Archer, 2010.

Standing near the hearse shed, the corn staddle first came to the attention of the Society in the early 1980s. Learning that the Council intended to dismantle and remove the staddle from Tucker Park, Society members debated getting involved. Was the structure significant, someone asked, pointing out that they were once common on farms and nothing special. Another member countered that they were now rare, especially in a public park. Ultimately members agreed that if maintained, the corn staddle could preserve something of the agricultural heritage of Paterson valley, and that had an important value.

Since then, the Society has put its efforts into restoring and maintaining the building, which - like the hearse shed - is an ongoing commitment. Both buildings are now a feature of Tucker Park, showcasing local heritage.

Heritage Address

In the 1990s, publications by Society members increased as they began to be linked to a “Heritage Address,” a public address on an aspect of local history given by a historian and/or member. The first address was held in 1993, when historian Harry Boyle was invited to talk on his research into English migrant William Arnold, a politician and pastoralist who lived in Paterson until he drowned in a major flood in 1875. This talk was subsequently published as a monograph and available for sale: a model for the Addresses that followed. These publications were often assisted by grants from the Royal Australian Historical Society and Heritage Office NSW.³⁰

Society publications continued to sell well. Other topics ranged from the history of Paterson’s John Tucker Park (Pauline Clements, 1990) to its churches and burials in Paterson (St Ann’s: Cameron Archer, 1990; St Paul’s: Pauline Clements, 1996-97), as well as biographical introductions to figures connected with the settlement of the area, such as Lt Commander Frederick Bedwell (1992); William Munnings Arnold (1993); George Boyle White (1995); George Townshend (1997); Charles Boydell (1999), all by Harry Boyle; or James Phillips (1999), by Shirley Threlfo. Boris Sokoloff’s *Aborigines in the Paterson-Gresford District* (1995) began the important work of extending the Society’s historical gaze beyond European settlers. The *Australian Women's Land Army 1942-1945*, based on the account of member Mabs Keppie, contributed to documenting women’s war time experiences (Shirley Threlfo, 1997). In 1997, historian Cynthia Hunter gave a Heritage Address to the Society on “The Settlers of Paterson Plains”.

Meanwhile, members of the Society also created a journal: *Museum News*, the Journal of Paterson Historical Society Incorporated. Registered with the National Library of Australia, the journal was published several times a year, recording the stories around Museum items and aspects of local history; sharing news about Society activities; and printing photographs and archival newspaper snippets. From 1999 it carried the clear statement: “The aim of the Paterson Courthouse Museum is to hold items in trust for the Paterson community, the Hunter Valley and Australia.”

³⁰ Harry Boyle, *William Munnings Arnold 1819-1875*. Paterson Historical Society, 1993.

Museum News



Image: “Loyal Paterson Union Lodge” banner (reverse side embroidered with text: “We Unite to Assist Each Other”). 1901, George Tutill of London. Photograph by Robyn Dunlop.

With its major building conservation work under control, the Paterson Historical Society was able to develop its conservation efforts. One of the items that the Courthouse Museum held in trust was the banner of the Loyal Paterson Union Lodge No. 012. Entrusted to the Society in the late 1980s, Society members undertook research on the banner’s significance and applied for funding and expert advice about its conservation.

The Lodge was opened in Paterson on 14 April 1846. It was a branch of the Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows, a society that raised money for sickness and distress payments for members. This role was particularly important in nineteenth century Australia, because it provided financial support for people in a period before government welfare benefits existed.

The Loyal Paterson Lodge fundraised and built its own hall in Church Street in the

early 1860s, holding its first meeting there in July 1865. The Paterson School of Arts used the Lodge hall until it built its own hall in 1876 (on King St). In 1875, the Lodge hall was also used as the location for the first public school lessons in Paterson.³¹

The Lodge banner was ordered in the year of Australia's Federation, 1901. It was later displayed by members on marches through the village (such as in World War One) and in other towns. Over the twentieth century, the importance of the Lodge diminished, and members ultimately amalgamated with other Hunter Valley branches. When the banner was handed to the Paterson Historical Society it was brittle and had evidence of insect damage. With advice, a grant and donations, the Society was able to have the item professionally restored and preserved to be on permanent display in the Courthouse Museum. Although the Lodge itself is gone, its message is clear and remains relevant to the community today: "We Unite to Assist Each Other".

By the second half of the 1990s, the Society had matured and was well-positioned for continuing into the new millennium. A snowballing effect had begun to take place, building momentum and strengthening ties between the local community, the Society and heritage industry bodies. This was exemplified in the Dorothea Mackellar exhibit.

The poem "My Country" by Dorothea Mackellar [first published in 1908 as "Core of My Heart"] was well-known to generations of school-children in Australia. Less well known was the Paterson Valley property that was the inspiration for part of the poem. Living in Sydney, the Mackellar family also owned country property at Gunnedah and at "Torryburn," just north of Paterson.

³¹ See Pauline Clements, *The Paterson Lodge Banner: Its Origins & History*. Paterson Historical Society, 1996.



Sketch: "Torryburn 1881" by Val Anderson, circa 1990s

In the late 1890s, "Torryburn" and the surrounding area were in drought. In an interview late in her life, Dorothea spoke of staying there then, and of the dramatic experience when the clouds burst and let pour a "flooding rain". In conjunction with Jack Sullivan and Harry Boyle, Paterson Courthouse Museum Curator Val Anderson researched "Torryburn" and the Mackellar link, preparing a display on the topic that was unveiled at the annual Heritage walk in 1996. The Mitchell Library in Sydney loaned a large portrait of Dorothea to the Museum for the occasion, and following the display's success, ended up donating the portrait to the Museum.

The project continued to develop when the Society received a Bicentenary grant towards a publication on the Dorothea Mackellar - Torryburn - Paterson connection, resulting in a new book that was launched at the Heritage walk in 1997. The book sold well, raising money for the Society's conservation works.

Coming full circle, the present-day owners of Torryburn invited the Society to make a Mackellar display on the property in 1999, as part of an "open gardens" event when the place was open to the public. This weaving of research, display, community and connections with public institutions was integral to what the Paterson Historical Society had become.³²

³² *Museum News*, vol. 3 no.4, June 1996; vol. 4 no.2, April 1997; vol 6 no.4, 1999. Val Anderson, *The Dorothea Mackellar - My Country - Paterson Valley Connection*. Paterson Historical Society, 1997.

Keppie Room

The work of the PHS continued in the 2000s. Members carried on opening the Courthouse Museum, accepting donations and preserving items related to local history; conducting research; answering family and local history queries; maintaining local heritage buildings; and organising and taking part in history-related events. Volunteering in the Museum on Sundays was always varied: some days there was a steady flow of visitors, other days saw school or tour groups visit; still other days were very quiet. Sometimes people travelled to visit the Museum as part of family history research; other times locals came in for a look. In August 2002 volunteers at the Museum met someone who once lived in part of the courthouse, in the 1950s.³³ Each shift could be a surprise.



Images: Keppie Room: stripped back, April 2004; and in use in 2025. Photos by Val Anderson and Robyn Dunlop.

The 30th anniversary of the Courthouse Museum was celebrated in 2004 with the unveiling of the refurbished “Keppie Room”. The work involved in this project showcased the aims, values and achievements of the Society.

Bill and Mabs Keppie were founding members of the Society and had made some of

³³ PHS Attendance and Sales Register: March 1997 - Dec 2002. 4/08/2002: “Visit by C. Cartwright (nee Bartrem), used to live in courthouse in 55-59? approx...Father worked at Railway Stn”. PHS archives.

the earliest donations to the Museum in the 1970s, including photographs, agricultural tools and domestic objects. These items expanded the Museum's focus from justice to the social, farming and economic life of the people of the area. In the 1970s, the Society had chosen a room off the central courtroom to display these and other items. This side room was the former magistrates' entry, and had also reputedly been used for conducting post mortems; for storage; and as a cow byre. In the 1970s, members cleaned and painted the space, added shelving and mounted an exhibition. Later, wire was installed in front of the exhibits to prevent theft. Still, the walls were unlined, the room was vulnerable to weather, and insects - and even snakes - could enter. With Dungog Council and the Heritage Council of NSW, a grant was obtained in 1989 to work on the building's conservation. External repairs had been done, and it was time for internal work to ensure that the Society could preserve and present museum items.

The Keppie Room refurbishment was a team effort. In 2004 there were 38 members of the PHS, and 21 were active volunteers. Many people contributed in various ways to the project. Some helped pack away the existing display, strip the room and identify necessary repairs. Others worked on a grant application for funding the work. Grant applications took many hours of volunteer time and dedication. For the Keppie Room refurbishment, Bill Anderson was named as Project Co-ordinator; Val Anderson as Honorary Curator, assisted by Bill and Mabs Keppie and their daughter and member Kathy Lyall. Shirley Threlfo was involved as Honorary Treasurer; Pauline Clements as Secretary; and Cameron Archer as President. Lindsay Kidd was a contractor, and Cathy Easdown was Honorary Auditor. Together, they were involved in specifying the work required, providing the Society's audited financial statements and including relevant quotes for the proposed work. Members of the Society liaised with the Museums and Galleries Foundation of NSW to revise the application. Although it was ultimately unsuccessful, the Society was now well-positioned to determine that the project was worthwhile and achievable. The PHS decided to go ahead with the project using its own funds.

Work restoring the interior of the Keppie Room was thorough. It included interior wall lining, installation of a handrail, shelving and picture rails. Everything was painted, and the floor was lined. Photographs and pictures were framed to conservation standards, labels were created and displays were mounted. Detailed records were maintained listing contractor and volunteer labour, and all materials; all receipts were kept.

When it was finished, the Keppie Room was re-opened as part of the 30th anniversary event that also saw the book launch of the Keppie Family History (by Ted Coyle) and the

History of St Ann's Presbyterian Church (Cameron Archer and Jack Sullivan), 18-19
September 2004.³⁴ It was a celebration of the local area's history, and of community effort.

³⁴ Edwin L. Coyle, *Ploughs, Pubs and Paddle-steamers: A Collection of Stories About the Keppie Family - Pioneers of Paterson*. Paterson Historical Society, 2004. Cameron Archer & Jack Sullivan, *A History of St Ann's Presbyterian Church Paterson*. Paterson Historical Society Inc, 2004.

Corn Staddle

In the two decades since 2005, the Paterson Historical Society has maintained its role in preserving and communicating the heritage of the Paterson Valley, illustrated in work on the corn staddle and hearse shed. Wayne Patfield has led a team of volunteers including Kevin Hawtin, Adam Long and Peter Marquet to conserve the staddle. This project involved removing the staddle from its decayed posts, replacing these posts, the roof and the slats. This was done through the complementary craning services provided by (then) Boom Cranes. The riggers and crane drivers supplied their labour at no charge, organised by Stephen Patfield. New posts were sourced and installed with the assistance of Leon Levick of Paterson, new timbers came from the former timber mill at Maxwells Creek near Dungog – all at no cost to the Society. The repaired staddle was then placed on the new posts. The project was only possible through the volunteer and in-kind contributions from the local businesses and the community. These efforts conserved this very special building for the future.

It should be noted that the design of the new amenities block in Tucker Park reflects the staddle in many features. These are incorporated into the new building including the identical pitch of the roof and the use of slats as infill in strategic parts of the building.



Staddle in 1980



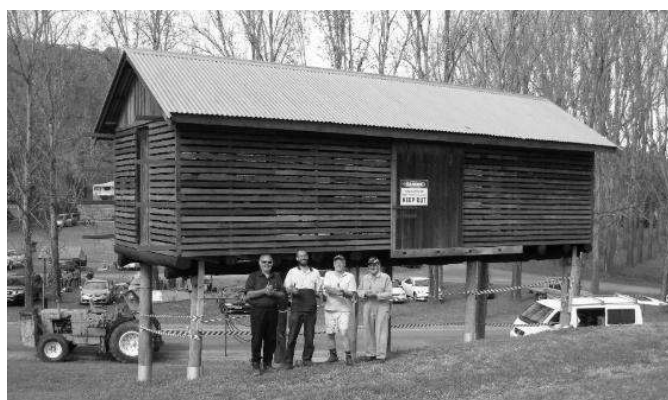
Condition of the staddle prior to works commencing



Drilling out the post holes for the new posts. New posts in place with the metal sleeves yet to be secured at the top of the posts. These are to stop rats and mice from climbing up the posts and into the staddle and eating the corn.



Left: Kevin Hawtin and Wayne Patfield undertaking repairs. Right: Repaired staddle being placed back onto its new posts.



Job complete: Peter Marquet, Adam Long, Kevin Hawtin and Wayne Patfield. Photos courtesy of Wayne Patfield and Cameron Archer.

Paterson Orange

The hearse shed in Tucker Park was saved from demolition by neglect through work led by Bill Anderson and others in the 1990s. At that stage it was impacted by large trees and the brick wall on the northern side had collapsed. These works secured the building for the future. Since then, further works led by Wayne Patfield assisted by Kevin Hawtin and James Cowled, have involved replacing gutters, building a window frame and securing the window and installing mesh-clad doors so that a local orange grader could be stored for public display.



Image: Orange grader being used for fruit packing; Aucket's fruit packing shed, Paterson; photograph courtesy of Wayne Patfield, Paterson Historical Society Flickr site, phs2335.

In 2006, the Society accepted the donation of an orange grader for the Museum. Orange growing was once a signature crop of the Paterson area, particularly from the 1870s through to the early 20th century. A variety of oranges were trialled but the area became known for the “Paterson orange”: a sweet but seedy orange, with thorns on its branches and best for eating. Production declined after World War II as other varieties became more popular and local farmers focused on running dairies. However, traces of the orange industry remain in Paterson.

Photographs of orange orchards, oranges being packed into crates and loads of crates

transported to market have been donated to the Courthouse Museum - as well as one of the original timber crates. The Paterson orange was propagated, and after the Heritage walk in April 1994, a young tree was planted by the Society in memory of the late Stan Fry, a long-term Paterson resident and Society member. In 2016, member Valma Patfield recorded the history of orange growing in Paterson in a book on the subject, ensuring this dimension of the town's agricultural history lives on.³⁵

³⁵ Valma Patfield, *Paterson Orange*. Paterson Historical Society Inc, 2016.

Rail, River and Land



Image: Dunmore shawl, held by Pam Sivyer, Kathy Lyall, Mabs Keppie, Shirley Threlfo, 2001.
Museum News photo by Val Anderson.

2011 marked 100 years since the opening of the Northern railway line through Paterson. In honor of the occasion, the Museum displayed the Dunmore Shawl from its collection. To maintain it in good condition, the item was usually kept wrapped in acid free tissue paper and stored in an archive box. It had last been on display for Federation celebrations in July 2001.

The shawl had been worn at the official opening of the Northern Railway, at Maitland Railway Station, 11 August 1911. It was worn by Mrs Sarah Swan, a descendent of John Swan of Lemon Grove: one of the first farms at Paterson Plains in 1811-1812.³⁶

The shawl is part of a larger collection of linen held by the Museum. Other items include baby christening gowns and lace. Although not often on display due to preservation issues, they form an important part of the collection, showcasing hand-made and decorated ceremonial clothing and linen from other eras.

³⁶ *Museum News*, vol 18 no.1, 2011.

With the arrival of the railway, the reliance of the people of the Paterson Valley on river craft for transport declined. For the 40th anniversary of the Museum in 2014, the PHS proudly launched two new books: *Dr Henry Lindeman and Cawarra - Gresford* by Jack Sullivan; and Shirley Threlfo's history of the Tinkler family. The event was held on the day of the annual Heritage walk, and featured a special display on river boats by member Wayne Patfield.

Although easily overlooked with today's roads, bridges and the railway line, the Paterson River has played a pivotal role in the history of the valley and it continues to make its presence felt: most notably in times of flood. In the early days of European settlement in eastern Australia, the river was used for exploration, for sending timber down to port, and for linking passengers, produce and supplies with other places. An example of this period was recorded by William King, published as *Farming and Shipbuilding on the Paterson and Williams Rivers in the 1800s*.³⁷



Image: ML Bowthorne, Paterson Government wharf. Bowthorne was a milk and cream boat. From Margaret Osborn, in Wayne Patfield collection, published in his book *Steamships on the Paterson River 1832-1950* and Paterson Historical Society Flickr site, phs2040.

River craft provided a vital means of transporting people and goods to and from the valley until the twentieth century. PHS member Wayne Patfield's ancestors were directly involved in the riverboat industry, and his research into this area has been showcased in the

³⁷ William King, *Farming and Shipbuilding on the Paterson and Williams Rivers in the 1800s*, edited by Brian Walsh. Paterson Historical Society Inc, 2018.

books *Sailing Vessels on the Paterson River 1804-1912* (2019; 2020); *Steam Ships on the Paterson River: 1832-1950* (2020); and *Morpeth's Steam Ships 1831-1946* (2023). As new generations of people grow up in the area, these publications record and communicate anew the strategic importance of the location of the village in previous eras.



Image: Lennoxton estate subdivision poster 1918; donated by the Keppie family, courtesy of Paterson Historical Society Flickr site, phs2297.

Member Brian Walsh conducted a major project in scanning and uploading the Museum's photographs and prints to its Flickr site, making digital versions of historic images and documents available to people everywhere. A significant example of the resources available via the Flickr site are the collections of maps of Paterson village and valley; and the sale banners for subdivisions.

Records of land grants, subdivision and sales have been a cornerstone of the history of the Paterson valley since European settlement. Physical copies of sale banners of significant properties in the Paterson Valley are held by the Museum but are not on display due to space and conservation issues. Having these scanned and available online has given them a new

life: preserving the originals but ensuring that their images are widely available to researchers, new residents and other interested people.³⁸

³⁸ See <https://www.flickr.com/photos/patersonmuseum/albums/72157688377626844/>

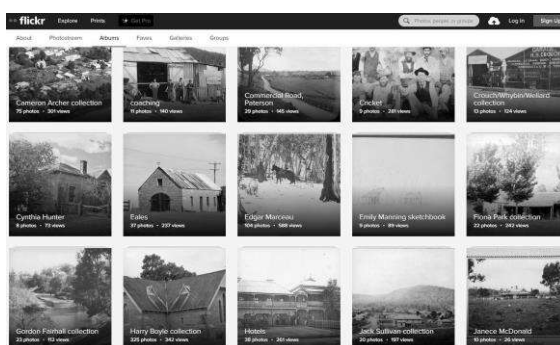
Website and the Digital Age

Since the 2010s, the Museum's presence online has increased thanks largely to the generous services of Brian Walsh. He has put the Society out in front in many ways. The Society's website <https://www.patersonhistory.org.au/> is a gateway to its online shop, information about the Society, as well as an enormous number of resources about the Paterson Valley. These include scanned copies of the Museum News, and often obscure booklets, indexes and church records – a nirvana for the family and local historians who are researching the district from near and far. Researchers often comment that they have found the website and its resources to be invaluable.



Paterson Historical Society website <https://www.patersonhistory.org.au/>

As mentioned, Brian has also built an enormous repository on Flickr of photographs relating to the Paterson Valley: at the time of publication, this amounts to 2300 images.



Brian has also curated and published a digital version of the Paterson Historical Walk on the 'cya on the road' app: <https://www.cyaontheroad.com/>. The Society collaborated with

Dungog Regional Tourism to produce the Horse Shoe Drive through Dungog Shire based upon the same platform.



Paterson Town Walk

Price: Free
Est. Distance & Time: 3.7km / 2 hrs 6 mins

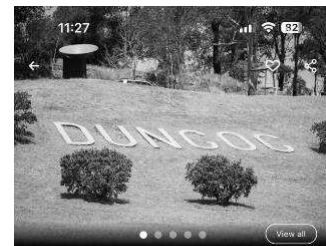
Location: Paterson, NSW, Australia

Map Itinerary

A walking tour of Paterson. The historic town was established in 1833 and many of its current buildings are heritage treasures, dating from the 1800s, some as early as the 1830s. The Paterson River flows alongside the

Tags: walk, stadium, heritage shed, court house, museum

Created on 10/10/2022



Dungog Region Horseshoe Drive

Price: Free
Est. Distance & Time: 82.6km / 1 hr 48 mins

Location: Tocal, NSW, Australia; Paterson, NSW, Australia; Vac...

Map Itinerary

Travelling along the Horseshoe Drive through the villages and towns in the Dungog Region of the Hunter Valley, NSW is an ideal way to experience the area's unique charm and history. Coined 'Horseshoe' for the shape of

Tags: one day, road trip, hunter valley, historical, paterson, vacy, gresford

Maintaining the Museum

When the Museum was opened in 1974, the entrance from the verandah led to the police station office, and the room that is currently the Society library was the Paterson branch library of Dungog Council. The verandah's weatherboard infill (now toilets) was used as a base for emergency services. In time the Council converted the weatherboard infill into toilets and set up the septic system and transpiration area to the east of the building.

In the 1980s, an external addition was made to the police residence (at the rear of the Court House site), providing Paterson with a purpose-built police station. The station is connected to a cell embedded in the side of the residence. The new building was built in a design sympathetic to the overall complex of buildings on the site. The new police station enabled the Society to have access to the one-time police office, which it used as the Museum's office.

At present the Society is making representations for the old police station stables to be made available for use by the Society.

The Society continues to invest its resources into maintaining the Museum building. Externally, the front fence was replaced in recent years using high quality Australian hard wood by Wayne Patfield, Kevin Hawtin, Adam Long and Cliff Fonua.



New front fence before and after painting. Photos courtesy of Wayne Patfield.

Wayne Patfield has overseen the replacement of the roof on the Museum, made possible through grant funds and funding from Dungog Shire Council.



Roof condition before works (left). Works underway (right). Photos courtesy of Wayne Patfield.

Internally, much has been done over the years to make the building an attractive place to visit and to learn about the history of Paterson. This includes internal painting, creating secure displays in the Keppie room, lighting and electrical works, floor coverings and conservation of furniture and fitments.

In the 2000s, the Council closed the branch library housed in one of the Court House rooms, and the room was made available to the Society. The room itself was in poor condition, requiring much work including new flooring, windows and many other repairs. It was transformed into the lovely library that is there today through the skills and hard work of Wayne Patfield, Kevin Hawtin and Adam Long with assistance with the electrics from Grant L'Green. Kevin Hawtin constructed a complete bespoke set of library shelves for the room consistent with the décor of the building. The works were completed with the installation of new floor coverings.



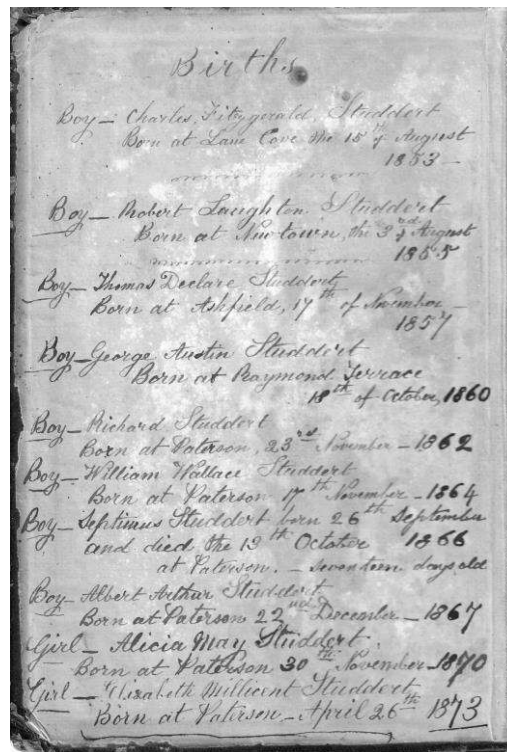
Library works included removing paint from colonial red cedar windows and replacing decayed and termite-affected floor bearers. Photos courtesy of Wayne Patfield.



During 2025 the Society used NSW Government/ Community Building Partnership funds to upgrade electrical circuitry, switching and conversion of all lights to LED, replacement of floor coverings in the main court room and office, installation of blinds and various minor painting jobs. PHS President Cameron Archer recorded that: “The Society has demonstrated careful stewardship over the years as dedicated custodians, with invaluable ongoing support from various service providers, tradespeople, and Dungog Council,” and noted that the courthouse building - like all heritage structures - requires ongoing care and maintenance.³⁹

³⁹ Paterson Historical Society News, 24 June 2025. PHS archives.

Full Circle



Interior page of bible, with handwritten list of births: names and dates; handwritten in ink; from Studdert family bible, circa 1800s; donated 2025. Photograph by Brian Walsh.

In 1840, Irishman Robert Studdert began work as clerk of the court of petty session in Paterson, a role he held until his death in 1879. Research by historian and Paterson Historical Society member Brian Walsh has fleshed out details from Studdert's life. When Robert began work as a clerk, he was 23 years old and the courthouse was a wooden building at the rear of the current site. (The present-day building - home of the Courthouse Museum - was built in the 1850s and extended in the 1860s.) As a clerk, Studdert's role was varied. He managed court proceedings and the lock up; provided support to magistrates; recorded registrations of births, deaths and marriages from 1857; administered the selection and sale of Crown Land from the 1860s; and mediated minor disputes. Given his long service as a clerk at Paterson, his influence was a significant dimension to the development of the place and the community during the mid-1800s.

Studdert married widow Susannah Matilda Ward in 1841, but they separated and he had a long-term relationship with another woman, Marion Laughton. Together they had four children. When Susannah Ward died in 1862, he married Marion and they had six more children. Each of their children's births were recorded in a family bible. In 2025, coming full

circle, this book was donated to the Paterson Courthouse Museum to be preserved for generations to come.⁴⁰

The Paterson Courthouse Museum, maintained by the Paterson Historical Society, has been a key feature in the village of Paterson since its opening in 1974. Over the years, the Society has been financially assisted by local government, community organisations, private sources and state and federal government grants. It has also raised a substantial amount through its own fundraising efforts, including book sales. This wide array of support acknowledges the value of the work the Society's volunteers do to maintain the building (and other structures within the village), hold items in trust in the Museum, and communicate the unique heritage of the area. Membership numbers have ebbed and flowed, but a core group has maintained the spirit of the founding members, and new faces are always welcomed. The work of the Society continues, exemplified in the courthouse building and extending outwards from here: to maintain and preserve the heritage of the past in the present, for the Paterson community, the Hunter Valley and Australia, today and into the future.

⁴⁰ Robert Studdert (1817-1879), plaque in Paterson Courthouse Museum, text by Brian Walsh, 2025.

Appendix I: Foundation Members and Officebearers

1973 Members

E. Clements, P. Clements, P. Evans, S. Fry, R. Hall, M. Hallinan, G. Johnson, H. Johnson, C. Keppie, M. Keppie, R. Keppie, W. Keppie, B. Lambley, M. Lambley, H. Mitchell, W. Northcott, H. Olive, G. Owen, S. Priestly, C. Sexton, J. Stubbein, S. Threlfo, N. Watson

Officebearers

President

1973	W. Northcott
1974-1975	G. Johnson
1976-1977	Allen Dunlop
1978-1980	Steve Vautier
1981-2025	Cameron Archer

Vice Presidents

1973	G. Johnson, Stan Priestly
1974	W. Northcott
1975	S. Priestly, C. Sexton, A. Dunlop
1976	G. Johnson, C. Sexton
1977	C. Sexton
1978 - 1980	Cameron Archer
1981	Steve Vautier and T. Collins
1982 - 1983	Steve Vautier and Allen Dunlop
1984 - 1986	Pauline Clements, Shirley Threlfo
1987 - 1988	June Mayne, Allen Dunlop
1989	Clive Corbett
1990	June Mayne
1991 - 1993	June Mayne and Maurice Dunlop
1994 - 2003	Maurice Dunlop
2004 - 2007	Kathy Lyall
2008 - 2017	Kathy Lyall and Lindsay Kidd
2018 - 2025	Kathy Lyall

Secretary

1973 - 1983	Pauline Clements
1984 - 1986	Jean Sparkes
1987 - 1988	Shirley Threlfo
1989	Vacant
1990 - 2009	Pauline Clements
2010 - 2010	Pauline Clements and Virginia Daniels
2011 - 2013	Virginia Daniels
2014 - 2025	Helen Russell

Treasurer

1973	N. Johnson
1974 - 1976	Shirley Threlfo
1977	Mr Cheetham
1978 - 1985	Jean Archer
1986 - 1995	Mac Mayne
1996 - 2013	Shirley Threlfo
2014 - 2025	Jean Archer

Honorary Auditor

1974 - 2000	Colin Sexton
2001 - 2025	Cathy Easdown

Recorder

1981 - 1988	Shirley Threlfo
1989 - 2009	Mabs Keppie
2010	Mabs Keppie, Valma Patfield, Mary Dunlop
2011	Valma Patfield

Curator

1990 - 2013	Val Anderson, assisted by Bill Keppie
2014 - 2015	Kathy Lyall and Val Anderson
2016 - 2019	Valma Patfield

2020 - 2022	Brian Walsh
2023 - 2025	Role in abeyance

Project / Maintenance Coordinator

1990 - 2008	Bill Anderson
2009 - 2019	Wayne Patifield, Kevin Hawtin
2020 - 2025	Wayne Patfield

Surveillance / Security Officer

1994 - 1996	Clive Corbett
1997 - 2000	Philip Leak and Clive Corbett
2001 - 2002	Philip Leak

Digital Services

c2014 - 2025	Brian Walsh
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Librarian

2016 - 2025	Kathy Lyall
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Public Officer

1999 - 2025	Cameron Archer
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Life Members (alphabetical order)

Bill and Val Anderson

Cameron Archer

Harry Boyle

Pauline Clements

Maurice and Mary Dunlop

Stan Fry

Bill and Mabs Keppie

Jack Sullivan

Shirley Threlfo

Appendix II: Society Publications

1984; 1993	History of St Paul's Church, Paterson	Pauline Clements
1986; 2018	Settlement of the Paterson District	Cameron Archer
1988; 1995	A Synopsis of the History of the Paterson River Valley	Harry Boyle and Val Anderson
1990	John Tucker Park	Pauline Clements
1990; 2001	Australia's oldest Presbyterian Church? St. Ann's Paterson	Cameron Archer
1992; 2021	Lt Commander Frederick Bedwell	Harry Boyle
1993	William Munnings Arnold	Harry Boyle
1995	George Boyle White 1802-1876	Harry Boyle
1995	Clements-Paterson Connection	Pauline Clements
1995; 2006	Aborigines in the Paterson-Gresford district	Boris Sokoloff
1996	Paterson Lodge Banner	Pauline Clements
1996; 1997	Burials in St. Paul's Church Cemetery, Paterson I & II	Pauline Clements
1997	Settlers of the Paterson Plains	Cynthia Hunter
1997	George Townshend 1798-1872 and Trevallyn Paterson River	Jack Sullivan
1997	Australian Women's Land Army 1942-1945 Dorothea Mackellar: My Country Paterson Valley	Shirley Threlfo
1997; 2008; 2016	Connection	Val Anderson
1999	Where, oh Where, is Wooger Vitnell?	Barbara Brown
1999	Pte Arthur Ernest Keppie	Edwin L. Coyle
1999	Charles Boydell, 1808-69 and Camyr Allyn, Allyn River	Jack Sullivan
1999	James Phillips and "Bona Vista", Paterson River	Shirley Threlfo
2000	J H Boughton of Tillimby, Paterson	Dulcie Hartley
2000	John Herring Boughton of Tillimby, Paterson 1793 - 1854	Dulcie Hartley
2001	First Fatal Election: Paterson 1843	Barbara Brown, Shirley Threlfo

2001	Parks of Paterson	Pauline Clements
2001; 2013	Sacred Heart Church and Cemetery, Summer Hill	Kay Ingle
2002	Personalities, Pragmatists and Visionaries	Cameron Archer
2002	Paterson, Gleanings from Museum News No 1	
2003	A Fortunate Liaison	Jack Sullivan
2003	Vacy : one hundred and eighty years of history	Pauline Clements Cameron Archer and Jack Sullivan
2004	A History of St Ann's Presbyterian Church, Paterson	
2005	Patch and Clennie' of Oridinna Gresford	Jack Sullivan
2006	Harry Boyle OAM 1919-2005 : an album of tributes	PHS, ed Cynthia Hunter
2007	John Powell Orange Grove	Kay Ingle
2007	Heritage Photographs Series 1	Mabs and Bill Keppie
2007	Heritage Photographs Series II	Mary and Maurice Dunlop Pauline Clements and Kathy Lyall
2008	Heritage Photographs, Series 3	
2009	Gostwyck : Paterson 1823-2009	Lesley Gent
2010; 2011	Herman Montague Rucker Rupp, Rector of St Paul's 1924-30	Val Anderson
2012	European Settlement at Paterson River 1812 to 1822	Brian Walsh
2012	A tribute to Mabel (Mabs) Keppie, 1924-2012	Ed Shirley Threlfo
2012	Kalimna, Paterson NSW	Shirley Threlfo
2013	Yarning with Noel	David Brouwer
2013	Reverend John Jennings Smith M. A.	Valma Patfield
2014; 2020	Toil and Trouble from Maitland to Moreton Bay	Brian Walsh
2014	Glove Box Guide to the Paterson Valley	Cameron Archer
2014	Dr. Henry Lindeman and Cawarra, Gresford. Part 1	Jack Sullivan
2014	Tinkler Family of Portnahinch	Shirley Threlfo
2016	John Eales of Duckenfield	David Brouwer
2016	Iona Duns Creek Bush Fire Brigade History	Robyn Dunlop Stephen Moore, Kathy Lyall, Lesley Gent
2016	Dawn Service	
2016	Paterson Orange	Valma Patfield
2018	Farming and Shipbuilding on Paterson and Williams Rivers	Brian Walsh, ed

2018	Vacy: one hundred and eighty years of history	Pauline Clements
2018; 2019	Brisbane Grove	Shirley Threlfo
2019; 2020	Sailing vessels on the Paterson River 1804-1912	Wayne Patfield
2020	Portraits of Paterson	Alison Pitkin; Val Anderson
2020	7 little churches of the Paterson Valley: the Anglican Parish	David Brouwer
2020	Steam ships on the Paterson River : 1832-1950	Wayne Patfield
2021	Woodville Uncovered	Brian Walsh
2022	Before and after 1822	Brian Walsh
2022	My Largs	Helen Russell
2023	Morpeth's steam ships 1831-1946	Wayne Patfield
2024	Vacy to Gresford - People and Places	Brian Walsh
2025	Gresford to Carrabolla - People and Places	Brian Walsh