

Australian Heritage Festival 2021

For the last 40 years, the National Trust has offered the Australian Heritage Festival as a way, in their own words,

'to connect the nation in its celebration of our heritage with a national program of events'

The festival runs from 18 April – 19 May, and celebrates all aspects of our Australian heritage, be it built, natural or cultural in its nature.

The theme for 2021 is 'Our Heritage for the Future'. It was the theme originally planned for last year's festival before the onslaught of Covid-19 meant that many such events had to be postponed or abandoned.

This year, for Australian Heritage Festival 2021, Camden Library is hosting an exhibition, *Keeping Connected in Camden* that looks at the ways Camden has stayed connected throughout its history. Before our current pandemic concerns that have disrupted "normal" life, Camden's residents have battled through flood, fire, and war to retain and strengthen its community ties and nurture its own cultural identity. By looking at its wealth of history we can see how the Camden community evolved as it grew, honouring the memories of its people and places.

One of the most obvious means of staying connected is through the infrastructure of the town. Camden's history of white settlement began with the opening up of The Cowpastures as farmland. Land grants were given to families such as the MacArthur's, Hassall's and Riley's. All the new settlers and convicts had to contend with major problems. Where were the roads and bridges necessary to access the area? How could they keep in touch with family and friends and not suffer from the isolation of Camden, so far from established areas such as Sydney and Parramatta? How could their farm produce get to market? How could supplies be brought into the area?



Menangle Bridge. Early wooden bridge over the Nepean River, with woman and sulky. 1910s.

- *Courtesy of Camden Library Local Studies*

Bush tracks gradually became roads. Prior to the 1810s, travelling to Camden from Parramatta meant travelling down the Great Western Road to Prospect and then following Cowpasture Road to complete the 25-mile journey. Cowpasture Road followed the original bush track that led to The Cowpastures, the location where missing cattle from Farm Cove were found. The cattle had been brought to Sydney on *The Sirius* in 1788 from Capetown. By the time they were found eleven years later, the original small group had grown into a large herd.

As the number of residents in the Camden area grew, “decent” roads were needed to keep them connected with Liverpool, Parramatta, and Sydney. The many rivulets and creeks required bridges to be built across them. Life gradually became a little easier as infrastructure was put in place.



Little Sandy Bridge. Under construction by Army personnel c.1940s

- *Courtesy of Camden Library Local Studies*

As the area grew, there were several Camden area newspapers established, including the *Camden News*, which became the voice of residents keeping them in touch with local and national news. The *Camden News* was owned by William Sidman and Frank Campbell and operated between 1881 and 1982.

It had been founded by William Webb, sold to Joseph Doust and at his death taken over by William Sidman who changed its name from its original - *Camden Times* when the newspapers were merged in 1895. It has been digitized by the National Library of Australia and can be accessed through its Trove website.



William Sidman. Co-founder of *Camden News* c.1896,
- *Courtesy of Camden Historical Society*

William Sidman's son, George Victor continued operating the *Camden News*. At the time of his death in 1953 he had been associated with the newspaper for more than 50 years. He also had a keen interest in Camden's history and produced books, articles and even presented a series of radio talks about the area in 1978 -1979.

The *Camden News* was known for keeping its local community connected. As well as noting news of interest at a national level, it also included personal and community-based information, such as births, obituaries and wedding notices. During periods of conflict, the newspaper was a means of keeping residents involved in the war effort through its support for organisations such as the local branch of the Red Cross.



Camden News Building with Foresters Hall to the left in Argyle Street.

- *Courtesy of Camden Historical Society*

To keep in touch with the outside world, a Telegraph Office was opened in 1877 in Camden. In 1878, a merger between the telegraph and postal services was proposed. A purpose-built Post Office was built in Argyle Street to replace an earlier postal service operated by Mrs Eliza Pearson. The new building was completed in 1882. By 1898 it had been extensively extended and a second floor was added to the residence.

The Post Office building at 135-143 Argyle Street, Camden, is still operating today. It was heritage listed in 2012.

The Post Office building also housed the original Telephone exchange. It operated between 7.30am and 10pm. Anyone requiring a telephone service needed to subscribe. In 1910 there were 22 telephones connected. This number had risen to 41 by 1913.

The *Camden News* published local phone numbers as a regular service. By 1911, the network included a main trunk line and a request was made for a much larger switchboard.



Camden Post Office. 135 – 143 Argyle Street, Camden c. 1905.

- *Courtesy of Camden Historical Society*

There were also numerous complaints about not being able to place calls in the evenings or during the night. This was an ongoing problem. Bakery workers witnessed a robbery taking place in December 1929. They had to run to the police house as no-one answered the call to the exchange. Meanwhile a safe was blown open in a nearby building. In 1930 Alderman Boardman complained that it had taken him 40 minutes to have a call placed to Liverpool.

By the 1950s it was obvious that the Telephone Service required its own premises, so it was relocated to the corner of View and Argyle Streets. This building housed the first automated exchange in Camden.



Location of 1st automated Telephone Exchange, cnr View and Argyle Streets. c. 1998

- *Courtesy of Camden Historical Society*

Later this building was used for other retail purposes and eventually was remodelled and became the Camden office of the Inglis family.



Inglis building, renovated site of the 1st automated Telephone Exchange in Camden c. 2004

- *Courtesy of Camden Historical Society*

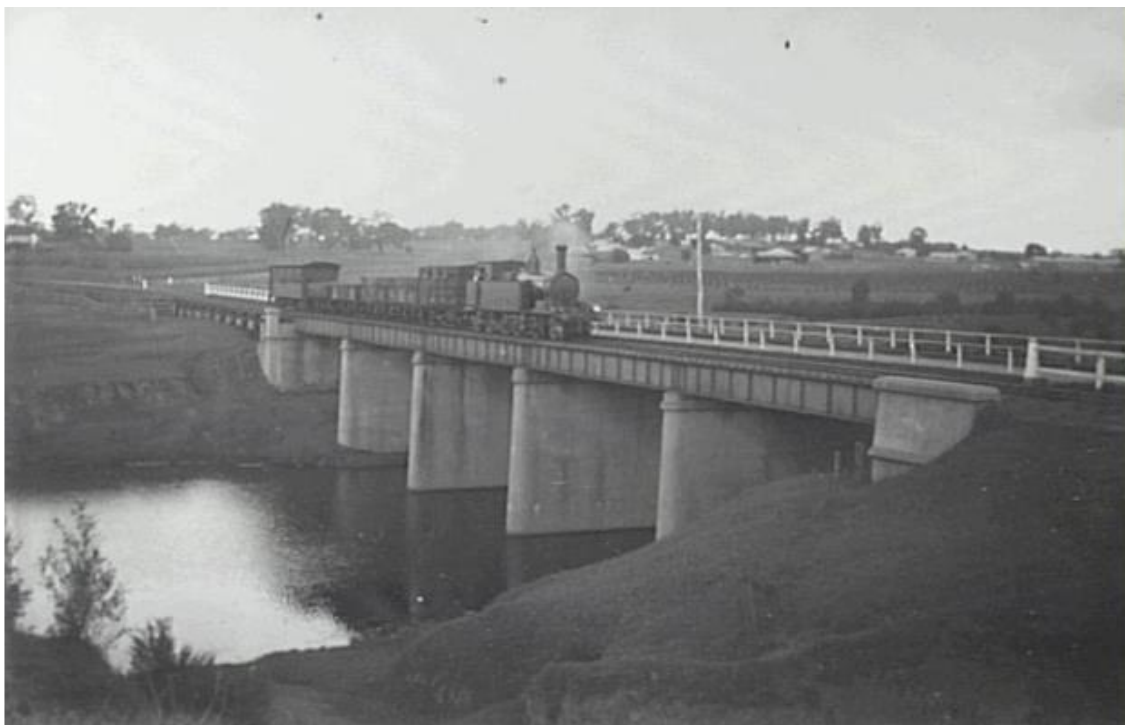
In the meantime, Camden was becoming a major producer of dairy products. It already was an established wool and wine growing area. A tramway was built, and the “Pansy” train provided transport for people and produce Camden to Campbelltown. After World War 1, trains began carrying milk. Dairy Farmers opened a major stop was in Argyle Street at its milk depot. There were 8 sidings/stations along the way after leaving Campbelltown :- Maryfields, Kenny Hill, Currans Hill, Grahams Hill, Narellan, Kirkham, Elderslie, and Camden.



Pansy, the Camden train at Kenny Hill siding

- *Courtesy of Camden Library Local Studies*

Many local children relied on Pansy to connect them to school outside of the Camden area, particularly those travelling to high schools in Parramatta and Homebush.



Pansy crossing over the Cowpasture bridge with passenger cars and milk cars. c.1910.

- *Courtesy of Camden Historical Society*

As road transport improved and family cars became more common, much of this area's produce, including coal, no longer needed the Pansy train service. It had been running at a loss for a number of years. The Pansy train operated from 1882 until it was closed by NSW State government in 1963.



Pansy at Maryfields with passengers for the 'Way of the Cross'.

- *Courtesy of Camden Library Local Studies*

Another means of keeping in touch was via air. Camden Airport was established on the site of Arthur Macarthur-Onslow's racecourse. The property had been part of Rowland Hassall's land grant from Governor Macquarie in 1812, known as Macquarie Grove. It was purchased by F.A. Macarthur-Onslow in 1918. His sons, Edward, Denzil and Andrew became keen flying enthusiasts. By 1935 the family owned several planes including a Compe-Swift and a De Haviland Hornet Moth.



Les Ray and George Mills at Camden Airport in 1937

- *Courtesy of Camden Historical Society*

The field was used as a private airport until 1938, when the Macquarie Grove Flying School was established by Edward. An aerial pageant was held the same year. Several flying displays and Inter-Club contests were held. Camden Airport was the site of the trial of the first Australian made parachute. The manufacturing company, Light Aircraft Pty. Ltd., belonged to Denzil Macarthur-Onslow.

However, these activities had to be scaled back after Edward offered the airport as a training ground for the RAAF during World War 2. Five squadrons were based there. British RAF and US Air Force squadrons also trained there.

After the war, the Macarthur -Onslow family encountered difficulties in trying to reclaim their property and the airport went through several periods of development. A control tower was built in 1962 and the main runway was sealed in 1978. For a while it was home to the Camden Museum of Aviation (1968-1976). In 2003 the airport was sold to a private company.



Camden Aerodrome, general scene of people and planes at the airport in 1938.

- *Courtesy of Camden Historical Society*

Nowadays the airport is mainly used by trainee pilots and community groups, such as the Airforce League, and several gliding clubs. It is also used for hot air ballooning.



Hot air balloon ready for take-off at Camden airport. c. 1993

- *Courtesy of Camden Historical Society*

Over the years the Camden's population has grown and new suburbs have developed on the sites of former large estates. Despite improvements to the infrastructure of Camden there is one aspect that has been a constant challenge to its community. Flooding in the area continues to wreak havoc.

Way back in 1860, it was suggested in the *Sydney Empire* newspaper that a canal could be built between Camden and Parramatta as an 'added means of communication' to solve the problems caused by frequent flooding in the area. In June 1913, the *Goulburn Post* reported that flooding in Camden had allowed

at least 5 feet of water to flow above the Cowpasture Bridge causing a 'complete blockage for the railway and mail'.



Flooding in Camden, Aryle Street outside the Milk depot c. 1925

- *Courtesy of Camden Historical Society*

Several times in recent years the township's direct routes have been affected or even cut-off due to flooding. This past 18 months has seen devastating bushfires, flooding, Covis-19 and then even worse flooding in March 2021. Once again, the people of Camden connected offering support, food, shelter. History has shown that the people of Camden have a strong community spirit that has been passed down through the generations enabling them to stay connected and generating their own cultural identity.



Flooding in 2016 -Cowpasture Bridge under water.

- *Courtesy of Camden Library Local Studies*

For more information please visit or contact Camden Library Local Studies at
<https://www.library.camden.nsw.gov.au>

Camden Museum and Camden Historical Society
<https://www.camdenhistory.org.au>

Camden Area Family History Service
<https://www.cafhs.org.au>