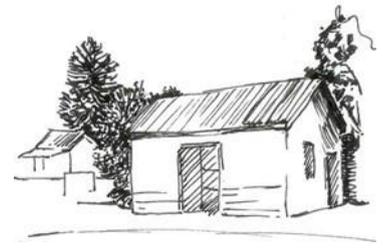


# Bundanoon History Group

## Monthly Newsletter



November 2020

### From the President

Hello Everyone,

During the week of 8 – 15 Nov, my granddaughters celebrated NAIDOC week at school. Whilst being aware that NAIDOC was a celebration and recognition of our first Australians, much to my embarrassment I could not explain what the letters actually stood for. Since it's an important event in the Australian calendar, I have included an article on the History of NAIDOC in this month's Newsletter.

Also in this issue, as summertime temperatures become part of our lives once again, we have an interesting and emotive article from Ian Smith on the 1939 Bushfires and their impact on Bundanoon.

Finally, its not long until Xmas and on Monday 7 December we are holding our Christmas lunch at the Bundanoon Carriage Club – a fantastic new venue for us, once again catered for by the Lions Club. Following the recent changes to the Covid regulations, we have been allowed to increase our numbers to 60 so there are still some spaces left if you would like to come. Just register your name with Treasurer Graham Morgan.

Best wishes and keep well,

**David**

**Email:** david.brennen@yahoo.com **Tel:** 0432 608 474

### Bundanoon and the 1939 Bushfires

**by Ian Smith, Archive Team**

January 1939 was a time of catastrophic bushfires in Victoria (the infamous 'Black Friday' fires) that claimed 71 lives. New South Wales also experienced devastating fires - on the South Coast, at Bathurst, Sydney, and Oberon, as well as Penrose, Bundanoon and the Southern Highlands. Six people lost their

lives. Kangaroo Valley experienced the worst bushfires for thirty years while at Mittagong fire came within 200 metres of the town centre and twenty homes and businesses were lost.

Most of these fires appear to have started as isolated outbreaks rather than emanating from a larger fire.

On Saturday 14 January, a day that experienced "the worst heat in the history of NSW", a bushfire broke out north of Penrose and Bundanoon. Fanned by a strong north-westerly wind this fire quickly jumped the Hume Highway, swept through Penrose State Forest destroying a forester's house and into Penrose destroying nine houses, two stores, a church and fruit packing shed plus at least eight farm houses.

Though most of the press reports concentrated on this devastation at Penrose, Bundanoon was not spared – it lost seven houses including that of Ivy and Norman De Meryck's at their property "Ben Nevis".

The fire that struck Bundanoon and Penrose originated in almost quite ordinary circumstances. With regard to rainfall, 1938 was a typical year with 1035mm recorded at Bundanoon (Ballymena). About 620mm or rain had fallen between August and November so the pastures and the bush would have been as lush as they have been this (2020) spring. Then the rain ceased - just 12 mm during the seven weeks prior to 14 January 1939. Maximum daily temperatures were also extreme. The nearest sites where the daily temperature was recorded at that time are Canberra (Acton) and Sydney (Observatory Hill). From New Years Day till 14 January the maximum daily temperature recorded in Canberra exceeded 31°C, and maximum temperatures hovered between 39 and 42°C (extreme heatwave) from 7-14 January. Consequently the thick long grass

and the forests would have been exceptionally dry when on Saturday 14 January, by 10.00am, a strong north-westerly wind sprang up that was described as being "straight from the hobs of hell." (The thermometer soared to 45.3°C on that day at Observatory Hill.)

At this time there was a camp of workers in the eucalypt forest about eight kilometres from Penrose Forest at Paddy's River. Here several men occupied five huts. One of these men was Cyril James Hayward (aged 39) who on that morning decided to boil a billy for tea. There was a fireplace in his hut but because of the heat of the day he lit a fire outside, 3.5 metres from the huts but less than a metre from dry grass that surrounded the area.

Having boiled his billy he doused the fire then took his tea inside his hut. Three minutes later he heard a crackling noise and running outside he found that the fire had re-ignited and had set the dry grass alight. He tried valiantly to stop the flames, fighting them till he was exhausted, but the fire, fanned by the strong winds, soon burnt down his hut and all his possessions.

The fire jumped the Hume Highway. Thirty minutes later it reached Penrose Forest, devoured the forest (and the forester's house) and in just another twenty minutes tore into Penrose and onto Bundanoon.

In this desperate situation, Penrose residents did what they could to quell the flames. Women and children were bundled on trucks and cars and ferried out of harms way. Bundanoon residents too were quick to lend a hand. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that some seven hundred men from Bundanoon, including one hundred visitors from Sydney, rallied together and did what they could to help but could only really save the Penrose railway station.

The railway line between Bundanoon and Moss Vale was likewise menaced by this fire. Serious damage though was averted when locomotives pulling tanks of water moved up and down the line spraying water over burning sleepers.

On the Sunday morning, 15 January, the body of an

elderly man (George Turner) was found by two boys. On sustenance relief, he had camped near Paddy's River but the fire overtook him and he had collapsed and died.

Next morning (Monday 16 January), in one of those strange twists of fate, heavy rain began falling. This doused the fires but alas it was too late to save Penrose and the seven destroyed houses in Bundanoon.

Several people were now destitute after losing everything in the fires. Nonetheless, with what was described as 'characteristic generosity,' more fortunate residents came to their assistance. Bundanoon residents promptly raised £136/1/9 for those in distress, the Bundanoon police made arrangements to help those in need with food, clothing and shelter and the Bundanoon RSL club donated £15. Wingecarribee Shire Council promptly established a bushfire relief committee to distribute aid.

In the aftermath of these bushfires, Cyril Hayward was arrested and pleaded guilty at Goulburn Court with having temporarily left a fire in the open air before extinguishing it. He was sentenced to three months imprisonment with hard labour.

Interestingly, as a precursor for what was to later ensue, two weeks previously around New Year's Eve, the Bundanoon police and local volunteers after three hours hard work subdued a bushfire which threatened to jump the railway line some five kilometres from town. Once again light rain showers with a cool change came in to minimise the risk of further outbreaks.

It's hard not to compare Bundanoon's experience in these fires with those we went through in 2020. Similar 'worst ever' weather conditions were reported on both occasions, while the generosity of the community was likewise similar. The striking difference is in the way the fires were fought. In 1939 members of the public, many or most with seemingly no fire-fighting experience, were at the forefront of the fire-fighting effort. Today it is very much a responsive professional effort that draws on expertise and resources from a well-organised State-

based system.

Given the events of the 1939 bushfires it is lucky that Bundanoon survived with comparatively minor damage. Indeed, perhaps when it comes down to essentials, luck may be the major factor in determining the outcome of all the bushfires that have threatened Bundanoon.

## A History of NAIDOC

Extracted from <https://www.naidoc.org.au/> by David Brennen



NAIDOC week is normally held in July but this year it was postponed to 8 – 15 November because of Covid-19.

**NAIDOC** stands for **National** **A**borigines and **I**slanders **D**ay **O**bservance **C**ommittee. Its origins can be traced to the emergence of Aboriginal groups in the 1920's, which sought to increase awareness in the wider community of the status and treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

A timeline of NAIDOC history is presented below:

### 1920 – 1930

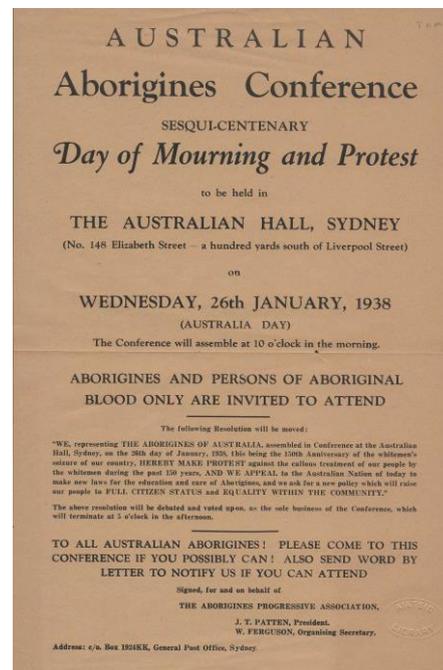
Before the 1920s, Aboriginal rights groups boycotted Australia Day (26 January) in protest against the status and treatment of indigenous Australians. By the 1920s, they were increasingly aware that the broader Australian public was largely ignorant of the boycotts. If the movement was to make progress, it would need to be active.

Several organisations emerged to fill this role, particularly the Australian Aborigines Progressive Association (AAPA) in 1924 and the Australian Aborigines League (AAL) in 1932. Their efforts were largely overlooked, and due to police harassment, the AAPA abandoned their work in 1927.

In 1935, William Cooper, founder of the AAL, drafted a petition to send to King George V, asking for special Aboriginal electorates in Federal Parliament. The Australian Government believed that the petition fell outside its constitutional responsibilities.

### 1938

On Australia Day, 1938, on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of British colonisation, protestors marched through the streets of Sydney, followed by a congress attended by over a thousand people. One of the first major civil rights gatherings in the world, it was known as the Day of Mourning



### Advertising Poster from the Dictionary of Sydney

The attendees passed the following resolution:

*'WE, representing THE ABORIGINES OF AUSTRALIA, assembled in conference at the Australian Hall, Sydney, on the 26th day of January, 1938, this being the 150th Anniversary of the Whiteman's seizure of our country, HEREBY MAKE PROTEST against the callous treatment of our people by the whitemen during the past 150 years, AND WE APPEAL to the Australian nation of today to make new laws for the education and care of Aborigines, we ask for a new policy which will raise our people TO FULL CITIZEN STATUS and EQUALITY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.'*

Following the congress, a deputation led by William Cooper presented Prime Minister Joseph Lyons with a proposed national policy for Aboriginal people. This was again rejected because the Government did

not hold constitutional powers in relation to Aboriginal people.

After the Day of Mourning, there was a growing feeling that it should be a regular event. In 1939 William Cooper wrote to the National Missionary Council of Australia to seek their assistance in supporting and promoting an annual event.

### 1940 – 1955

From 1940 until 1955, the Day of Mourning was held annually on the Sunday before Australia Day and was known as Aborigines Day. In 1955 Aborigines Day was shifted to the first Sunday in July after it was decided the day should become not simply a protest day but also a celebration of Aboriginal culture.

### 1956 – 1990

Major Aboriginal organisations, state and federal governments, and a number of church groups all supported the formation of, the National Aborigines Day Observance Committee (NADOC). At the same time, the second Sunday in July became a day of remembrance for Aboriginal people and their heritage.

In 1972, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs was formed, as a major outcome of the 1967 referendum.

In 1974, the NADOC committee was composed entirely of Aboriginal members for the first time. The following year, it was decided that the event should cover a week, from the first to second Sunday in July.

In 1984, NADOC asked that National Aborigines Day be made a national public holiday, to help celebrate and recognise the rich cultural history that makes Australia unique. While this has not happened, other groups have echoed the call.

### 1991 – Present

With a growing awareness of the distinct cultural histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, NADOC was expanded to recognise Torres Strait Islander people and culture. The committee then became known as the National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC). This

new name has become the title for the whole week, not just the day. Each year, a theme is chosen to reflect the important issues and events for NAIDOC Week. The NAIDOC 2020 theme - *Always Was, Always Will Be*. - recognises that First Nations people have occupied and cared for this continent for over 65,000 years.

During the mid-1990s, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) took over the management of NAIDOC until ATSIC was disbanded on 15 April 2004.

Over the period from 2004 to 2005 there were interim arrangements, with former Senator Aden Ridgeway chairing the Committee until 2008.

Anne Martin and Ben Mitchell served as co-chairs of the National NAIDOC Committee from 2008 to 2018, when Patricia Thompson and John Paul Janke were elected the Co-Chairs.

The National NAIDOC Committee has made key decisions on national celebrations each year and has representatives from most Australian states and territories.

NAIDOC week in 2021 runs from Sun 4 – 11 July. I wonder if they will rename it sometime to NAIWOC?

### Coming Events

#### Mon 7 Dec 11.30 am:

*BHG Monthly Meeting and Christmas Luncheon.* At the Bundanoon Carriage Club, Quarry Road. Members must book in advance with Graham Morgan. Tel 4883 7714 or email: morgan\_gt1@yahoo.com.au. Luncheon cost \$10.

#### Mon 25 Jan: *BHG Committee Meeting.*

#### Mon 1 Feb 10.15 am:

*BHG Monthly Meeting* at the Soldiers' Memorial Hall. Guest Speaker, Dr Carolyn Cosgrove on the Edenhelm Guest House hopefully to be followed by a tour of Sunnataram Monastery.

