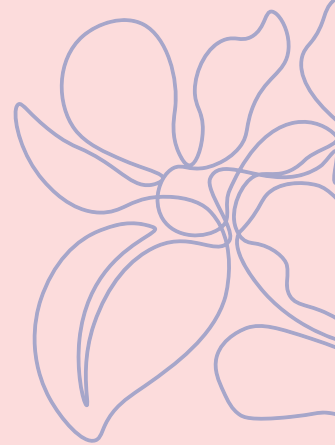




**A celebration of
Wagga Wagga's women
from early settlement to today**



Published by Museum of the Riverina
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Written and compiled by Michelle A. Maddison.

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One Museum, Two Sites.

**Museum of the Riverina
Historic Council Chambers site**
243 Baylis Street, Wagga Wagga
+612 6926 9655

**Museum of the Riverina
Botanic Gardens Site**
127 Lord Baden Powell Drive, Wagga Wagga
+612 6926 9650

museum@wagga.nsw.gov.au
museumriverina.com.au

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THE MUSEUM OF THE
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History has long been a boy's club.

Sadly, throughout much of history and across many cultures, women were viewed as second class citizens. As a result, their stories, in the form of diaries, letters, photographs or sentimental mementoes, were all too often relegated to the bottom drawer, if they were retained at all.

With society frequently placing an emphasis on their role as wives and mothers, women were valued more for how they looked and behaved, rather than what they achieved.

It is only in the last 50 years that attitudes towards women's history have begun to change. Both academics and the layman (or woman!) have come to the realisation that like their male counterparts, women too, lived extraordinary lives, did exceptional things and persevered through hardships. And usually, they came out the other side stronger and more resilient.

Think of that well-known quip about Fred Astaire - 'Sure he was great, but don't forget that Ginger Rogers did everything he did... backwards and in high heels.'

Through historical narrative, *There's More 2 HerStory* provides an insight into some of the incredible women associated with Wagga, from the early days of settlement through to the movers and shakers of the 21st century - Indigenous Elders and artisans, sportswomen, businesswomen, performers, teachers and adventurers.

These are their stories.

**For most history,
anonymous
was a woman.**

Virginia Woolf





Image: The women at right is Phoebe Price, whose story is told on page 22 of this book.

woman



Elizabeth Edney

1833 - 1913

The conditions were calm and fine at 3 p.m. on the afternoon of 3 July 1859, as the tall ship 'Caribou' set sail from Liverpool, England. On board, were 417 passengers, mostly Irish immigrants sponsored by the NSW Government under the auspices of the Donegal Relief Fund (DRF).

But not all the migrants on board were Irish. And not all had received government assistance.

Elizabeth Welsh Edney was one such passenger. Born in Dundee, Scotland in 1834, 1833 she was 25 years old, heavily pregnant and seeking a new life in Australia. Elizabeth was travelling with her husband James Brown 'JB' Edney (27), their two-year-old son James Welsh, and her mother-in-law, also named Elizabeth (57).

The family was emigrating to Australia to reunite with patriarch John Robertson Edney. Transported to Australia as a convict in 1833, John had completed his sentence and purchased property in Wagga. Almost 27 years after involuntarily leaving his wife and child, he had sent for them to join him in his new home.

It can only be imagined how uncomfortable the 93-day voyage was for Elizabeth. Sharing a cabin amidships with her husband and son, alongside other families, food rations included salted meat, 'Bulley' soup and rice, preserved potatoes and a sour bread known as 'baker's bread'. When their water supply went bad, charcoal and lime juice were added to disguise the taste.

Nine weeks into the voyage, on a blustery day in the middle of the Indian Ocean, Elizabeth gave birth to a daughter. Being the only girl born during the voyage, the captain asked that she be given the ship's name. So, towards the end of September, the youngest Edney was christened Mary Welsh Steel Caribou.

'Caribou'

The **Caribou** docked in Sydney on 4 October, and the family spent the next month getting their land legs. But their journey wasn't over. They still had to reach Wagga, and with the roads too rough for a horse and cart, the family had to proceed on foot!

Approximately 11 weeks after giving birth, Elizabeth and her family set off on the almost 500 km trek to their new home, **Mount Edney Farm**. 'Mount Edney Farm'.

Leaving on 30 November, the Edneys spent 23 days on the road passing through Parramatta, Liverpool, Goulburn, Gunning, Yass, Bogalong, Jugiong, Coolac, Gundagai, Nangus, Oura Flats and Gumly Gumly. While JB carried little James on his shoulders, Elizabeth carried baby Mary in her arms.

They reached their destination on the evening of 22 December, and their new life began. Elizabeth's first home must have come as a shock, as her husband described in his later **Reminiscences**: *in italics*

...the Floor was composed of Clay and open Square holes for Windows to admitt (sic) in the light of Day the walls were made of Slabs of Wood and the Roof covered with stringybark with a Great big open fireplace like what Noah had in the Ark... *in italics*

Sadly, little is known of Elizabeth's life once she arrived in Wagga. She settled at the family property, 'Mount Edney Farm', ironically named due to the flatness of the land. Elizabeth went on to have nine more children. Her last, Walter Scott Laing, was born in 1880 when she was 46 (he died the following year).

In 1912 Elizabeth and JB celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary. Aged 80, Elizabeth was reportedly still in excellent health, and enjoyed a family including five sons, four daughters, 32 grandchildren and nine great grandchildren.

Wagga was Elizabeth's home for 54 years. It was there she died in 1913 at the age of 81. Today, she rests in the Monumental Cemetery with her husband and at least three of her children.

***I have to tell about another matter
my Wife was put to bed that day
and Confined of another Daughter
my Fishing then was stopped
awhile until she again got fairly
Well as my mother came to nurse
her then I am very pleased to Tell...***

The Reminiscences of James Brown Edney





Caroline Dunstan

1861 – 1930

When Caroline Dunstan passed away in November 1930, the Wagga community lost not only a remarkable woman, but one who had vocally advocated for a woman's place in public life.

Born in Vaughan, Victoria in 1861, Caroline was one of eight children born to an English father and Irish mother. A good student, she became a Pupil Teacher in 1876, following the completion of her schooling at age 15. Inspectors' Reports determined the young lady to be 'a good teacher, willing, intelligent, reliable and smart', and in 1883 (aged 22) she was offered the position of head teacher at Quambatook, Victoria.

Caroline declined the position, resigned from her job and on 22 October 1883, married newspaperman Henry Dunstan.

Henry's work took the couple to Minyip, Charlton, Yackandandah, Urana, The Oaks, Mascot and finally Wagga. Caroline ran a private school at Minyip and possibly in some of the other locations.

In 1909, Henry became Wollondilly Shire Clerk, a position he held from January until his appointment as Town Clerk of North Botany on 21 December 1909. When Henry resigned his position in Wollondilly, Caroline stepped in, unofficially becoming Shire Clerk for the five weeks it took to find a replacement. Thereafter, she claimed to have been the first female clerk in NSW!

Mrs Dunstan was a woman of wonderful energy, unflagging in her efforts to assist every women's movement for the town's welfare.

The Daily Advertiser, 27 November 1930

Years later Caroline had another 'first', when alongside Wagga Mayoress Collins they became the first two local female Justices of the Peace.

Whilst living in Yackandandah, Caroline had convened a public meeting regarding the erection of a dedicated maternity hospital within the town. One of the most active canvassers in the district for the cause, she then became the first president at the helm of the eight-patient institution. It was one of the first hospitals of its kind in the state of Victoria.

It was this success that years later prompted Caroline to move the Wagga CWA to push for a similar maternity hospital in Wagga, and it was her actions that led to maternity homes becoming one of the foremost objectives of the CWA movement.

The Dunstan family settled in Wagga in 1912, when Henry and his sons took over the Wagga Wagga Express (WWE) newspaper. Caroline and Henry had eight children dash should be here
■ Harry (b. 1884), Carrie (b. 1886), Charles (b. 1888), Pearl (b. 1890), George (b. 1892), August (b. 1896), Nellie (b. 1899) and Roy (b. 1904). As well as running her household, Caroline was a dynamic woman who took an active interest in women's organisations.

In Wagga, Caroline was an active member of the Churchwomen's Union, the Wagga Croquet Club, the Shakespearean Society and the Wagga Tutorial Club. She held the position of secretary for several charitable organisations including the Wagga District Hospital (a position she held for three years), the Church of England Flower Show (1930) and was an early secretary of the Wagga CWA. During World War I, she was an ardent Red Cross worker and secretary of the Soldiers' Comforts Fund.

Mrs Dunstan left behind her a well-remembered record of public work. The home, nevertheless, was never neglected.

The Daily Advertiser, 27 November 1930

With her father and husband both journalists, Caroline herself, was also gifted with journalistic ability. When Henry took over the WWE, she undertook the majority of the paper's social reporting work. Writing as 'Caro', her Ladies' Column was a feature of the Express for many years and she took every opportunity to voice her firm views regarding the role of women in society.

Her art and musical critiques were very popular, and she also reported on school speech days for many years, having fostered a close relationship with Wagga's school community.

Sadly, Caroline became a widow with the sudden death of Henry in 1914. From then, until her own death years later, she assisted her sons in the management of the paper.

Caroline maintained her active lifestyle almost to the end of her life, as her demise was fast. She entered Welwyn Private Hospital on 16 October 1930 and 'death called her to rest' ten days later. But it was only fitting that before she slipped away, a group of townswomen, led by Mayoress Collins and former Mayoress Day, presented her with a substantial cheque of funds raised in appreciation and acknowledgement of her many contributions throughout the town and district that became her final home.



Ada Baker

1866 - 1949

Ada Baker's life was one filled with music.

Born on 11 December 1866 in Strawberry Hills, Sydney, Ada moved to Wagga with her family in January 1883 when her father, George Frederick Baker became licensee of the Pastoral Hotel.

Young Ada had dreams beyond the boundaries of her new hometown. Desirous of becoming a professional singer, she was single-minded in her pursuit of this ambition. After settling in Wagga, Ada performed and taught private singing lessons, with a view to financing future musical **tutorage** for herself back in Sydney. **tutelage**

Her first public performance in Wagga came in September 1884 at the Freemason's Hall. Performing the role of Lily in the cantata **The Flower Queen**, Ada appeared opposite Charles Henry Hall, who later became her husband. **in italics**

A great personal triumph for Ada came two years later when she organised and performed in a fundraising concert, once again at the Freemason's Hall. It was a huge success, and the proceeds of the night raised £50 for the Wagga Hospital, with a further £24/15/6 going to the survivors of the SS **Ly-ee-Moon** shipwreck. Ada's **'Ly-ee-Moon'** contribution to the latter was acknowledged in Sydney's Evening News under the heading 'Well done Ada!'

She possesses a voice of rich calibre; the lower notes are deliciously liquid, the upper ones full of power, so that she fills the building with ease.

The Sydney Morning Herald, 13 December 1886

Ada moved back to Sydney in late 1886 to commence tuition under Signor Steffani (singing) and Albert Fisher (piano). She made a triumphant return to Wagga the following year, performing a concert under the patronage of Mayor Harry Fitzhardinge. Of the event, the Wagga Wagga Advertiser

reported 'the hall was almost crowded by a large and fashionable audience, most of which were anxious to hear Miss Baker sing for the first time since she entered upon extensive musical studies in Sydney..'

1891 - 1893 saw one of the most exciting periods in Ada's career, when she joined the Willard Opera Company, touring China and India as the lead in a series of Gilbert & Sullivan comic operas. In India, she performed for the Maharaja of Mysore, who had his own theatre and the first gramophone in India! The Maharaja was so taken by her singing that Ada was given the honour of being allowed to ride his white elephant, and was gifted a topaz necklace, earrings and bracelet.

In 1894, Ada joined Harry Rickards' vaudeville company, based at Sydney's Tivoli Theatre. When the company toured Perth in 1898, Western Australia became her home for several years. There, she again established herself as a singing teacher, also performing with the Lyric Club, the Fremantle Orchestral Society and the Perth Musical Union. On her return to Sydney in 1907, the Bunbury Herald lamented the loss of 'perhaps the best mezzo soprano vocalist in the State.'

Back in Sydney, Ada continued teaching, performing and fundraising. By February 1908 she had over 60 students enrolled for singing lessons. That year, at the age of 42, she adopted the professional moniker 'Madame Ada Baker.'

Miss Ada Baker first made her mark as an amateur in Wagga Wagga, N.S.W. where she was head and shoulders over any other vocalist at the time. Her voice is singularly sweet and expressive.

Clare's Weekly, 23 July 1898

Throughout her life, Ada was a prolific fundraiser. She raised money for Perth's Children's Hospital, the British Red Cross Society, the Sydney Hospital, the Protestant Orphan's Fair, Callan Park Hospital for the Insane, the Sydney Seaman's Mission, the Sydney Night Refuge for Destitute Men, the Rachel Foster Hospital for Women and the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Women and Children.

Ada's passion for performance and fundraising never waned. During WWI she arranged music for and led the St. Cecilia Ladies' Choir in Pymble, raising £1000 for the local branch of the British Red Cross Society. During WWII, following the death of a grandchild who had enlisted in the RAF, she established the 'Grandmother's Victory Bond League' in the Ku-ring-gai Municipality.

is there an extra gap here?

Ada retained a singing studio at the W.H. Paling's building for more than 40 years where she continued teaching until her 82nd year. Upon her retirement, 60 of her students arranged a testimonial concert in her honour at the Sydney Town Hall on 14 July 1949.

Sadly, Ada was too ill to attend and passed away just ten days later.



Dora Day

1886 - 1963

Eileen Day

1891 - 1977

footnote

In November 1914, the Day family, William Frederick, his wife Alice¹ and their daughters Dora and Eileen, returned from an extended tour of Europe and Great Britain. It was an exciting end to their holiday when they narrowly avoided internment, being in Brussels when war was declared on 2 August 1914. The family's return trip to the safety of Australia was one they talked about for many years to come.

On their homecoming to Wagga, the Misses Day, as they became affectionately known throughout the district, purchased a small private school on the site of the Plaza Theatre (Baylis Street). Immediately after their purchase, the sisters relocated the school a few blocks away to the less commercial surrounds of 105 Best Street.

In 1915, the Wagga Grammar School (WGS) opened with just nine pupils, but by the end of the year, the student population had grown to at least 20. In its heyday, the school had a capacity of 96 students, a mix of day pupils and boarders. Girls from across the district attended, with boys being allowed to attend until they turned seven.

These two women were outstanding personalities, respected by the community and the many girls who attended their school over the years.

The Daily Advertiser, 23 January 1980

Miss Eileen Day (aged 24) was the principal of the school and taught most of the senior subjects, also taking the juniors for history every Monday afternoon. Outside school hours she gave private elocution

lessons. Strict about breathing exercises and correct vowel sounds, her elocution students were required to practice these techniques every day in their own homes. An ardent student of Shakespeare, contemporaries claimed that in the art of speech and the appreciation of the English language, Eileen could not be faulted.

¹ Alice was the stepmother of Dora and Eileen, but lovingly reared the girls as her own.

Miss Dora, the older of the sisters, took most of the junior school subjects and taught all art classes. During the Great Depression she also took over teaching the kindergarten lessons. A talented artist and sewer, many of her students gained prizes for their needlework and artwork at the Wagga and district shows, and her own needlework was renowned throughout the district. Dora was also largely responsible for the inclusion of an Art Section in the annual Wagga Show.

In addition to being school principal, Eileen was also the school drama teacher and received high praise for her stage productions. Together the sisters produced some memorable shows at the Wonderland Theatre, for which Dora painted the backdrops and made the costumes.

Alongside the three R's (reading, writing and 'rithmetic) social graces ranked high on the WGS curriculum. Whilst the Misses Day catered for mainstream subjects at their school, their syllabus also included subjects socially acceptable for young ladies at the time – the art of speech, sewing, painting, drawing, physical culture and eurythmics, music and singing. Students were also encouraged to help the disadvantaged in the community and each year they filled 150 stockings which were sent to the orphans at Sydney's Carlingford Homes.

After completing the Leaving Certificate, the sisters motivated their students to continue their education by attending either a college or university. Many obviously did as amongst the WGS Old Girls were doctors, lawyers, barristers, nurses, music teachers and other professionals. They turned out a Miss Australia (Sheila Martin, 1937) and even taught Judy Kelly, a Hollywood actress of the 1920s-30s!

The Misses Day made a lasting impression on their pupils on the proper way to behave and live a good life.

Phyllis White, former student

The Great Depression was a difficult time for the Misses Day and their school. Economic hardships led to the closure of the boarding school in 1932.

Sadly, ill health and likely the strain of operating a school during the Depression and wartime became too much for the Misses Day, and they closed their school for good in May 1945. The two continued with their involvements in numerous cultural activities within the Wagga area. They were great workers for the Annual Eisteddfod and everything connected with drama and music.

Following the death of their adored stepmother in 1948, Dora and Eileen looked after their father, living with him until his death at the age of 98. Dora died on 15 December 1963 at the age of 77. Eileen continued in her charity work, especially her support of St. John's Anglican as an active member of the church community. Seeing the need for a centre aisle carpet, she raised the necessary money by baking and selling pies, which attracted a ready clientele each Thursday. She also donated a stained-glass window to the church in memory of her beloved sister.

Eileen took that last trip to re-join Dora on 24 April 1977, aged 86. Following her death, members of the Grammar School Old Girls' Union showed their gratitude to their former teacher. As a memorial to her they arranged for the double doors at the entrance to St. John's to be restored. The dedication ceremony took place on 3 May 1981.



Dorothy Hammond

1891 - 1936

One of the most striking features of the eastern approach into Wagga is the avenue of plane trees flanking both sides of Hammond Avenue. Many motorists probably pass between these silent sentries without a second glance, ignorant to their significance and that of the small stone cairn that rests in their shade, whose inscription reads:

This avenue is dedicated to her as a mark of appreciation of her devoted services to the Country Women's Association, 19 August 1937.

Dorothy Coverdale Hammond came to Wagga with her family in 1899 when her father, Charles Kentish Horwood joined Arthur Raleigh in the partnership of Horwood and Raleigh, Stock and Station Agents.

Her name will live long for her unselfish and energetic efforts for a cause so dearly loved by her and by other women who understand country life and conditions.

The Daily Advertiser, 31 August 1936

From a young age, she was a member of the Juvenile Journalists League, established to encourage and develop interest in literature among children. Obviously a well-educated and bright young lady, Dorothy attended Wagga Grammar School (where she excelled in sewing and fancy needlework) and Gurwood Street Public, where she presented former Governor of NSW Sir Harry Rawson's daughter with a bouquet on behalf of the pupils, during his 1906 visit to the district.

Following the untimely death of her mother in 1905, Dorothy completed her education at Bishopthorpe Church of England Grammar School in Goulburn. Prior to

her marriage, Dorothy was well-known and admired throughout the district, having closely associated herself with community activities, first with Wagga's Younger Set¹ and then in patriotic circles during World War I.

On 30 June 1919 Dorothy married grazier William Malcolm Hammond and the newlyweds settled on the property 'Gawsworth', Harefield, on the outskirts of Wagga. The couple had two sons – Ralph (b. 1921) and Kentish (b. 1923).

The Wagga branch of the Country Women's Association (CWA) was formed in November 1923 and by 1925, Dorothy had been elected President of the Riverina Group. She threw all of her energies into the group, holding the position of executive officer for many years. The area covered by this group was geographically extensive. While Wagga was the central hub, members came from as far east as Tumbarumba, as far south as Albury and as far west as Urana. Dorothy's work for the CWA brought her into direct association with colleagues in all parts of NSW.

small 'p'

Dorothy's greatest achievement for the CWA were the 'calendars' she started producing in 1929. Containing recipes for cakes, puddings, tea and luncheon dishes, they also included ideas for meals for every day of the year. Taking on nearly all the responsibility of preparing them for sale, it took Dorothy nearly three months to arrange each set of recipes. It was a job she enjoyed and they were a huge success for the CWA, even during the lean years of the Great Depression.

CWA branches sold these calendars and made a profit of one shilling on the sale of each one, with the proceeds being devoted to the individual work of the club. The money collected by Dorothy from her own personal sales was used to assist the building of a hospital in the small country town of Moulamein, NSW. In 1931 Dorothy was honoured with a Life Membership of the CWA based on the strength of her fundraising to date.

In April 1933, *The Sun* newspaper reported that more than 20,000 of the cake calendars had been sold, and the pudding calendars were a close second, with 15,000 sold, making a total profit of £2,731 (\$328,864.87 in today's values).

Sadly, it's impossible to know what further fundraising ideas Dorothy would have conceived, as she resigned from the CWA in mid-1936. A few weeks later, on 29 August, Dorothy passed away, aged just 44.

By her devotion to self-imposed duties, backed by a loveable disposition, she endeared herself to members of the CWA in cities, country towns and hamlets which she visited.

The Daily Advertiser, 31 August 1936

In March 1937, the CWA Riverina Group decided to plant an avenue of plane trees in or near Wagga, to perpetuate the memory of their fallen member Dorothy. The NSW Main Roads Board offered to supply the trees and the CWA ladies planted one in sixteen of them.

In 1956, the former Tarcutta Road was renamed Hammond Avenue in honour of this woman whose star shone so brightly, it was extinguished prematurely.

¹ The Younger Set was a nationwide CWA-related society for unmarried women aged 18 to 30.



Louisa Irons

1893 - 1977

Louisa Maria Ida Mahlo was born on 8 December 1893 in Dimboola, Victoria, the daughter of Herman and Ida Maria Mahlo (née Pohlner).

In 1916 she married John Turner Irons at Albury and they began married life working as sharefarmers¹ around small country towns south of Wagga.

It wasn't an easy life for the newlyweds but was especially challenging for Louisa as the lifestyle was often itinerant. Louisa gave birth as they travelled, with her five daughters, Irene (b. 1916), Alice (b. 1918), Ruby (b. 1919), Winifred (b. 1921) and Ellen (b. 1926) being born in Albury, Lockhart, Milbrulong, Wagga and Henty.

With their growing family, John and Louisa relocated to Wagga to live in about 1923. They moved into a house on 'Tolland', the 165-acre property on the Albury Road (now Bourke Street) owned by John's father, Matthew.

Sadly, in 1926 their life was turned upside down when John died at the Wagga District Hospital following surgery for bowel cancer. He was just 47 years old.

This left Louisa a widow at 34 - and she had to support five young daughters under the age of ten. After a short period of mourning, Louisa was told by her father-in-law that she should return to her own family as he was unable to support her and her children. This is perhaps unsurprising, considering Matthew had 10 adult children of his own.

It wasn't uncommon for widows at this time to be left to face life without a breadwinner and often without a home of their own. Many, particularly young widows with children, had to fall back on support from their extended families to take them in. With no welfare available through the government and unable to loan money from a bank, Louisa eventually borrowed money from, or through, her brother Alf, who lived at Lake Cargelligo.

¹ Share farming is when the owner supplies the land and assets and the sharefarmer provides the labour, expertise, machinery and anything else that is required.

footnote

With that money, Louisa purchased a small farm block on Cullen Road, Lake Albert. With the entrance gate to the property flanked by oleander bushes, the farm was called 'Hollywood'.

At 'Hollywood', Louisa single-handedly raised her girls. She made a living out of selling dressed chickens, churned butter, cream, milk and fresh flowers. Once a week she would take her horse and buggy into Wagga to supply customers with her fresh farm produce. The girls would accompany her during school holidays and Louisa would drop them off at Collins Park to play while she carried out her deliveries.

In hard times, Louisa collected and cured possum pelts to make a living. She worked like a man. Her eldest daughter Irene (aged 10) left school after her father died, and willingly took on the running of the house and cared for her younger sisters who continued their education.

Louisa also grazed some cattle on her land, and in drought times, when grass was scarce, she would take her herd down to the long paddock, but council authorities would move her on. When the dam was dry, she would walk her stock to Lake Albert for a drink, but only under the cover of darkness.

When Louisa's girls left school and found employment in Wagga, she sold her small farm and moved to town. After paying off her debt to her brother, she purchased her forever home, 9 Gossett Street, where she lived until her death in 1977.

At Gossett Street she had fruit trees and grew her own vegetables. Louisa also kept chickens and would kill and pluck those chickens as she had done on the farm. From their feathers she made her own feather pillows, stuffing them into unbleached calico covers. Today, her granddaughter Maureen still uses one of these pillows.

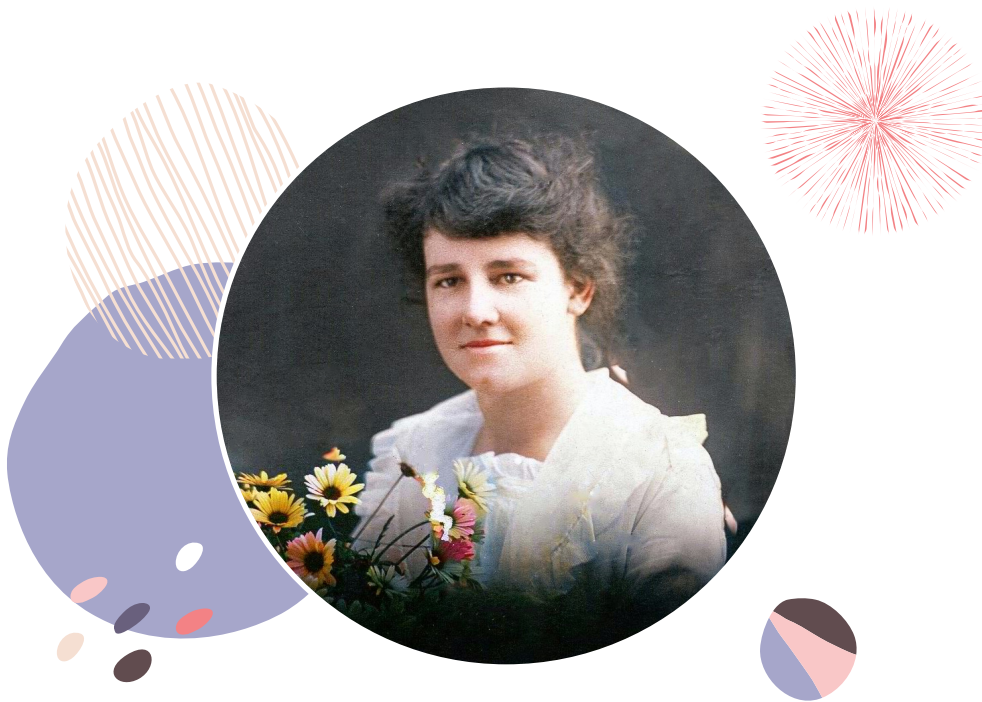
Nothing was ever wasted and things that might come in handy later were never thrown out. With the help of daughter Irene, Louisa made wagga rugs using old, thin and worn blankets and cut-up jumpers. The home had no insulation and lots of draughts. The house was heated from the wood fire in the kitchen, fulfilling the role of cooker and heater.

With money left over from the sale of 'Hollywood', Louisa decided to assist her daughters to be financially independent from their husbands. She purchased houses for three of her daughters, with theirs being the only name on the title deed.

It was in her home on Gossett Street that Louisa died, aged 84. On her death she may have been poor, but she left her daughters something even better than money, giving them the gift of bricks and mortar security.

Louisa instilled within her children strong family ties and values. She encouraged her grandchildren to aspire to a better life.

Maureen Allen, granddaughter, 2023



Flora Eldershaw

1897 - 1956

When author and historian Marjorie Barnard first met Flora Eldershaw, she was struck by the 'dark-haired, vivacious girl' who was 'a fountain of energy, ideas and laughter.'

Together, these two women would go on to produce five novels, three histories, a volume of literary criticism and a host of articles, stories and lectures. Writing under the joint nom de plume M. Barnard Eldershaw, their partnership would become the longest running and most productive one in Australian literary history.

Born on 16 March 1897 at Darlinghurst, Sydney, Flora Sydney Patricia Eldershaw was the youngest daughter of Henry Sirdefield Eldershaw and Margaret (née McCarroll). Although born in Sydney, she moved to the Riverina at a young age, when her father became manager of 'Mundawaddera' Station.

A bright child, Flora was educated at Mt. Erin High, before becoming an undergraduate at Sydney University in February 1915 (aged 18). It was there that she met fellow scholar Marjorie Barnard, who was also studying history under the renowned professor George Arnold Wood.

After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in 1918, Flora was offered a teaching position at Cremorne Church of England School for Girls. She remained there until 1923, when she transferred to the Presbyterian Ladies' College (PLC) at Croyden, where she taught both English and economics. A gifted educator, Flora became Senior English Mistress and head of the boarding school. Most likely she would have risen to the position of Headmistress had her Catholicism not precluded her from further promotion.

I began to write when I was quite a small girl and my mother used to embarrass me by reading my 'pieces' to visitors.

Flora's friendship with Marjorie continued after they graduated from university and followed their respective careers. On weekends, they would meet up and discuss collaborating on novels. This dream became a reality when Australian periodical The Bulletin advertised a lucrative £1000 prize for the best Australian novel of 1928. The young women submitted their first book, *A House is Built*, and much to their surprise, won joint first place with Katharine Susannah Pritchard's novel *Coonardoo*. *italics*

The pair quickly followed this with their second novel, *Green Memory* (1931), but *after* *delete* following a lukewarm reception, the women wrote separately under their own names for several years afterwards.

A most exciting episode of Flora's life came in 1934 when she embarked upon a world tour, travelling for a year throughout Great Britain and Europe, visiting Paris, Budapest, the Rhineland, Norway, Sweden and Austria. She saw the world-famous passion play at Oberammergau, and even attended the Nuremberg Rally and heard Adolf Hitler speak!

By the 1930s, Flora was a leading figure in Sydney literary circles, mingling with other dedicated writers including Miles Franklin. Her position as a successful authoress was further cemented in 1935 when she became the first female president of the Fellowship of Australian Writers (FAW).

Flora had been a teacher at PLC for 18 years when, in May 1941, she resigned her post, and was seconded into the Reconstruction Division of the Department of Labor and Industry in Canberra. In that role she was involved with drafting a plan for the betterment of Australian women in the post-war period. In 1946 Flora transferred to the division of Industrial Welfare, advising the Government on women's legal rights, working conditions and equal pay, also extending her scope to include the welfare of Indigenous and migrant women.

The war years were demanding for both Flora and Marjorie but their collaboration continued, with the pair writing short stories, critical and historical essays and a radio drama, *The Watch on the Headland*. Both were politically active and in 1943, Flora was once again elected president of the FAW, where she strongly supported the organisation's pro-Soviet stance.

Eldershaw was socially and politically inclined to the left, her pro-Soviet position and involvement in the Peace Movement resulted in her having a slim, if predictable ASIO file.

John Morrison, author

M. Barnard Eldershaw's final novel, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (1945) was published in 1947, following delays due to wartime censorship and paper shortages.

Flora's health began to fail after the war and in 1955 she retired, settling with her sister Mary at her property, 'Sackville', Forest Hill. It was there, on 20 September 1956 that *she* suffered a stroke, and passed away at the Wagga Base Hospital aged just 59. In 1983, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* won the \$12,500 Patrick White Award, which was accepted by Marjorie, a fitting end for a duo whose literary career began with a prize-winning novel.



Kathleen Higgins

1897 - 1979

Immediately following World War I, around 6,000 members of the Australian Imperial Force returned to Australia with English brides. The first to make Wagga her home was Kathleen May Craig-Hall. Born in Brighton, she married Captain Walter Henry Higgins on 3 April 1919 and soon afterwards accompanied him back to Australia.

In England, Kathleen had trained as an 'art of speech' teacher and after moving to Wagga, she was interested in continuing her vocation. As her husband's work as an engineer took him away from home regularly, she thought she could offer lessons in elocution and the 'art of speech'. However, it was uncommon for married women to work in this era, so Wal put his foot down and said, 'no way.'

Ladies didn't work in those days... my father found her in England – met her and decided he was going to marry the 'girl in the green cardigan.'

Elizabeth Blake, daughter, 2003

Luckily, it didn't take long for Kathleen, far from home and missing her family, to find her niche within the community.

Like many good housewives of the 20th century, Kathleen's interests were centred on her home and family. While she devoted much of her time to her family circle, she also had numerous interests outside of the domestic realm.

Fostering a life-long love of music, literature and the arts, Kathleen was active in several groups throughout her life in Wagga. These included Alliance Française, the School of Arts, the Art Society, the University Tutorial Class, the Association of Riverina Cultural Clubs (ARCC), the Shakespeare Club, Al-Anon, the Wagga Eisteddfod Society and the 2WG Women's Club. When she had time she also enjoyed playing golf with her husband, who was a first-class player.

Growing up, Kathleen had enjoyed regular walks on the South Downs with her family, especially her father. After having her own children – son Bruce and daughters Elizabeth and Barbara - she would often take them for walks up Willans Hill, where they enjoyed picnics and nature rambles. When Barbara showed a keen interest in wildflowers, Kathleen wanted to encourage her, so scoured bookstores locally and in Sydney and Melbourne for a suitable reference book for her daughter.

Finding nothing appropriate for adolescent readers, her husband Wal suggested that she write her own.

Illustrated by the iconic Australian artist Pixie O'Harris, **Betty in Bushland** also includes more than 50 flowers drawn by Ethel King, artist of the Australian Museum.

Her taste for things beautiful is reflected in her charmingly appointed home, in Wollundry Avenue, overlooking the waters of the lake.¹

The Sydney Morning Herald, 16 September 1937

italics

Throughout the 1930s, Kathleen submitted the occasional short story, prose and articles for publications including the Sydney Morning Herald, Good Housekeeping (UK) and the Sydney Mail. In around 1942, she was approached by her good friends Forbie and Alice Sullivan, who owned the Daily Advertiser newspaper. They had taken on a new manager who had the idea of creating a regular column called 'Items of News', and the sisters thought of Kathleen. Subsequently, 'Notes for Women' was born and over the next 30 years Kathleen wrote the column under the nom de plume 'Dianthus.'

Timorously, yet daringly, Mrs Higgins undertook the task, and this Christmastide many a child's heart will be gladdened when he or she receives "Betty in Bushland".

The Daily Advertiser, 11 December 1937

Looking at the articles and the range of subjects covered, one gets a fair impression of Kathleen's personality. She was obviously an empathetic person, who cared about social issues including homelessness, mental health and alcoholism, to occurrences like strikes, fundraising and big events like the opening of Blowering Dam in 1968. When Kathleen travelled to the Far East in the 1960s, she

wrote lengthy articles about the cities and sights she saw under titles like 'City of Mystery: Dianthus in Hong Kong' and 'Manila: City of Colour and Contrasts.'

During WWI, Kathleen had served with the British Land Army. In WWII, she enlisted once again, serving as area Commandant with the Women's Australian National Service (WANS), a voluntary service organisation training women in skills such as first aid, signals, driving and air raid response.

Kathleen wrote her last book, **This Goodly Heritage: a History of the Parish of St. John's**, to commemorate the Centenary of St. John's Church of England, in 1965. She was planning another overseas trip when she died whilst on holidays to Merimbula on 7 January 1979 in her 82nd year.

Kathleen's memory is honoured to this day with the naming of the Dianthus Room at the Wagga Wagga Civic Theatre.

¹ In the early 20th century Wollundry Lagoon was sometimes called 'Wollundry Lake.'



Phoebe Price (Andrews)

1899 - 1978

In 1928, under the fairy lights which illuminated Dixieland on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River, a couple took to the dance floor in front of an appreciative audience. They were 29-year-old local teacher and performer Phoebe Andrews and an aspiring 19-year-old dancer called Robert Helpmann.

Born into an artistically talented family at Wagga, Phoebe was the eldest daughter of master baker Charles Andrews and his wife Elizabeth (née McGaulley). Alongside her siblings - brothers James, Harry and Joseph, and sisters Gwen and Ursula - Phoebe excelled at ballroom dancing, winning numerous competitions. She regularly partnered her brothers at the Dixieland Palais and the Masonic Hall, twirling to the strains of the Dixieland Masters of Melody.

From a young age, Phoebe displayed numerous talents. She was a gifted elocutionist, performed on stage in Wagga School of Arts productions, and in her late teens ran 'Phoebe Andrews Dance Classes' at several locations in Wagga, including the Empire Hall, Oxford Theatre and the Coronation Terrace on Gurwood Street. There, adults could learn 'all the latest jazz and specialty steps' and children were taught 'national, ballroom and tap dancing.'

There is no doubt that she has the divine spark of genius. Anyone who cannot see this is either blinded by prejudice or has not average intelligence.

Wagga Eisteddfod president Mr Mackinnon, 1924

Her theatrical career began in 1921, when she attracted the attention of stage impresario Mr Alan Wilkie, who was visiting Wagga with his Shakespearean Company. After actress Lorna Forbes contracted laryngitis, Phoebe was invited to take her place, appearing as Puck (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and as Arthur, Duke of Britain (*King John*) on stage in Wagga, Albury, Ballarat and Melbourne.

italics

Following several prize-winning performances at the Wagga Eisteddfod, Wagga Council, led by Mayor Daniel Byrnes decided to send Phoebe to Sydney, where she would undertake six months' training in the arts of elocution and music, and acquire her Teaching Diploma through Trinity College, London. The funds were publicly raised and Phoebe acquired her qualifications, thus ensuring that Wagga residents had access to a formally trained elocutionist.

In a teaching career spanning 40 years, Phoebe taught speech, choral work, dance and performance to students at St. Michael's and Mt Erin High and inspired many of her charges to become teachers themselves. Privately, she established the 'Phoebe Andrews' School of Speech Training', which later became 'The Elizabethan Academy of Speech and Drama.' Tutoring students from her home, she often operated an 'open house' for many artists, actors and friends, including Dame Mary Gilmore.

Great-niece, Dee Hinton, remembers visiting Phoebe's marital home, 29 Macleay Street. For the primary school student, it was an adventure, complete with a Chinese room full of glossy black lacquered furniture, a cellar, an expansive bathroom tiled in black and pink - and (apparently) - a resident ghost! Many soirées and bridge parties were hosted by Phoebe at this elegant residence, bringing together guests of varied cultural interests.

Phoebe had 11 nieces and nephews and enjoyed spending time with them all. She was particularly close to Judy and John Deegan, Fay Walters and Joann Hinton. All were gifted in some area of the arts, having been inspired by their wonderful aunt.

Phoebe was one of Wagga's leading lights. Her colour glittered and glowed. She exuded vibrance.

Fay Walters, niece, 2004

As an etiquette coach, for many years Phoebe advised Wagga Wagga City Council on arrangements for balls and civic receptions and assisted councillors on protocols in preparation for Vice-regal visits. In the 1940s and 1950s she tutored the Miss Wagga entrants and organised fashion shows and entertainment for the David Jones Emporium.

Phoebe's contribution to Wagga went beyond teaching. She was the first secretary of the Loreto Home of Compassion, secretary and early instigator of the School of Arts and secretary of the Wagga Shakespeare Club. In World War II she joined the Voluntary Aid Detachment and was also a Justice of the Peace.

December 1952 saw Phoebe produce and direct Wagga's first local musical-comedy, **Sally**, at the Wonderland Theatre. No mean feat, with a cast of 60! In her spare time, Phoebe sewed, pickled and preserved, made jams, gardened and collected antiques, but this was a domestic side very few people saw.

In 1968, Sir Robert Helpmann paid an official visit to Wagga. Now an internationally renowned ballet dancer and Hollywood star, he sought out his former Dixieland dance partner and together they demonstrated their moves for a press photographer. The two remained firm friends until Phoebe's death in 1978, with 'Bobby' being forever grateful for the help she gave him in the early days of his career.



Lilian Fletcher

1903 - 1992

In September 1914, Orange's Leader newspaper carried an intriguing headline which read 'Wagga Lady Robbed by Wolves!' The brief article recounted the tale of a 'most trying episode' experienced by Miss Shaw of Wagga, a nursing missionary with the Inland China Mission, who encountered a Chinese bandit and his accomplices whilst travelling to Lancow to take up a nursing position at the hospital there. While the bandits didn't take any of Miss Shaw's belongings, they greatly inconvenienced her by taking the 'chair bearers and coolies' who were engaged to carry herself and her luggage to her destination!

Asked if she would return to China, Miss Fletcher was emphatic in her affirmative reply. At the expiration of her furlough, she will again leave her native land to continue the work which she loves so much.

The Daily Advertiser, 16 October 1940

It was into this country, described by the Rutherglen Sun and Chiltern Valley Advertiser in 1900 as a 'land of heathen darkness' to which young women like Lilian Fletcher willingly travelled during the first half of the 20th century.

Lilian and her twin sister Florence were the youngest children of John George Fletcher and his wife Annie (née Booth), born on 'Gobbagombalin' Station on 17 February 1903. The family moved to 'Walteela' (13km from Wagga) when

Lilian was five. The Fletcher girls undertook their secondary schooling at Wagga High, where they topped their class in 1920 and 1921.¹ It was while a student at Wagga High that Lilian first heard of missionary work in China, through a cousin of the Lyons family of 'Sackville', Forest Hill.

footnote

On leaving school Lilian pursued nursing and left Wagga to take up a position at the Sydney Children's Hospital. Eighteen months after leaving home, Lilian felt the 'call of God to become a missionary' having read the history of the China Inland Mission.

¹ Florence was Fourth Year Dux in 1921, and Lilian was first in history and chemistry. Florence went on to become a teacher.

The China Inland Mission (CIM) was founded by Englishman James Hudson Taylor in 1865. Between 1900 and 1953, several young women from Wagga undertook missionary service with the CIM, including Miss A.J. Pownall, Lizzie Weisner (later Mrs C Best) and the aforementioned Miss Shaw.

In 1932, following a course at the Bible Institute in Melbourne, Lilian left Australia with 14 other women bound for China. Once there, she spent several months training at a language school with young women from 11 different countries.

Lilian, now Sister Fletcher, spent her first four years nursing at the Hospital in Chefoo (now Yantai, Shandong Province). In 1937 she travelled to the interior of China, nursing in a Chinese Mission Hospital at Linfin, Shansi Province. Lilian was there when the Japanese troops arrived two and a half years later and drove 700 refugees into the sanctuary of the church compound. For more than two months, between 200-400 people, including Lilian, slept on the church floor.

After the Japanese took over the Mission Hospital and refuge, the missionaries were forced to leave. The resulting 250-mile (402 km) trek by bicycle and on foot was made even more difficult as the roads had been torn up by the Chinese, who were endeavouring to slow the progress of the Japanese troops. Arriving in the Szechuan (Sichuan) Province, Lilian spent the next 15 months working at the Mission Hospital.

During the peak prewar years there were a thousand members of this mission working throughout 12 Chinese provinces. Many of them remained at their posts during the war, spreading the Gospel, together with education and a knowledge of modern medicine and hygiene...

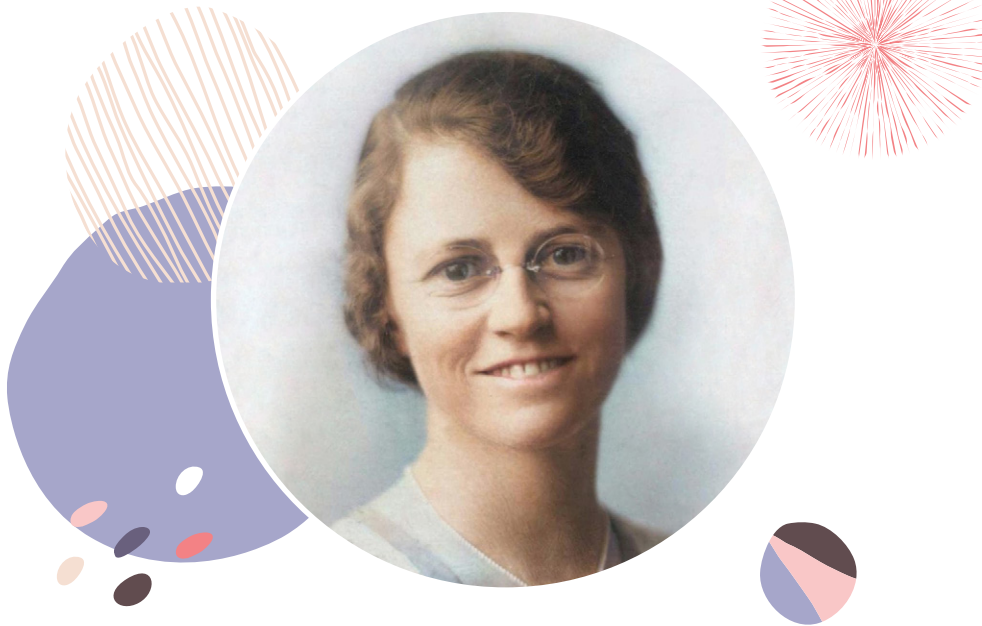
The Sydney Morning Herald, 25 July 1953

With tensions rising in China, in October 1940, Lilian returned to Australia for a year's furlough. Before leaving, she spent 10 days at Chungking, which was bombed by the Japanese while she was there. Back home, Lilian gave numerous talks on her time in China, before travelling back to the East in August 1941.

On 28 June 1942, Lilian, along with 415 Allied nationals who were still resident in Shanghai, reported to the Lincoln Avenue civilian camp, where they were interned under the Japanese. The camp consisted of concrete houses in a compound which had been looted and seriously damaged in 1937. Set on very rough ground with little open space, the camp was surrounded by a wall and electric barbed wire fence. There, Lilian's nursing skills and experience would have been invaluable, as many of the internees were of an advanced age.

After the war, she continued nursing in China. However, following the formation of the People's Liberation Army in April 1949, Lilian was expelled from China. Escaping to Hong Kong, Lilian travelled on to England, where she took up her last professional posting in 1950, becoming Matron of Comford House, Kent, a home for retired missionaries.

Lilian retired in 1975 and returned home to Australia to settle in Baxter, Victoria. With seven of her siblings having pre-deceased her, she no doubt wanted to finish her days near her twin sister. Lilian reached the grand old age of 89 years, dying on 11 December 1992. Her sister, Florence, lived to 101. Today, they both rest in peace, together again, in the Springvale Cemetery, Victoria.



Florence Lunn

1903 - 2004

Born in 1903 Florence Booth Fletcher enjoyed a comfortable childhood, growing up on her family's 3,000-acre property 'Walteela' and attending school in Wagga. Raised a devout Methodist like her twin sister Lilian, she was inspired to leave Australia and take up the mantle of missionary life.

While Lilian served as a nursing missionary in China, Florence found herself in deepest, darkest Africa or as the *Melbourne Herald* of 15 October 1936 described it, the "land of evil spirits."

After graduating from Wagga High, Florence studied at The University of Sydney. There she gained a Bachelor of Arts and afterwards completed a Diploma of Education. Once qualified, Florence began working for the NSW Department

of Education (DET) in 1929, after accepting the position of history teacher at Tumut Inter-High School.

Having visited Fiji, New Britain, Japan and China, Miss Fletcher is a well-informed, well-trained worker, and coming to this congenial sphere in early womanhood we predict for her a happy, successful and long term of service.

The Spectator, 19 July 1939

Two years later in January 1931, Florence left the DET and travelled to England, where she spent two years pursuing further study and gaining teaching experience. On her return to Australia, she resumed teaching, this time at Hawthorn's Methodist Ladies College, where she remained for several years.

In July 1939, Florence was appointed as secretary of the Young Women's Missionary Movement (YWMM) and was interviewed by Melbourne church magazine *The Spectator*, resulting in a feature article appearing on page 573 outlining the 36-year old's achievements to date. Florence didn't know it then, but this article would change the course of her life forever.

Three months later approximately 14,000km away in Abri, at the base of the Nuba Mountains, Sudan¹, missionary Will Lunn² had received this very magazine in the mail. Flicking through its pages, he was immediately drawn to the photo of the accomplished lady featured under the headline 'Miss Florence Fletcher, B.A., Dip. Ed. (Syd. Univ.)' Reading the article, Will was thrilled to discover that Florence was university educated, had travelled the world, was an accomplished speaker³, and most importantly, had a heart for world mission. He then wondered, could she possibly also have a heart for some lucky man somewhere? footnote

A 43-year-old widower with a five-year-old son, if Will was to continue his work at Abri, he needed a wife to work alongside him at the settlement. Furthermore, his son, Norm needed a mother. On paper, Florence seemed ideal. In 1940, Will returned to Australia and sought a meeting with the woman who had captured his attention.

Having mutual friends and acquaintances, it was not long before Will crossed paths with Florence, and quickly fell in love with her. Three years of long-distance courting followed, mostly due to the challenges of geographical distance and upheaval caused by World War II. Florence, disappointed to not have experienced butterflies and a rush of overwhelming love, sought advice from friends who encouraged her to take a leap of faith.

I did not think there was much chance of you not being happy as I watched your faces walking up the aisle together – you both looked radiant enough.

Florence's aunt on her wedding day.

On 31 December 1943 in 40-degree heat (what could be more suitable for missionaries to Sudan?) Will and his bride married in a quiet ceremony in the East Malvern Methodist Church, the bride resplendent in a frock of periwinkle blue sheer over taffeta. Following a honeymoon in the Dandenong Ranges, Mr and Mrs W.J. Lunn travelled to Africa, where they began their life together in Abri.

For Florence, life as a missionary, wife and mother was a dream come true and it wasn't long before she settled into her new life amongst the Nuba people. Intelligent, hardworking, a keen evangelist and sociable, she was also eminently practical, a valuable trait for a western woman living on an isolated Mission station so far from the comforts of her home in Australia.

In her day-to-day life Florence helped run the Mission alongside Will. Together, they were responsible for the physical and spiritual welfare of 25,000 tribespeople. While Will's work demanded many hours spent on the road, helping colleagues on other stations or dealing with administrative matters in El Obeid⁴ or Khartoum, Florence spent her days providing a range of services for the native community from education to health and spiritual guidance.

Immediately after arriving in Abri, Will encouraged Florence to undertake language studies. First, she learned Arabic and then, the local dialect Ngirere. This enabled her to take her turn preaching at the main Sunday services, but more importantly, was essential for communicating with those in her care.

Much to the delight of the Nuba who weren't used to seeing a woman drive, Florence also mastered handling the large truck which was the settlement's main means of transport. This freed Will from many time-consuming tasks including meeting people coming by train, visiting distant villages and even transporting bricks and other supplies.

In addition to teaching at the Mission's school, Florence spent many hours working in the on-site medical clinic, which treated up to 4,000 natives a month. Initially, the Nubas were suspicious of the 'Red People', but as the missionaries continued to demonstrate their willingness to help those in need at the dispensary, more and more patients flocked to Abri. The mission became a haven for those suffering with ailments including malaria, yellow fever, blackwater fever and syphilis. Leprosy treatment was introduced and administered in a separate settlement nearby.

Prior to the intervention of the Sudan United Mission, infant mortality was high



Margaret Read

1903 - 1992

The story of sisters Margaret and Trixie Read begins near the small village of Colac in western Victoria. Margaret, born in 1903, was the eldest of George and Alice Jane Read's five children, followed by William (b. 1904), Alice Ethel Wyn 'Trixie' (b. 1906), Stuart (b. 1909) and Donald (b. 1912).

In 1924, the Read family left Victoria and relocated to NSW, where they settled on the property 'Braehour' at Forest Hill, just 9km east of Wagga. There, the sisters worked alongside their brothers on the farm and enjoyed family activities including picnics, tennis, swimming in the Murrumbidgee and evenings spent socialising with neighbours and friends.

Margaret's contribution to the community as an art teacher has had its rewards. At least two notable Australian artists, Robert Owen and Earle Backen, studied painting with Margaret during their formative years in Wagga.

Elsie Cochrane, Tribute to Margaret Read

Following their mother's death in 1934, 'Braehour' was sold. While their brothers purchased their own properties in NSW and Victoria, Margaret, Trixie and their father moved into Wagga, purchasing 49 Kincaid Street, which became the trio's home for many years. They also purchased a property at Uranquinty, being co-owners with their father and brother William.

During WWII, the sisters joined the Women's Australian National Service (WANS), helping to fill the void in their community left by the men who had enlisted. Training in the mechanics of driving and maintaining trucks, they also worked the farm at Uranquinty until William returned home after the war. On the farm they helped with stockwork and cooking duties during shearing times, skirting fleeces, clearing dams, inoculating livestock, branding sheep and drafting cattle.

Neither Margaret nor Trixie married, and their lives were closely entwined from birth until death. During their senior years as boarders at Fintona Girls' School in Melbourne, each sister discovered diverse interests that gave each of them distinct identities for which they are still remembered today.

I don't think there is a hobby that satisfies people more than painting.

Margaret's foremost passion was art.

She began studying in Sydney during the 1930s, first as a student of The Royal Art Society and then under artist Anthony Datillo Rubbo at his School of Painting. In later years she took every opportunity to hone her abilities, travelling to Melbourne to study at the National Gallery, attending summer schools at Albury, and taking classes under famous artists Sali Herman, Arthur Murch and others who visited Wagga.

Margaret and two friends travelled to the UK in the 1950s, seeking inspiration by visiting many places where famous artists had lived and worked.

In her work, Margaret experimented with watercolours, charcoal, pastel, pencil, pen and ink, but her preferred medium was oils and later, acrylics. In the 1950s she tried her hand at lino-cutting, pottery and leatherworks, but eventually just focussed on painting. By 1977, she had produced hundreds of paintings and drawings, from landscapes to portraits, abstracts to impressionism, contemporary and traditional.

Locally, Margaret was also renowned for designing and painting many of the backdrops for Wagga Wagga School of Arts' productions, most notably, JB Priestley's 'They Came to a City' which was performed for three nights in 1951 as part of the Commonwealth Jubilee Play competition.

During her active years, Margaret sold several of her paintings in Sydney and Melbourne. Her biggest thrill as an artist came when Sali Herman admired one of her paintings in Sydney and bought it. Many more of her artworks were sent overseas, mainly to friends, and even now her paintings can be found adorning the walls of older Wagga homes. Today, the Wagga Wagga Art Gallery holds seven of Margaret's works in its collection.

In addition to being an artist, Margaret also taught art in Wagga. She ran both children's and adult classes at the Wagga Technical College and in later life offered private classes on Thursdays and Saturday afternoons. Many of her students taking private classes were housewives.

When the Wagga Art Society was established in 1949, Margaret was a founding member, and she held the position of president for many years after its inception. Under her guidance, a collection of valuable paintings was purchased using Society funds which formed the beginnings of a permanent collection for the future Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery. Her lifelong dedication to the Wagga arts community was formally recognised by Charles Sturt University, who conferred upon her an Honorary Bachelor of Arts degree.

Margaret died on 13 November 1992 following a short illness, aged 89. She would undoubtedly be proud to know that she is still remembered by the community, especially in the field of art. Her legacy will continue to live on through the Art Gallery's collection.

² His school was very well known in Sydney, with students including Donald Friend and John Olsen. Margaret studied there intermittently for approximately four years.

³ On 1 January 1976 Trixie was awarded a B.E.M, a British Empire Medal (Civil) (Imperial). The BEM is awarded for community service, such as charitable or voluntary work.

⁴ In the early 1940s, Margaret was a Brown Owl (a leader of Brownie Guides).



Trixie Read, BEM³

1906 – 2002

Throughout her life, Alice Ethel Wyn Read was known simply as ‘Trixie.’ It was the nickname given to three-year-old Trixie by her father, because she was always playing tricks.

Like her elder sister, Trixie was a talented artist. Her keen eye and well-honed powers of observation are evident in her artworks, whether in her skillful capture of the fine details of the birds, lizards and insects she encountered, or her renderings of the beauty of the shifting colours of the landscape stretched before her.

Possibly it is her tireless work with people less well off than the average, and her lovable personality, which have captured the hearts of her fellow townspeople.

The Land, 10 May 1977

However, while art became an almost all-consuming passion of Margaret's, for the most part, Trixie gravitated more towards an involvement in community service, welfare projects and Guiding.

Trixie first joined Girl Guides Australia in 1922 and it was an organisation that remained close to her heart for the remainder of her life. Both sisters were instrumental in ensuring the success of guiding in Wagga .

As a Guide, Trixie organised fundraising events and attended numerous functions.

By 1938, Trixie had become Captain of the 1st Wagga Girl Guide Company and devoted a great deal of her leisure time to the movement. In this role, she represented the Guides and Brownies at annual Scout Jamborees held in various locations throughout NSW.

In 1952 she became District Commissioner for Wagga, a rank she held until her retirement in June 1962. Having given 40 years' service to the Girl Guides, Trixie joined the Trefoil Guild, an association of ex-guides which raised funds to help the guiding movement.

Throughout her life, and well into her nineties, Trixie was an outstanding and energetic community worker. She was involved with so many local organisations, Margaret once quipped that she couldn't keep up with all the committees her sister was on!

The best time of my life is now – because I have reached the stage where I have a little bit of wisdom. I live more for each day as it comes.

Over the years, Trixie volunteered with groups including (but not limited to) Meals on Wheels, Alcoholics Anonymous, Relationships Australia, the Wagga Wagga Marriage and Personal Counselling Service and Kurrajong Waratah. She was a committee member of the Women's Refuge in the 1970s and a community advisor on Wagga City Council's Community Development Committee. In 1968, she co-founded the Wagga Community Action Group to help locals suffering with mental illness. The aim of this group was to support those in need, providing them with referrals and information when required.

1975 was International Women's Year and fittingly, Trixie was officially recognised that year for her outstanding service to the Wagga community by being named Wagga Wagga Woman of the Year. It was in this role that on Saturday 7 June 1975, 69-year-old Trixie, resplendent on a white horse rode onto the Eunony Bridge in front of assembled crowds of onlookers and dignitaries. Without dismounting, she cut the ribbon stretched across the thoroughfare and officially declared the Bridge open to traffic.

Four years later, in March 1979, Trixie was once again given the honour of officially opening another community asset when, alongside Mayor Hedditch and the regional Director of Health, she cut the ribbon on a new maternal and childcare centre on Coleman Street. Created to provide speech therapy, hearing test services, play therapy, group work programs and professional advice for expectant mothers, her involvement with this centre was just another indication of Trixie's passion for facilities which supported women's health and wellbeing.

On 1 January 1976, Trixie's contribution to her community was recognised internationally when she was awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM). Presented locally, the BEM is conferred upon an individual who has excelled in providing a very 'hands-on' service to the community in a local geographical area.

It is a testament to Trixie's wonderful understanding and broad appreciation of people that following Margaret's death in 1992, she took on a succession of boarders in her home, comprising overseas university students from countries including Hong Kong, South Korea, Kenya and Botswana. These students in turn brought their friends around to meet their beloved landlady. As a result, for her new young friends, Trixie's home became a joyful cosmopolitan gathering place on many occasions.

This wonderful lady with her broad beaming smile died on 11 November 2002 at the advanced age of 96. Today she rests with her family, reunited once again, in the Presbyterian section of the Wagga Wagga Monumental Cemetery.

The old adage 'only the good die young' is definitely disproven in the case of Trixie Read.

In 1998, Wagga Wagga City Council created the 'Wagga Walk of Honour', stretching along Baylis Street between Morrow and Edward Streets. Forming part of the Council's Australia Day Awards, it confirms the Council's belief in the importance of recognising those members of the community who have given so much of themselves to the city. In 1999, a plaque was laid to honour Margaret and Trixie, to cement the legacy of these sisters and ensure their memory endures for generations to come.



Perdita McCarthy, GBE RRC & Bar

1916 – 2012

If Australia ever had its own version of Florence Nightingale, her name was Ditta McCarthy.

Born on 21 May 1916 in Wagga, Perdita Marjorie McCarthy, known simply as 'Ditta', was the daughter of businessman Charles McCarthy and his wife Kathleen (née Molloy).

After schooling at St. Clare's College, Waverley, and Rosebank College in Five Dock, Ditta enrolled in nursing at Sydney Hospital on Macquarie Street. Following the completion of her initial training in March 1939, she went on to train in obstetrics at the Crown Street Women's Hospital.

However, as World War II raged on, Ditta desperately wanted to use her nursing skills where they were most needed, overseas where the fighting was taking place. She enlisted with the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS)¹, one of approximately [footnote](#) 4,000 women who served in this capacity during the war.

***All we wanted to do
was to nurse and care
for our wounded.***

Her first postings were to hospitals in Australia, to care for soldiers wounded in Timor. When Papua New Guinea (PNG) was deemed safe enough for nurses, Ditta was transferred to Aitape (northern PNG), mostly treating troops suffering from tropical diseases including scrub typhus and malaria, but also gunshot wounds.

Post-WWII, Ditta served on the MV 'Duntroon', making two voyages to Japan, before being posted to Kure, Japan in 1951 to take up duties with the British Commonwealth General Hospital. Two years later, she

¹ The AANS later became the Royal Australian Army Nursing Service (RAANS) and then the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps (RAANC).

was seconded to the British Commonwealth Communications Zone Medical Unit (BCZMU) in Seoul, South Korea.

It was during this posting in South Korea that Ditta's commitment to her army career and dedication to her patients was most evident. The nurses not only had to deal with primitive conditions, but also initial opposition and resentment in an environment perceived as a male domain. All problems were eventually resolved, and the women slowly became accepted as an integral part of the 'team.'

My God we worked hard!

Operating within a derelict two-storey school on the outskirts of Seoul, just 48 km from the front line, the conditions were extremely challenging. With winter temperatures typically dropping to minus 15 degrees Celsius, the building had no running water or sewerage system, barely any electricity, and a continuous flow of patients. Night rounds were carried out by candlelight. It was back to basics nursing.

Of the experience, Ditta wrote:

The real horrors of the Korean War were "brought home" to me when I was allocated for duty in the Burns Ward. Many were bandaged from head to foot, with only slits for their eyes and mouths, and obviously in great pain, which we attempted to alleviate with what "pain killers" were available at the time... the stench from putrefying flesh was overpowering, the memory of which remains with me to this day.

italics

For her services in Korea, in 1954, Ditta was awarded the Associate Royal Red Cross. After Korea, Ditta served in both Malaya and Vietnam (1971), the latter, as Colonel and Director of the RAANC. Her final appointment was as matron-in-chief to army headquarters in Melbourne, a position which also gave her the station of Honorary Nursing Sister to the Queen.

A remarkable lady, with an indomitable spirit and a wonderful sense of humour.

Robyn Siers, 2012

On her retirement in 1972, Ditta was awarded the Royal Red Cross (RRC) for her dedication to nursing. Three years later, she became Honorary Colonel of the Nursing Army Corps, eventually attaining the rank of Brigadier, the first armed services nurse to do so.

In retirement, Ditta was not idle. She co-founded the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps Association and worked as a volunteer at the Army Museum in Sydney's Victoria Barracks. She also penned several biographies of nursing colleagues and predecessors.

Ditta passed away in her sleep on 10 March 2012, having reached the grand old age of 96 years. In the end, with 31 years of continuous and exemplary service in the army, she could rest well knowing that she inspired many young women to follow in her footsteps.



Evadne Fenn Lusher

1918 - 1987

One can't help but wonder, given her academic achievements, what Evadne thought of this snippet that was published in the Lithgow Mercury in the Just for Today column, written by 'Bystander'. For, in an era where a woman's worth was all too often measured by how well she kept her home and raised her children, Evadne was in an enviable position that allowed her to tread her own path, regardless of society's opinion.

Born in Sydney at the end of World War I, Evadne Jean Fenn Lusher was the eldest daughter of solicitor Edwin Fenn Lusher and his wife Jean (née Laing).

The family settled in Wagga in 1926 when Edwin went into partnership with Charles Throsby Young and Frederick Charles Stellway, establishing the firm Lusher, Young and Stellway Solicitors on Fitzmaurice Street.

In addition to being academically gifted, Evadne was a skilled writer. As a teenager, she entered stories and poems into the annual Wagga Eisteddfod. In 1931 (aged 13), she had three winning entries, The Grey Kangaroo (Winning Short Story under 18), The Valley (Original Poem under 18) and Tippity's Atonement (Winning Fairy Story for Children). All were reproduced in the Christmas Day edition of the Daily Advertiser. The following year, she entered a more serious piece, an essay titled Influence of a Good Citizen, which again took first prize at the Eisteddfod. Writing was something that Evadne would continue with great success throughout her life.

Mr. H. Hamlyn-Harris took to wife no ordinary lass when he wed Miss Evadne Fenn Lusher. Hailing from Wagga, she is a solicitor, an M.A. of Sydney Uni., an M.Litt. of Cambridge Uni., and a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain. With all these scholastic distinctions Evadne should be able to hold her own in any domestic argument that may develop.

But can she cook?

Lithgow Mercury, 25 January 1952

On leaving school, Evadne enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts at Sydney University. As an undergraduate, she was twice awarded the Albert Prize for Anthropology, in 1939 and 1940. Following graduation in 1941 she became an Articled Clerk at her father's firm. Passing her final law exam in November 1943, she was admitted as a solicitor of the Supreme Court of NSW on 28 July 1944.

While practicing with Lusher, Young and Stellway, Evadne continued with further studies at Sydney University and presented her thesis A Sociological Survey of Wagga in 1945, for which she was conferred with a Master of Arts (Anthropology).

Miss Fenn Lusher is a very promising young writer, her work being very highly praised by the adjudicator in the recent Wagga Eisteddfod.

Sunday Sun, 15 December 1935

Evadne's anthropological studies continued in 1948 when she set sail for England and the hallowed halls of Cambridge University.

Like her father, Evadne had a long association with the School of Arts and played an active role in the Dramatic Society and Music Club. She was a foundation member of the Wagga School of Arts Players (1942) and they staged several of her one act plays.

In her spare time (!) Evadne continued to write for pleasure. Her most substantial written piece (and one of her last) was They Founded a City. The culmination of Evadne's love of history, her anthropological talents and her script writing skills, it was divided into four time periods representing 1788, 1829, 1843 and 1851, and depicted pertinent phases in the history of Wagga and the Church of England.

The play was staged for three performances at the Wonderland Theatre in November 1951 to coincide with the Wagga Anglican Church's centenary celebrations.

When interviewed by the Daily Advertiser on 16 November 1951, Evadne was asked about her future, to which she replied that she had hoped to go to America to continue her studies, but has now dismissed the ambition because, as she put it, "I became engaged."

On 5 January 1952 Evadne married Hugh Hamlyn-Harris at St. James' Church, Sydney. The couple made their home in Melbourne and together, they had three sons - Andrew, Michael and James. Evadne remained a principal of her father's firm until 1 December 1957.

Miss Lusher has a wealth of knowledge relating to Wagga's early history and has written countless plays ever since she has been able to write.

The Daily Advertiser, 16 November 1951



Gwen Thomas

1918 - 2008

Gwen Thomas had a special way with animals, especially horses.

The first horse she rode (aged three) was an old pony called Robin, a resident of the irrigation farm in Victoria's Tennyson district where Gwen's earliest memories were made. Robin was the first in a long line of horses that Gwen would love throughout her life.

At the age of six, Gwen moved to Wagga with her family, settling at 'Wynyard Park' (Alfredtown), a mixed farm with free range chickens, dairy cattle, fat lambs, pigs (for bacon) a Dorset Horn stud and crops including wheat, oats, barley and lucerne.

With the family farm being a five mile (eight kilometre) cross country ride away from the children's school at Forest Hill, Gwen and her siblings - Harry, Jenny and Stan [dash should be here](#) were each given their own pony as transport. Gwen travelled five days a week to school and home on her pony Midgee in all weather, including dust, storms, rain, frost and heatwaves.

As Gwen became an experienced rider, she started riding larger horses, including Patches, a flighty piebald pony belonging to a neighbour and Rocket, a lazy grey who only lived up to his name on one occasion when he was stung by bees!

Whilst at 'Wynyard Park', Gwen took on several young horses which she broke in to be ridden, thinking it would be a nice hobby. However, she worried too much when it came to their being sold and what sort of home they would go to, so horse-breaking wasn't a long-lived pursuit. Besides, she was kept too busy on the farm, where she loved working with the family's big draught horses.

By the start of World War II, Gwen had become a full-time farm hand. During the war, with many male farm workers enlisting, it was not unusual for women to take on their jobs. Gwen, and her mother Mary worked long hours, especially during the

harvesting and haymaking season. By this time, all Gwen's siblings had left home. Feeling lonely, she started spending more time with her horse Scandal and discovered she had a knack for teaching him tricks.

With fundraising an essential part of the war effort, Gwen and Scandal became a popular attraction at events throughout the district. In August 1941, the Daily Advertiser reported on the Kyeamba Shire Gymkhana held at the Wagga Airport. Gwen's performance with Scandal received a special mention under the headline 'Clever Performing Pony.' The crowds were notably appreciative of the lengthy list of tricks executed and were rapturous in their applause when Scandal not only goosestepped like a German soldier, but steadfastly refused to move when he was told to go to 'Germany' and 'Italy', yet proudly pranced forward to 'England.'

The duo became well-known and highly praised for their performances which continued, to the delight of Riverina audiences, for the duration of the war.

Following the sale of 'Wynyard Park' in 1946, Gwen stayed on in Wagga for a time, where she worked at the Dunlop Weatherproof Factory, making gaberdine trench coats. When her parents moved to Eurobin, Victoria, Gwen's love of the outdoors led her to reunite with them, on their dairy farm. From her new home, Gwen successfully participated at the Porepunkah Show with her next horse, Dandy.

After Eurobin, Gwen moved to Kenthurst (near Sydney), when her parents purchased a mixed farm growing citrus and passionfruit and running free-range chickens. Her horse there was Pinto Pete.

Apparently, I didn't like walking when I could ride. Even when I was bringing the herd in for milking, I'd hop on the back of a special friendly cow and ride her with the herd.

Gwen always had a love of horses – Blaze was the farm horse and Scandal she taught to do tricks. She even tried her hand at training some chooks and a rooster!.

Dell Bungay, niece, 2008

no fullstop

In the 1950s, Gwen's parents moved once again, this time to North Haven near Port Macquarie, which became their final hometown. There, Gwen bought a taxicab and successfully started her own business, which she operated for many years.

Even though Gwen owned no more horses in her later life, after marrying in 1963, she adopted a black Labrador, Bindi, who became her constant

companion. Through great patience and perseverance, Gwen even trained her new friend to perform various tricks, to the great delight of visitors to her home. No doubt, Bindi brought back many happy memories of Gwen's former equine friends from the halcyon days of her youth.



Maisie Hartwig

1919 - 2009

Mavis 'Maisie' Hartwig was a country girl.

Born and raised at Scone in the Hunter Valley, she grew up on her family's dairy farm on the banks of the Hunter River. From an early age she was no stranger to hard work. In addition to helping on the farm Maisie also learned how to cook, clean, sew and do all the domestic chores required to successfully run a household. It was an upbringing that would hold her in good stead throughout her life.

After graduating from high school, having gained her Intermediate Certificate and First Aid certification, Maisie moved to Sydney and started a career in nursing at Gladesville Mental Hospital. She would have loved to join the police force, but female police officers were a rarity at the time, with only a few employed to bolster the forces during World War II. Instead of a career in law enforcement, Maisie pursued employment in psychiatric nursing, an equally challenging career, but one that she loved.

Following several years at Gladesville, Maisie transferred to the Parramatta Hospital and it was there that her life changed one cold rainy night in 1942. While going out for a hamburger, Maisie and her friend Peg ran into two soldiers on the street who were making the most of their final leave before being posted overseas. One of the soldiers was Walter Albert 'Lou' Hartwig and for both Maisie and Lou it was love at first sight.

I've had no regrets since the day I was born.

Three weeks on from the day they met, on 31 July 1942, Maisie and Lou married. They would spend the next 66 years together, 40 of those on a soldier settlement block at Wantabadgery East on the outskirts of Wagga.

Maisie's first home as a wife was a corrugated iron shed with dirt floors built by Lou and his brother - which measured 6m x 9m, of which 3m x 6m were their living quarters. Maisie was the first woman to settle on the Wantabadgery East Estate.

The couple's living quarters incorporated kitchen, dining, lounge and bedroom. Maisie made it a home, furnishing the space with the couple's modest worldly possessions, a double bed, wardrobe, table, four chairs, two bags of wheat - each covered with a crochet rug - as a lounge, a stove and a kerosene trolley lamp. Maisie spread wheat bags on the floor, which she kept neat by wetting before sweeping.

There was no electricity, running water or sewerage. For their toilet, Lou cut a doorway into old tank found on the property and to this, Maisie attached a flap sewn from bags which provided some privacy for the user. On cold nights, the couple kept warm by rugging up in their military-issue overcoats, as they listened to serials on the radio.

Two and a half years after moving onto 'Coombe-Martin', Lou and Maisie began the arduous process of hand making the bricks for their new home, which was built in 1951. Maisie's upbringing had prepared her for married life, as in addition to her domestic chores, she helped Lou with outside jobs including eliminating rabbits, drenching sheep and raking up hay. She was also responsible for the care of her poddies (calves and lambs), chooks and some turkeys. Maisie was incredibly proud of the extra money she brought into the household by selling eggs and butter, mostly to the hotels in Junee. It was with that money that she furnished their new home.

It was very hard work but very rewarding and I loved every moment of it. You were doing something for somebody who could not really help themselves.

At the end of the working day Maisie would sit up until 11 o'clock at night, sewing and embroidering by the light of her lantern. She exhibited her work and produce grown on the property at district shows - flowers, preserves, jams and pickles, usually making approximately 200 bottles at a time.

On 'Coombe Martin', Maisie and Lou raised their two children, Tim (b. 1951) and Julie (b. 1959). Maisie would have loved to return to nursing, but it wasn't possible with so much farm work to do, and no money to hire help.

In 1987, 40 years after joining the soldier settler community, Lou and Maisie retired and turned the farm over to their son. After moving to their new home at 10 Bavaria Street, Tolland, Maisie returned to hospital work, becoming a volunteer Pink Lady at Wagga Base Hospital.

In retirement, Maisie and Lou enjoyed 21 years together until Lou's passing in 2008. In his obituary, Lou had written 'I have the greatest helpmate anyone can ever have. I and the kids owe so much to my beloved wife.' Maisie, a remarkably resilient, hardworking woman, who had trusted her instincts from the age of 22, joined her husband less than a year later, and today, her story stands as a **testament** to all the **tribute** wives of soldier settlers who gave so much and asked for so little in return.



Nancy Jenkins

1922 - 2009

Many Riverina residents in the latter half of the 20th century would know the name Nancy Jenkins. A renowned seamstress, Nancy used to say she “dressed the brides of Wagga for 50 years.” And that’s no exaggeration. From the 1940s through to her death in 2009, Nancy produced thousands of wedding dresses. So much so that it is not uncommon to hear women say even today, “Nancy made my dress.”

Born 24 February 1922 in Wagga, Nancy was the eldest of Bertie ‘Dick’ and Marjorie Nixon’s five children. [new paragraph](#)

A talented sewer from a young age, she came from a long line of women who were skilled in needlework.

After attending Gurwood Street Public School and Wagga High, young Nancy was awarded a scholarship to study fashion at East Sydney Tech (now the National Art School). Unfortunately, this academic opportunity was upset by World War II and following the Japanese submarine attack on Sydney Harbour in May 1942, Nancy’s father called her home to Wagga.

Nancy worked from home and did a lot of hand sewing at night, often working into the wee small hours.

Luckily, this didn’t hold her back.

On returning to Wagga, Nancy ran her own business on Fitzmaurice Street in Wagga’s CBD where she employed up to four girls. Later, she moved her business to the building which still stands on the corner of Urana and Bourke Streets today.

Two of her employees there became her bridesmaids when she married Reg Jenkins in 1953.

Husband Reg was very supportive of his wife’s work even as their family grew. In 1965, the family of six (now including four children – Richard, Greg, Megan and

Merrilee) moved to a new home in Wooden Street. There, Reg and his brothers built a room in the garden especially for Nancy's business. The family called it 'the sewing room'.

With an innate talent for both sewing and clothing design, Nancy could sketch an outfit, make changes if desired, cut her own pattern, and create the garment. She could make anything, but her true love lay with evening and bridal wear. As a result, during these years, an endless procession of glamorous ladies would visit Nancy, and her family became used to her sitting in front of the TV every evening, hand stitching millions of beads on flowing gowns.

Nancy drew the inspiration for her gowns from magazines and everything around her. A wonderful example dates to 1973, when, inspired by the design of Sydney's new Opera House, Nancy created her 'Opera House' dress. This simple white gown was paired with a bold cape that perfectly mimicked the white sails of the iconic harbour building. It was modelled at the Albury Gown of the Year by Mrs Patricia Clarke.

Nancy was also inspired by fellow-designers she admired, like Carla Zampatti. Later, John Claringbold had a huge influence on her and they became good friends.

In addition to her sewing accomplishments, in 1973, Nancy also co-founded the Wagga's Golden Gown Awards alongside Pat Clark, Val Samuelson and Lurline Mowsar. The ladies formed the first committee, and Nancy remained an active committee member for the following 25 years.

The Golden Gown Award first presented in 1974 was established to promote Wagga in fashion, the use of the city's resources, the use of wool in fashion, to encourage design and dressmaking, and to provide an outlet for local and overseas talent. In 1976, 600 guests attended the 'glittering evening' event, with Sonia McMahon as the guest of honour, presenting the \$1000 prize. By 1998 the prize money had grown to almost \$25,000. The Golden Gowns ceased to operate in 2003, ending a highly successful and memorable 30-year (run throughout the region) fashion extravaganza.

Thrifty Nancy was a rare gem.

Daily Advertiser, 2009

Today, Nancy continues to be remembered throughout Wagga and the district. Her children still talk about some of her more memorable creations, especially the fancy dress costumes she used to make. Beyond her family, Nancy's memory lives on through her handmade garments that still hang in wardrobes or are carefully packed away in boxes in homes throughout the state. She would no doubt be delighted to know that most of these treasured pieces of clothing are wedding dresses.



Daphne Oriel Begg

1922 - 2015

Daphne Oriel was so tiny when she was born, her father called her 'Hec the Spec', and for the rest of his life, referred to her affectionately as his 'Hec.' Born at Lockhart in 1922, Oriel was the eldest child of Willie Haberecht and Ivy (née Holloway).

What Oriel lacked in physicality, she more than made up for in personality. A well-known figure around Wagga, this woman with a wide smile and twinkle in her eye became known by family and friends far and wide simply as 'Granny.'

Young Oriel had great dreams, wanting to become a doctor.

At 16 years old, her future looked promising. In October 1938, she was one of just 22 debutantes presented to the State Governor, His Excellency Lord Wakehurst at a Vice-regal ball held in Wagga's Kyeamba Smith Hall. Resplendent in a gown of shadowed French soiree, Oriel must have thrilled to the scene of 900 attendees dancing in a ballroom festooned with flowers, a huge crepe paper Union Jack and glittering golden crowns.

Sadly, after completing her Intermediate Certificate at Wagga High School, Oriel had to abandon her hopes for further education, as war loomed on the horizon.

World War II was a busy time for young Oriel. She supported her mother in fundraising enterprises for the Red Cross, CWA and Hospital Ladies Auxiliary. A talented teen, Oriel danced, sang and played the bass guitar as part of a group.

She was also a great help to her father. With a shortage of male staff during World War II, Oriel joined him in his cordial business, AVOR Quality Products. There, she became her father's 'right hand', learning all facets of running the business, from bookkeeping to operating the machinery. Demand for their products was great. Over the Christmas-New Year period in 1939-40, the pair worked for eight days and nights with little or no sleep, ensuring the usual supply of their iconic Ginger Beer was available to stores throughout the Riverina.

In 1942, Oriel married businessman Robert Begg. Two years later, when he was elected Mayor of Junee, she made history as the youngest Mayoress in Australia, being just 21 years old. The following year, Oriel and Bob welcomed their first child, John, born in Junee on 8 April. Five more children followed – Maree (b. 1945), Bobbie (b. 1951), Vicki (b. 1954), Laurie (b. 1956) and Ian (b. 1965).

Alongside raising her family, Oriel was active within the community. In 1948-49 she became the first female in Australia to co-pilot a Tiger Moth aeroplane. In 1951, when the Begg family relocated to Lennox Head, NSW, Oriel became a local reporter with Lismore's Northern Star newspaper and local radio station 2LM. With her husband Bob president of the Lennox Head Progress Association, Oriel held the offices of secretary/treasurer.

Oriel was a larger-than-life lady with a contagious laugh and a thirst for community spirit. She always looked on the bright side of life and counted her blessings for everything – even in times of hardships.

Daryl Maguire, 2015

Oriel and her family returned to Wagga in 1965 where she resumed working with her father at AVOR. The business closed in 1967 but Oriel still had plenty of activities to fill her time. She was involved with the Boy Scouts, the Wagga Historical Museum, Kurrajong Waratah and community radio station 2AAA-FM. One of her proudest achievements was her involvement with Wagga's Foxtrot Dance Studio, where she earned the nickname 'Granny Foxtrot' due to her unwavering support. Until the day she died, Oriel proudly (and prominently) wore her little gold badge showing the lifetime membership that had been bestowed upon her.

It is said that 'those who are remembered never die.' If that is the case, Granny Begg will be immortal in the minds of all who knew her.





Helen Buchanan

1930 - 2021

Helen Buchanan was a force of nature.

The eldest of seven, she had an idyllic childhood. With her father Norman McRae working on the railways, the McRae's lived a transitory lifestyle until Helen began secondary school. Between 1930 and 1941 the family resided in Emmaville, Maitland, Malabar, Narrabri, Nyngan, Junee and Armidale.

Helen always wanted to become a teacher. She enjoyed school, particularly St. Ursula's in Armidale, where the nuns were ahead of their time regarding the

education of women. It is possible that it was there that Helen found the role models that would shape her own teaching career.

I am one of the few people I know who has been fortunate enough to fulfill her wish-list – bike riding around China, visiting Russia and climbing Machu Picchu.

Helen graduated from Armidale Teachers' College in 1951, and moved to Wagga in January 1970. While husband Donald took up the position of Assistant Director of the Riverina, NSW Department of Education, Helen became Sports Mistress at Wagga High School.

With a long-standing interest in fitness and enjoying a variety of sports in her spare time, Helen was an ideal physical education (PE) teacher. Popular with students, she became known affectionately as 'Mrs B' by those at Wagga High.

But Helen was more than a PE teacher. After identifying a need in the personal development of the school's adolescents, Helen was instrumental in pioneering sex education workshops.

With the school providing the perfect safe and nurturing environment for these classes, and following exhaustive parent consultation, Helen introduced and taught the subject at Wagga High. Later, she was seconded to other schools throughout the Riverina as a consultant.

Helen also had extensive input in the state's Personal Development, Health and PE curriculum.

In 1985, a year after her husband's death, Helen retired from teaching. Her retirement dinner was attended by many students, teachers and community members.

Retirement did not make Helen idle. With no obligations at home, she divided her time between travelling, collecting antiques and volunteering. Between overseas adventures, Helen became involved with community groups including Legacy, Meals on Wheels, the Wagga Country Club, Wagga Antiques Society, ADFAS and Friends of Stewart House. Her contribution to Wagga was recognised in 2007 when Helen was awarded Citizen of the Year.

Antiques were a particular passion that Helen enjoyed when she wasn't travelling. While Donald had been a minimalist, after his death, Helen's collecting exploded, and her house was filled with second-hand treasures.

Take the cards you've been dealt, make the most of it, and live your best life!

A 'find' at an auction of a brown Lithgow jelly mould in a box won for \$5, started Helen's obsession with Australian pottery, especially Lithgow Pottery. Over the years, she attended many auctions and sales, acquiring an impressive collection. After her death, much of Helen's historically significant collection was donated to the National Museum of Australian Pottery in Holbrook.

On 20 December 2019, Helen made the local news, when she made her last delivery for Meals on Wheels. It was a significant feat. Helen had not only been volunteering there for 35 years, at 89, she was also older than some of the service's recipients!

It was one of the final acts of the free-spirited, tenacious woman who gave so much to Wagga, the home she loved. Helen passed away on 20 January 2021 having reached the grand age of 90 years. In her wake, she not only left a lot of strong-minded individuals, but inculcated in them a love of travel, gardening, the arts, giving back and books!





Sheila Quee

1931 - 2015

Between 1945 and 1982, more than one million Britons, known colloquially as 'Ten Pound Poms', migrated to Australia under the Assisted Passage Migration Scheme.

Among them was Sheila Brodrick who, in 1955, stepped aboard the MV 'Georgic' ready to begin a new life Down Under.

Born in Cowley in the County of Middlesex, England, Sheila was the eldest of Alfred 'Basil' and Bobbie (née Axtell)'s four children. Like many children growing up with the hardships of the Great Depression and World War II, young Sheila learned resilience and resourcefulness, both traits that would serve her well throughout life.

Upon completing her education, Sheila tried several jobs before finding one that she loved, becoming a ledger machinist, a job she continued for the next 40 years until her retirement.

I arrived in Melbourne with £10, no job and much ignorance as to the conditions here.

After turning 21, Sheila was ready for an adventure. When one of her girlfriends suggested they apply for immigration to Australia under the government's Ten Pound Pom scheme, Sheila readily agreed. She was supported by her parents who saw it as a great opportunity for their daughter to spread her wings.

It took Sheila nearly two years to pass the interviews, medical examinations, and to collect all of the necessary documentation (for example: work and personal references). This period allowed Sheila to save up funds for the journey ahead - her £10 fare, £10 to spend on the ship and another £10 for any contingencies that may have arisen upon her arrival in Melbourne.

When her girlfriend reneged on their pact at the last minute, Sheila made the trip to Australia alone. It was a brave undertaking for a young lady.

Sheila left Liverpool with approximately 1,500 fellow migrants. The voyage took five weeks, with stopovers at the Canary Islands, Cape Town and Fremantle, WA. She shared a small cabin with nine other girls. Located three decks down and with no portholes, it was very dark, hot and stuffy.

In 1955, migrants to Australia were required to have a sponsor who would guarantee them bed and board until they found their own job and accommodation. Sheila's sponsors – Daphne and John Leece, whom she had known in England – made her feel very welcome, and she settled in quickly. Being a skilled ledger machinist, Sheila found it easy to gain temporary work in her new home.

Not long after arriving in Australia, Sheila and two girls she had befriended on the voyage out – sisters Pat and Vera Harris – decided to hitchhike around the country on a working holiday. Together, the trio travelled to Adelaide, Alice Springs, Darwin, Mount Isa, Cairns, Townsville and Brisbane. Their transport varied from tow-trucks and prime movers to semi-trailers, a coach and even a railway trolley called a Casey Jones.

When the day came for me to go to Liverpool to board the ship, I almost didn't go. I don't know why really, maybe it was the fear of the unknown...

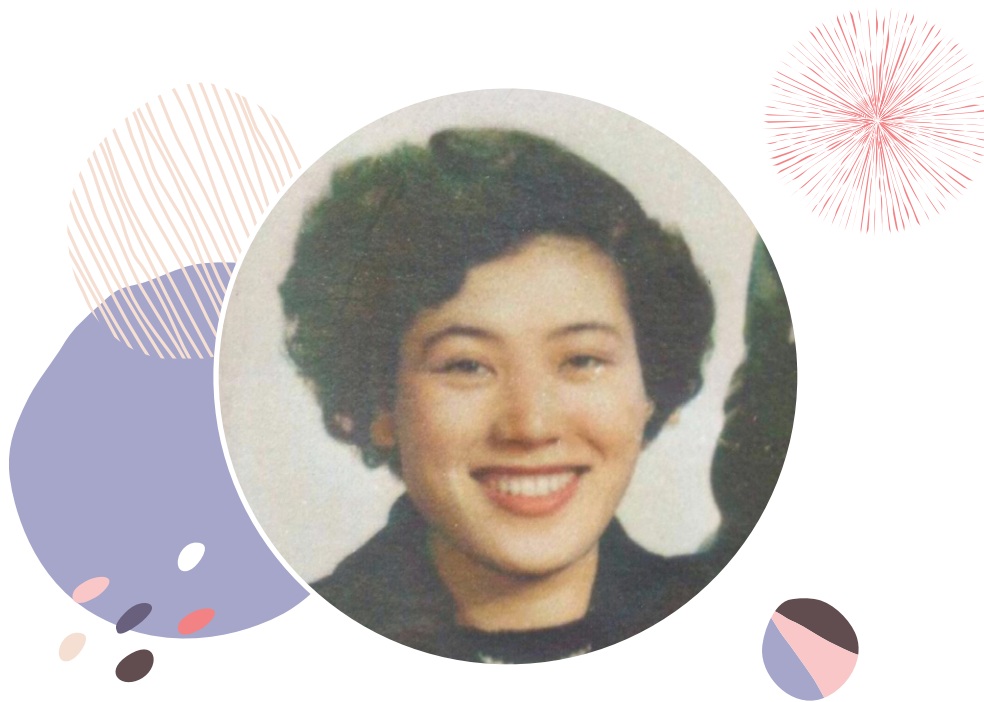
The girls settled in Darwin in 1956 and Sheila found employment with the Commonwealth Department of Works. Two years later Sheila sponsored her family's migration to Australia. She found them a home, furnished it, teed up employment for her parents, brother and sister, and enrolled her younger sister in school. Quite an undertaking for a 27-year-old!

In Darwin, Sheila met her future husband, Sergeant Jack Quee, who was stationed there with the RAAF. When Jack received a posting to Wagga in 1960, Sheila missed him terribly and ended up following him there two years later.

The 1960s were a momentous decade for Sheila. On 28 June 1961 she became an Australian citizen and a year later, she married the love of her life. After one more posting back to Darwin, Sheila and Jack returned to Wagga for good in 1966 and welcomed two sons, Robert and Peter shortly afterwards.

Sheila's life in Wagga was complete when, in the aftermath of Cyclone Tracy, Bobbie and Basil also moved to Wagga to be close to their new grandsons. Bobbie and Sheila enjoyed a strong mother-daughter bond in their new home and all former 'Ten Pound Poms' became very happy Australians, taking out citizenship as soon as they were able.

Sheila passed away in September 2015, just six months after her adored husband. They are buried together in Wagga's Lawn Cemetery, reunited once again near Sheila's beloved parents.



Mitsue Stockley

1932 - 2020

Between 1952 and 1965, over 650 Japanese women migrated to Australia as the wives and fiancées of Australian servicemen. These war brides often faced prejudice, hostility, distrust and racism in many communities throughout Australia, which still nursed a strong belief that Japan was the enemy.

The first Japanese war bride to settle in Australia was Nobuko 'Cherry' Parker in 1952, and in January 1953, Sasayo Cooke became Wagga's first Japanese resident. A year later, Mitsue Stockley followed, having married Australian serviceman Roy Stockley eight months prior.

Born in Kure, on the outskirts of Hiroshima, Mitsue was the youngest of four siblings. Alongside her brother and two sisters, she was raised by her grandparents from the age of two, following the death of her father, which forced her mother's return to work to support her family.

Mitsue, whose name means 'sunshine' in Japanese, was a happy child. This was reflected in her outgoing and lively personality, which was at odds with the traditional Japanese culture of the era, where girls were expected to be quietly spoken. It was a trait that would be advantageous for her during the difficult and lonely years after first moving to Wagga.

***Still, I can see Mum
saying goodbye to me.***

A tragic turning point in Mitsue's life occurred when she was 11 years old. At 8.15 a.m. on 6 August 1945 the atomic bomb nicknamed Little Boy was dropped on Hiroshima and the city of her childhood became an unrecognisable landscape of pain, suffering and untold hardship. In the blast,

Mitsue lost many friends, cousins and her uncle and aunt - a small percentage of the 100,000 that were killed that day. Her eldest sister Toshie, who was on her way to work, was killed instantly in the blast.

Throughout her life, Mitsue had recurring nightmares of Hiroshima. From Wagga, she returned four times to visit her childhood home, but painful emotions were always close to the surface during those trips.

After marrying Roy in 1954 Mitsue, and 11 other Japanese brides, travelled to Sydney aboard the MV 'Taiyuan', on a four-week voyage.

Prior to her arrival, Roy warned Mitsue that she may encounter racial hatred on the streets of Wagga. But she was not prepared for the anti-Japanese sentiment in the streets - the staring, verbal abuse and even hate mail that she received in the early years of her life in Australia.

Bearing no grudges from the war herself, this treatment made Mitsue more determined to throw herself into community work and become an accepted and valued resident in her new home.

And she did exactly that.

Mitsue's first job was working in the kitchens at Calvary Hospital, an environment which greatly helped her master the English language. After leaving to have her two sons, Wayne (b. 1957) and Jeffrey (b. 1959), she returned to the workforce once her children began school, first becoming a beautician at Dorothy's Beauty Salon, then taking a part time job as a shop assistant at Edmondson's Department Store, where she worked across a variety of departments.

It is largely through her last job that Mitsue became well-known in Wagga, working for 25 years in ladies' fashion at Best & Less. There, Mitsue was a welcoming and friendly face and many Wagga locals still remember her in that role to this day.

From the time of her arrival in Wagga, until the late 1990s, Mitsue unofficially played the role of Japanese ambassador in the community. She was involved as a guest speaker and Japanese language teacher to a diverse range of groups including the Girl Guides, the Country Women's Association, the Wagga Wagga International Club, Lions' International, the Wagga School of Arts and the Workers' Educational Association.

Mitsue also hosted and interpreted for visiting Japanese dignitaries and memorably, advised on language and customs to the School of Arts production, and the first one performed at Wagga's new Civic Theatre - **Teahouse of the August Moon** - teaching lead Louise Blackett how to speak Japanese, and wear a kimono.

'Teahouse of the August Moon'

In the late 1960s locals also became acquainted with Mitsue through the medium of television when she was invited to do a weekly segment on RVN2's **At Home With Two**. Every Wednesday, she would highlight a different aspect of Japanese culture - cooking, domestic practices, conversational language and traditional Japanese dress.

'At Home...'

I tried to do the best by Wagga. Everything I could I helped with, and I had a wonderful husband.

Mitsue reunited with her beloved Roy on 8 December 2020, more than 30 years after his passing. The legacy of her 88 years for the people of Wagga lucky enough to have met this remarkable woman is immeasurable - the memory of the contagious smile that lit up her eyes, her warmth of spirit and an appreciation of the culture of the home she said goodbye to six decades earlier - and she is still missed.



Aunty Flo Grant

1936 - 2019

This was the advice given to Aunty Flo by her father Cecil Grant, and it stood her in good stead throughout a life that was well lived.

Aunty Flo Grant was a force to be reckoned with. In life, she was a passionate educator, visionary and reformer, but above all, she was a proud Wiradjuri woman.

Florence Catherine Eunice Grant was born 18 August 1936 on the Aboriginal mission at Condobolin and grew up in a tightknit community, lovingly cocooned within the culture of her people. Surrounded by family, it was through her elders that Aunty Flo experienced her culture first-hand, clapping along as her grandfather Wilfred performed the Magpie dance, accompanied by the old women, singing the songs of Wiradjuri.

Born into the Interwar period, Aunty Flo's community survived on what bush tucker was readily available. Her childhood diet included goanna, echidna and damper cooked in the ground, rabbits, fish, mussels and yabbies. Bush honey, mushrooms, snotty gobbles (the sticky fruit of the mistletoe) and witchetty grubs, were also foraged by the children.

As a child, Aunty Flo loved reading and history. Inspired by the adventurous tales of explorers including Magellan, Captain Cook and Marco Polo, her lifelong dream was to travel to the exotic places she read about.

In her teenage years, the family moved to Yenda on the outskirts of Griffith. Growing up there, living by a channel bank in a dirt floor humpy, was as far removed from Venice as one could imagine. But Aunty Flo's father encouraged her to follow her dreams and explore the world like her hero Marco Polo.

Just after her 21st birthday, Aunty Flo moved to Sydney, where she took a job at the Baptist Girls Hostel at Ashfield. This led to work in nursing which, much to her delight, provided her with not only a job, but a home and a chance to travel. She hitchhiked around Australia, before heading across the ditch to New Zealand

where she worked in a variety of jobs including aged care nurse, tobacco grader, waitress and shearer's roustabout.

Aunty Flo's childhood dream of overseas travel became a reality in 1978-79. For nine months, she travelled extensively through America, Canada and Europe. She visited Mexico, England, Scotland, France, Monaco, Switzerland, and finally, made it to Marco Polo's Venice! She filled her passport, taking every opportunity to experience these cultures that were so different to her own.

Returning home, Aunty Flo felt invigorated. After going back to school to complete her HSC as a mature age student, a world of opportunities opened up to her. In 1990, she took a job as an Aboriginal Information Officer with the Department of Social Security. This role exposed her to the world of media, and she became involved with Aboriginal radio, having an online slot with radio 2XX from 1982 to 1989. Later, Aunty Flo would work with the head of ABC, Brian Quigley, and the Institute of Indigenous Studies, establishing training programs in radio skills.

Aunty Flo adamantly believed that Indigenous people should have a voice. A great advocate for Indigenous culture, she was instrumental in several important projects that not only revitalised but ensured the survival of Wiradjuri traditions and culture. In the late 1980s, she saw a need for a revival of the Wiradjuri language, and for almost two decades, ran programs at 'Yal-balinga-da', a property on the outskirts of Wagga which became a training post for Aboriginal cultural heritage.

She helped establish the Wiradjuri Council of Elders, later becoming Chair of the group. A powerful force in Aboriginal education in Wagga, Aunty Flo worked closely with Charles Sturt University, contributing greatly to the university's graduate certificate in Wiradjuri language. Alongside her brother Uncle Stan Grant, and linguist Dr John Rudder, she was involved with the publication of the Wiradjuri Dictionary in 2005.

In June 2019, in recognition of these contributions, Aunty Flo was awarded an Order of the Companion for her leadership and contributions by CSU Vice-Chancellor Professor Andrew Vann.

On 6 August 2019, Aunty Flo passed away on Wiradjuri land in Wagga, surrounded by family and friends. She was just shy of her 83rd birthday. On announcing her death on NITV News, Claudia Farhart perhaps best summed it up when she stated:

'The Riverina is by far the better for the grace, wisdom, thought leadership and nation building that Aunty Flo championed through to her very last day.'

A woman of strong Christian faith, Aunty Flo will be remembered as a champion of justice for all and a lady with a giant heart who helped people in need and advocated for the rights of the Wiradjuri people. Most importantly, she invited us all to adopt and live by the ethos Yindyamarra Winhanganha – the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in. And that is a legacy we should all embrace.

Wear your Wiradjuri heritage with pride, not ignorance.

Aunty Flo dedicated her life to helping Indigenous people reconnect with their culture.

ABC Riverina, 7 August 2019



Dr Sandra Claxton

1945 - 2023

Much to the dismay of her rather conventional mother, little Sandra Siebels wasn't interested in dolls, much preferring to construct balsa wood model aeroplanes! This may have been an early indication of Sandra's scientific bent and a sign of things to come.

Born in Sydney on 9 June 1945, Sandra moved to Wagga aged ten, when her father joined his brothers in establishing the construction company Siebels Brothers.

Undertaking her secondary education at Wagga High, it was there that Sandra discovered not only a love of mathematics, but also physics and chemistry, all subjects she excelled at. In an era when most girls were encouraged to pursue teaching, nursing or secretarial work, Sandra set her heart on becoming a scientist.

In 1962, 17-year-old Sandra took the first step towards her dream career, successfully applying for a NSW Department of Agriculture traineeship through Sydney University. However, despite passing all five first year subjects - botany, chemistry, agriculture, physics and zoology - things didn't go to plan in her second year.

With the encouragement of her parents, Sandra abandoned the traineeship and took a job as a laboratory technician in the Biochemistry Department at the Veterinary Research Station (VRS) at Glenfield (near Liverpool). It was there she met veterinarian Dr Peter Claxton, whom she wed at St. John's Anglican Church, Wagga on 15 August 1970.

After leaving her traineeship, Sandra thrived academically, professionally and personally.

Completing a Biology Certificate at the Sydney Technical College gave Sandra the self-confidence to undertake a part time Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree at Sydney University, enrolling in 1967. During these studies, she realised that her scientific interests lay mainly in botany and zoology. In her second and third years of study,

her dedication paid off, when she was awarded the Eva Saunders Memorial Prize for botany (1968) and the Haswell Prize for zoology (1969).

In February 1972, Sandra was accepted to study a Master of Science (MSc) degree, and a year later she gave birth to her son, Marcus. Sadly, it was also at this time that she was diagnosed with severe and generalised rheumatoid arthritis, a condition that forced her to suspend her MSc candidature and resign from her position at VRS. Worse still, the new mother was unable to feed, lift, or even cuddle her baby. The next few years saw Sandra fight against a disease that wrought havoc on her body, causing her constant pain and progressively damaging her joints.

With medication easing her pain, Sandra discovered a renewed joy of study, especially after PM Gough Whitlam abolished university tuition fees in January 1974. Initially enrolling in maths and then palaeontology courses at Macquarie University, Sandra was surprised to find that concentrating on her studies enabled her to better cope with her pain and rapidly increasing disablement.

For the next 30 years, while dealing with the ups and downs of her physical ailments, Sandra persevered and triumphed in her studies, graduating from Macquarie University with a second Bachelor of Science (majoring in palaeontology) in 1984, an MSc in 1992, and finally, a PhD in 2004, along with the 2004 Vice Chancellor's Commendation for 'a doctoral thesis of exceptional merit'.

Sandra took 11 years to complete her PhD as her health continued to deteriorate, leading to periods of hospitalisation and surgery. Partway through her studies she also lost her central vision in both eyes, a rare side effect from one of the drugs that she was prescribed.

However, Sandra persisted and completed her PhD 'The taxonomy and distribution of Australian terrestrial tardigrades' to great acclaim in scientific circles. Known colloquially as water bears or moss piglets, tardigrades are a phylum of eight-legged segmented micro-organisms. Much like her illness, tardigrades became a constant part of Sandra's life for decades, having discovered them during her early zoology courses at Sydney University.

Working from her home laboratory set up by her husband Peter, Sandra began studying these minute creatures for her MSc at Macquarie University. In her lifetime, she identified over 70 species of tardigrade not previously known to science, including *Echinicus marcusii*, which she named after her son.

Sandra passed away on 6 September 2023. Her obituary published in the Sydney Morning Herald perfectly captured her legacy:

A life of high academic achievement despite the increasing ravages of severe rheumatoid arthritis.

An exemplar of stoicism and determination... [she]

Will be sadly missed by her family and friends, particularly those in the international Tardigrade research community.

Dr Sandra Claxton was one of Australia's foremost zoologists who, despite enduring a life-changing disease, took Australia to global prominence with her studies of microscopic creatures unknown to many.

The Sydney Morning Herald, 25 October 2023

italics

italics



Margaret Chicken

1828 - 1905

Sarah Houghton

1845 - 1913

Ivy Black

1910 - 1984

Every day in Wagga, hundreds of cars driving down Bourke Street, cross the railway lines which intersect the road at the Chaston Street end of the Showground. Just over the tracks, on the eastern side of the street, some may notice a historic house behind an elaborate brick wall, whose front sits incredibly close to the train tracks. Here, surrounded by several later additions is the original Albury Road gatekeeper's cottage.

Prior to the introduction of the automated gates with flashing lights and bells that we are used to encountering at today's railway crossings, level crossing gates used to be manually operated. Each time a train passed through a town or city, across tracks that dissected a road, the gates had to be opened to the train and closed to vehicular and pedestrian traffic (and vice versa) numerous times each day and night by a gatekeeper.

The gatekeeper's position came with a job and income, a departmental residence, and place to raise a family. It also came with a great deal of risk. Today, the gatekeeper's role has been largely forgotten, partly because very few gatekeeper's cottages remain in situ.

Many gatekeepers throughout NSW (and the other states) were women, usually women whose husbands had been employed on the railways. A considerable number of them were widows.

One of Wagga's earliest was Margaret Chicken, whose husband William, had worked on the construction of Wagga's original viaduct. Following his sudden death in 1878, as a mark of respect from the Department of Railways, Margaret, mother of his eight children, was offered the Albury Road (Dockers Street) gatehouse on the condition that she opened the gates when required.

Margaret was the first occupant of this gatehouse, moving into her departmental residence in late 1878, and remaining there until her death on 6 May 1905, just one day shy of her 77th birthday. It is apparent from contemporary newspaper reports that Margaret's health had been ailing in the years leading up to her death, due to an affliction brought on as the result of an accident at the railway gatehouse, but no further details are known.

A few blocks eastwards from the Albury Road gatehouse stood the Tarcutta Road Railway Crossing (Lake Albert Road) gatehouse, operated by Sarah Houghton footnote between 1892 and 1896. Born in Yorkshire, Sarah (38) had emigrated to NSW with her husband David (40) and four children. In England, David was a platelayer¹ for the railways, and on his arrival in Australia, he found employment as a fettler², first in Hay and then at Wattamandara near Cowra. David was tragically killed in 1892, having taken a hand-pumped railway tricycle down the tracks to visit a friend one evening, before being overtaken by the No. 10 Uptrain from Harden.

The Railway Commissioners must have had some sympathy for the family's plight, as Sarah was given the Tarcutta Road job.



Albury Road (Bourke Street) gatekeeper's cottage, 1885. Margaret Chicken is the lady in black at centre.

Shockingly, just four years after the death of her husband on the tracks near Cowra, Sarah nearly lost her own life in the execution of her duties. Required to open and close the gates for every train on the main Sydney to Melbourne line, 24-7, it was not unusual for Sarah to be called out for 12 to 15 trains every night. One night, while waiting for the Wagga to Junee water train, she fell asleep, only to be woken by the train approaching at around 11 p.m.

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¹ A platelayer was the name used in Britain for the men who laid and maintained the 'plateways' on a railway.
² A fettler lays and repairs tracks for railways, and installs and repairs signals and other equipment.

should this footnote be one line?

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Public safety at Wagga's busiest railway crossing rests in the capable hands of a middle-aged housewife with seven children.

The Daily Advertiser, 17 November 1954

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Panicking, Sarah rushed out to open the gates, but they had not fully opened before the train came through, and she was sent flying. Found lying alongside the tracks, she was seriously injured, having sustained a broken right shoulder blade,

collarbone and fractured skull. Luckily 63-year-old Sarah survived, but her accident raised concern in the Wagga community about how anyone could be expected to be a gatekeeper, given the hours required to attend the gates. This would have been especially strenuous for women who were also often raising children or caring for infirm husbands at the same time.

A third central Wagga railway crossing was on Urana Street at the western end of the Showground. In 1940, Ivy Black (30), along with her six children – Norma (b. 1930), Donald (b. 1933), Valmah (b. 1936), Keith (b. 1939), Lola (b. 1941) and Trevor (b. 1943) - moved into the gatekeeper's cottage which had opened on 1 September 1880.

Ivy was a social woman, who loved her job, and her children enjoyed their childhood home and playing in the grounds of the gatekeeper's residence.

It is Ivy's story however, that opened the community's eyes to the dangers for gatekeepers and their families living in such proximity to the tracks. The front of the Black family home was a few short metres from where trains would go hurtling past on their journey from north to south. The gate leading to the house was always closed and fastened with wire, but on 27 March 1946, a great tragedy occurred.

Ivy was standing in the gatekeeper's box on the western side of the rail line at about 6 p.m., having closed all gates at the crossing against vehicular traffic. Looking across to the house (approximately 4.5m away from her), she heard the train approaching. Suddenly, she noticed her infant son Trevor, come through the gate and climb onto the line in the path of the train, which was just 27m away from him.



Ivy Black returns to the old Urana Street Railway crossing gatekeeper's house.

The driver applied the brake but could not stop the train in time.

At the coronial inquest, held the following month, the magistrate implored railway authorities to consider finding a way to make gatekeeper's homes safe for the children they so often housed. Sympathy to the parents was expressed on behalf of the Railway Commissioners and the driver and fireman of the train by Messrs. Power and Carmichael. The coroner expressed sympathy on behalf of the police and himself.

Ivy continued in her position as the Urana Street gatekeeper until its closure in April 1969, following the installation of flashing lights. She then moved to Kildare Avenue, to a house which had a view of the railway line.

The Urana Street gatekeeper's house, which had seen both laughter and tears, was demolished in 1974. Today, there is nothing but a block of scrubland where the home once stood.



Jacinta Bodel

It's as if Jacinta Bodel was born to be in the construction industry. The daughter of plumber Mick Bodel, she was always interested in plumbing, and when grown up, wanted to be a plumber just like her dad.

Even though construction is today Australia's second largest industry, it is still a male dominated field, with 'lady tradies' still few and far between. Australia saw its first female plumber in the 1950s and it was another 40 years until the country's first registered female builder. Both women helped pave the way for those who followed in their footsteps.

In 2010, Jacinta made history when she graduated with a plumber's licence from Wagga TAFE. She was the first female plumber in the city, if not in the district.

But plumbing was just the beginning of her journey.

When she was 19, Jacinta helped her uncle build her first home. A financially challenging task for a young woman, especially one on an apprenticeship wage, it was this experience that opened Jacinta's eyes to the creative opportunities presented by the building industry.

For Jacinta, it was back to square one and time to learn a new trade. She returned to TAFE for a four-year apprenticeship in carpentry, followed by night classes to earn her builder's licence.

My favourite thing is seeing something through from start to finish. I love having something in my mind and then creating it. I truly love being hands-on to make a vision come alive.

Growing up with a builder for a father, Jacinta spent countless hours watching him work and learning the trade. She realised that building wasn't just her passion – it was her calling.

Being an ambitious woman, Jacinta always wanted her own business. That dream came true in 2018, when she established Jacinta Bodel Homes (JBH). With the distinction of being the only female run building company in Wagga, JBH challenges industry stereotypes, while providing leadership for young female tradies starting their career.

I am a very determined person. I don't think it would matter if I was female or male. If I put my mind to something then it gets done.

Jacinta brings her unique perspective as a female builder to every stage of construction – from the first blueprint to the final coat of paint. With a conscious push away from the mainstream, she pulls her inspiration from a range of different architectural styles, elegantly blending them together to make them her own. In the ever-growing landscape of new builds across the city, Jacinta's passion for her trade is tangible in the homes she creates.

Professionally, Jacinta has now notched up more than 17 years in the industry. She has worked extensively on renovation projects throughout the Riverina, and to date, JBH has erected 30 homes.

Jacinta has much to be proud of. Her most recent accomplishment came in November 2023, when JBH won 'Villa of the Year' in the HIA-CSR1 ACT and Southern NSW Housing Awards, a great achievement for a relatively young business.

[footnote](#)

Jacinta has great hopes for the future women of Wagga. With the number of successful female entrepreneurs continuing to grow in today's Wagga, it is her hope that women will continue to break those glass ceilings, creating opportunities for the next generation.

For those wanting to follow in her footsteps, she has one piece of advice: "Get out and have a go!"



¹ Housing Industry Association



Annette Brown, PhD

One of the proudest moments in Annette Brown's life came in 2011, when she was awarded a PhD from Charles Sturt **University** Wagga. With a background in Fine Arts and a double honours degree in Textiles and Art History already under her belt, Annette's doctoral thesis was the culmination of years spent employed as an arts professional within the museum industry.

comma

From her first job working in a commercial stationery factory in Brisbane at age 15, for Annette, her journey to donning the academic gown and bonnet was an arduous one, achieved through long hours of toil, hard work, drive, determination and the support of her family and friends.

Annette always loved learning. Although wanting to study art at high school, it wasn't on offer as an examination subject at Bonnyrigg High where she completed her secondary studies. As a result, she instead focussed on her two other favourite subjects – science and history – fortuitously, both areas of interest that have served her well in her career.

Women's stories add an important vitality and depth to our understanding of social history.

A self-proclaimed 'nerdy swat' in high school, Annette dreamed of continuing on to university after graduation, but sadly, it wasn't to be. Due to family issues, including an adored often absent father who worked on the railways and a mother who suffered from an undiagnosed bipolar disorder, Annette's home life wasn't easy.

Despite having ancestral links to the Wagga District dating back to 1870, young Annette's childhood was itinerant due to her father's job, with her formative years spent in Wagga, Albury, Sydney and Brisbane.

A family breakdown during Annette's second year at high school saw her leave Sydney and return temporarily to her hometown of Wagga. Living for six months with her much-loved Aunt Rita, Annette still remembers this time with great affection, being incredibly close to her. Although this was a difficult period for the teen, it was also this experience that formed two favourite childhood memories –

aunt

running wild with her cousins and watching her aunty bake.

After leaving school, Annette worked a variety of jobs. Early roles included machinist in the Formfit factory in Sydney¹, junior bank officer at the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney and Laboratory Assistant in the Biology/Geology Department of the Sydney Teachers' College.

footnote

In 1970, she married Warren Brown, and the newlyweds settled in Wagga, where they welcomed two daughters, Donna and Sarah. While Warren had a fulltime job, Annette juggled a number of casual positions. This, in addition to raising her daughters, running the family household, volunteering for the City of Wagga Wagga Eisteddfod Society and the Wagga Wagga Softball Association and caring for a mentally fragile mother, left time for little else.

However, Annette still dreamt of pursuing further education, and in 1992, took the first step towards fulfilling that dream as Lab Assistant with the School of Education at Wagga campus.

Missing out on that job when it was advertised as part-time, led to Annette making the lifechanging decision to finally enrol in tertiary studies. Not in science, but fine arts. After completing a 12-month bridging course at CSU Wagga in 1993, Annette became a mature age student the following year.

Through her studies, Annette not only discovered innate creative talent as a textile artist, but also a love of domestic textiles. It was at CSU that she met some remarkable academics who would become mentors and shape her future career. These included Professor David Green and Dr Julie Montgarrett, who were catalysts for her interest in textiles, especially women's textiles, both domestic and gallery pieces. Julie also introduced Annette to feminist and women's textile art of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

Take an interest in local history and listen to the stories that your mothers, grandmothers and aunties tell.

A third mentor was the revered social historian, the late Wendy Hucker. She taught Annette the importance of recording the social histories of not only working-class women, but also the domestic textiles that were such an integral part of their everyday lives. This is a skill that Annette has since applied extensively within her museum practice, incorporating women's social history into her textile artworks.

In 2000, Annette made her first foray into the museum profession, when she became a volunteer at the Museum of the Riverina. This position led to further professional opportunities, including specialist training, and culminated in her being accepted to the Doctoral program at CSU Wagga.

Since graduating, Annette has worked as a museum advisor to numerous museums throughout NSW, in towns including Coolamon, Narrandera, Hay, Holbrook, Jindera, Adelong, Tumut & District, Batlow, Wyalong, Ungarie, Weethalle and Condobolin. Her proudest professional achievements to date have been her work as Project Manager during the early stages of establishing the Mount Erin Heritage Centre (Wagga), and the position she currently holds as Honorary Director of the Pioneer Women's Hut Museum in Glenroy, NSW.

For women who may want to follow in her footsteps, Annette hopes that her personal journey from school to university and beyond, proves that you are never too old to learn new skills, or to follow your dreams.

¹ The Formfit Company manufactured women's 'foundation garments', mainly corsets and girdles, but later became known for other types of lingerie, particularly bras and briefs.



Vickie Burkinshaw

Vickie Burkinshaw is a powerhouse. She is a business owner, professional facilitator, author and business coach.

With a successful career in communications, Vickie lived life in the fast lane, travelling the world and working alongside The Body Shop founder Dame Anita Roddick for seven years. It wasn't until she became a mother that Vickie reassessed her lifestyle and, in early 2017, relocated from Melbourne to a 360-acre farm at The Rock with her husband Tim and children Lucy and Angus.

It was a homecoming of sorts. Growing up on a small farm outside Wagga in a community called Brookdale, Vickie had always wanted to be a writer. So perhaps it was destiny when, in 2020, she entered Wagga's Rabbit Books searching for a book for Lucy, and exited not with the book, but instead, a plan to buy the business!

The contracts were exchanged just before Covid-19 hit, in a move that could have been disastrous. But lockdown gave Vickie the luxury of being able to renovate the space and the time to reflect upon what she wanted her business to be beyond the bookshop.

When restrictions lifted, the doors of The Curious Rabbit were thrown open.

Vickie's vision for her business was first and foremost to establish a safe space for people to be themselves, a haven for creative and sensitive souls. And this is exactly what The Curious Rabbit has become.

Curiosity is one of the most important human qualities for people to have. It opens conversations, spurs learning and encourages the exchange of ideas.

More than just a bookshop and café, the business offers the community an eclectic range of events. It is an art gallery, and a space for art classes and workshops, the presentation of talks, book launches, poetry readings, live music, open mic nights and the ever-popular drag queen shows led by resident drag queen Rose Quartz.

A testament to her many business accomplishments came in 2022, when Vickie was awarded the annual Transgrid Leadership Award

for communities in Regional NSW and the ACT. It was a well-deserved accolade for a woman who wears many hats.

In addition to The Curious Rabbit, Vickie's other business ventures include being co-founder of Beyond Business Groups - it's like a book group, but for businesses, and Purple Pyjamas - a collective of changemakers led by Vickie who are there to guide, motivate and support small businesses in all their forms.

Beyond her business interests, Vickie is president of Friends of the Wagga Wagga Art Gallery and president of the Wagga Women's Health Centre - both organisations that provide invaluable benefits to the residents of Wagga and beyond! She is also a passionate advocate for reconciliation, and the rights of First Nations communities.

In her future, Vickie sees a life filled with even more music, drag and the arts in all its forms, and one in which she will carry on agitating for human rights. She will no doubt also continue to be a role model who, through leadership, will pave the way for others to follow.

I am proud to be able to lead an incredible organisation in a community dealing with increasing rates of femicide and gender inequality.

I have always been a writer, a photographer, a dreamer. A lover of the arts and someone with a never-ending curiosity about the people who make art.





Julie Busutil

In 2021, Julie Busutil introduced the literary character Superconscious Dave to the world.

An inquisitive green alien with a mop of bright red hair, Dave takes children on exciting journeys seeking magic, creativity and wonder in the world around them.

For the past three years, children have been thrilled to join his adventures with the Purple Fandango, Mysterious Poo, and most recently, the Collective Soup.

As a child, Julie's interests included marine biology and geography, the latter due to her fascination with Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. After leaving school, she pursued a Bachelor of Applied Science (Environmental Science) at Charles Sturt University, and also gained postgraduate qualifications in climate change and management.

The scientist and the government leader in me, is analytical and systematic, whereas the intuitive is the creative expression of me.

Today, Julie has a full-time position with the NSW State Government, responsible for delivering a multi-million-dollar program supporting Landcare. To date, she has been employed as an environmental scientist for over 20 years, working in both state and federal government positions, including a stint in Defence Intelligence.

But there is another side to Julie the scientist. She is also an Intuitive Consultant.

Taking a Writers Genius course online through the Natural Success Academy opened the floodgates of Julie's creativity. This was incredibly beneficial to her as an author. Since then, she has written her three Superconscious Dave books and has also penned a short novella and second children's book series targeting older children.

In addition to her writing, over the past four years, Julie created Be you HQ, a business in which she facilitates creativity, insight and connection for her clients, and teaches them to tune into their own intuition, unleash their creative power and recognise their own greatness.

This all eventuated after completing a transformational creative course which woke Julie up to the fact that all humans are highly creative, but many don't know how to harness that creativity. Intuition is now a skill that Julie uses to great effect in all areas of her life – as a scientist, writer, mother and teacher.

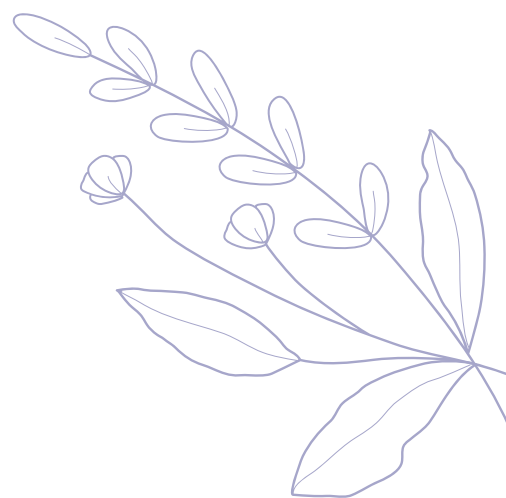
In the case of Superconscious Dave, Julie relied heavily on her intuition to help create his adventures, she was merely the creative vessel. There is a part of Julie's personality and interests woven through each adventure.

The Purple Fandango reveals Julie's belief in the importance of imagination and focus, which are the ingredients needed by individuals to create anything. **Superconscious Dave and the Mysterious Pool**, combines two of Julie's loves – *italics* Superconscious Dave himself and ancient Egypt. The story also teaches kids in a fun way about the modern-day Dung Beetle.

The final book in the trilogy, the Collective Soup ties everything together, and shows what Dave personally represents to Julie. The theme running through this story is that everything is connected, and everything can be known. All that is needed is for a person to intend, focus and receive. This uplifting message is also the mission of Be You HQ.

I am certain that we are all born intuitive. As we get older, unless nurtured and embraced, we forget we are intuitive and just begin to assimilate into what we think we need to be, how to act...

I hope Superconscious Dave inspires children to think outside the box and helps keep the magic and wonder alive in their lives.





Lee Clout

As a young child, Lee Clout wanted to be a nurse. But in her teenage years she developed an interest in becoming a paramedic. Even though both her parents were involved in volunteer rescue, in these early days of Second-Wave Feminism, Lee was advised that this was an appropriate career for males only.

As a result, in 1976, Lee moved to Wagga and commenced nursing at the Wagga Base Hospital. But after seeing an advertisement for paramedics in the newspaper – which didn't specify gender – Lee took a chance and applied. John Bradford Ambulance Superintendent at the time hired her, stating 'she was employed because she was the best person for the job.'

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In May 1979 Lee made history, becoming the first female paramedic employed in NSW (and the third in Australia). Training consisted of a six-week residential training block in Rozelle, followed by five months in Wagga working with a trainer/mentor, then another four-week training block in Rozelle, and then off to Tumut to continue her career as an Ambulance Officer.

I enjoyed the challenge of proving the work of a competent Ambulance Officer had nothing to do with gender.

Lee had a great mentor, an English gentleman who instilled in her pride in her chosen profession. Lee was encouraged and mentored by all staff she worked with in Wagga. She greatly appreciated them sharing their knowledge and skills to improve her ability and become a competent Ambulance Officer.

Even though she worked on her own a lot, it was in Tumut that Lee learned invaluable lessons from her mentors and peers. They taught her how to use bystanders, how to carry out her job with limited resources and how to cope with loss.

Lee loved everything about being a paramedic, despite the occasional challenges of the role. The part of the job she found most demanding was dealing with the loss of a child, or, at the other end of the spectrum, consoling an elderly person who had just lost their long-term partner.

Sadly, while her original manager was wonderful, management made her life difficult later, when she decided to have a family. Maternity leave was measured by how long Lee could fit into her normal uniform, then it was leave without pay, except for three weeks prior to baby's birth and six weeks after birth.

The world is not such a big place and there are many opportunities to follow your dreams so don't wait. Do it, it may take time and it may take more than one try, but don't give up. As the saying goes "the world is YOUR oyster".

Returning to work meant full-time shift work with no other options. After three months working full-time following the birth of her first child, and with no desire to further challenge the equality of the position, Lee resigned.

Lee left the NSW Ambulance Service in 1984, but returned ten years later, to work in the role of coordination officer when the Coordination Centre was being moved from Wagga to Wollongong. She chose to stay in Wagga, and for 11 years worked for the NSW Police Force in their Communications and Emergency Centre.

Lee never intended to become a trailblazer, but she inevitably led the way for other women to join the force.

7 News Riverina, 2019

now

Things have changed for women wanting to enter the workforce as a paramedic.

In 2019, Lee appeared on the SBS program **Insight**, in an episode **'Insight'**

titled 'Female Firsts'. From those early days of being a 'novelty' as an ambulance officer, Lee was pleased to report that equality has well and truly come to the NSW Ambulance Service, with 50% of its staff now female, in addition to 40% females in management.

And that result was brought about by women like herself.





Sally Jean Davis (Shipard)

Sally Jean Davis is one of the greats of Australian football. She is also one of Wagga's biggest sporting success stories.

Born in Tumut, three-year-old Sally moved to Wagga with her family in 1990. Taking up football two years later with Wagga PCYC, Sally dreamt of becoming a professional sportsperson. That dream came true in 2004, when 16-year-old Sally made her international debut representing Australia as a midfielder with the Matildas at the Athens Olympics.

Sally represented Australia at U20 level on 21 occasions, debuting early in 2004. Over the next 10 years, she made 62 appearances as a fully-fledged Matilda, representing Australia at the FIFA World Cup in 2007 and 2011.

Domestically, Sally played 30 games for Canberra United in the W-League and was named Player of the Year in 2011/12. In 2012 she travelled to Cologne, where she went on loan for 10 games to Bayer 04 Leverkusen in the German Bundesliga (premier women's division).

I wanted to do something with my hands. You see, until December 2016, I'd predominately used my feet...

Despite many career highlights, one of her most memorable was in 2010, when the Matildas won the AFC Asian Cup in China. It was Sally's crucial spot kick in the final that helped Australia defeat Korea DPR on penalties.

Sadly, Sally's football career ended in 2014, due to ongoing degenerative knee issues. While the 27-year-old's body was ready to quit, her mind wasn't, making retirement from the game she loved a difficult transition.

After a stint in administration work with Football Federation Australia and some TV work with Fox Sports, an opportunity arose for Sally within the construction industry when she was offered work as a builder's labourer.

From there, Sally took up carpentry as a mature aged apprentice. Starting in the Northern Beaches with a small company called Transition Building, Sally completed her apprenticeship in Canberra with Built By Drew. Carpentry lured Sally in because of the creativity involved. With satisfaction gained from tangible outcomes, she also enjoys the physicality of the work, all things that football also gave her.

While carpentry is Sally's bread and butter, she also runs a side business.

Prior to the 2017 vote on marriage equality, and in anticipation of a positive outcome, Sally became a marriage celebrant, launching Marry Us Sally. This was a natural fit, as Sally loves love stories.

In 2023, Sally was diagnosed with a rare form of ovarian cancer. It required a marathon operation followed by six months of chemotherapy, and, in the words of her partner April, ripped the rug from under her feet. With incredible support from her family, friends, former teammates and the football community, Sally has, today, come out the other side.

So, what does life hold for Sally? Now living in Candelo on the NSW South Coast, she has plans for renovating the small cottage she and April call home. Alongside her work as a wedding celebrant, Sally is also branching out into funerals, although she has yet to officiate one.

For the future young women of Wagga, Sally's hope is for them to feel connected to community and have the freedom to bring to life whatever they dream. And it's also what she **hopes** for herself, living in a great community, she hopes that her future delivers much in the way of wholesome days, health, strong family and community ties.

Can't hope for much more than that.

These skills as a carpenter I intend on utilising for my lifetime. I bumped into a lady in her 60's, who came to tools at the age of 55. She said, "How have only men been having this much fun for all these years?" With a huge smile stretched across her face, it was golden. I would love for more women to have this feeling.

desires



Judy Galloway

Like many young people, Judy Galloway had no idea what she wanted to do when she left school. She would have loved to work in agriculture, especially with cattle, but her father told her that “it wasn’t a place for young girls.”

In hindsight, this was a blessing both for the future people of Wagga, and for the city.

After leaving school, Judy undertook a 12-month Business Administration course at Wagga TAFE. On completion, she was offered a job with the Public Service to take Hansard in Parliament. But having just given birth to her eldest child, she couldn’t move to Canberra.

In the mid-1970s, Judy applied for a job as a court typist. There were many applicants that all had to sit a typing and spelling test and were then reviewed by a panel. Even though Judy was the fastest typist and best speller, the panellists told her she should stay home and look after her children!

For a long time, I had thought women’s capabilities were not highly considered in the business domain.

In her late 30s, having worked numerous casual positions to fit in around the commitments of her growing family, Judy began a part time job at TAFE. There, she was given the opportunity to study a Diploma of Adult Education. Loving the study, after the Diploma, she enrolled in a Bachelor of Business at

Charles Sturt University, and never looked back.

A turning point in Judy’s life came after she heard a woman speaking on the radio about the lack of support for women in business. This struck a chord with Judy and inspired her to create a seminar for Women in Business in Wagga. The event was incredibly successful, attracting 300 women. It led to Judy being asked to duplicate the seminar in other regional areas and deliver training to the staff of the bank that gave her the loan to run the seminar.

With a new confidence, Judy took a leap of faith, and left her full-time teaching

position at TAFE. Founding Sureway Employment and Training in 1990, she worked closely with businesses to transform their operations by upgrading the skills required in a wide range of workplaces. All of this was done while raising her four children.

Judy was CEO of Sureway from 1996 until 2009, when she stepped back into a non-executive role. In 2014, with Sureway having grown to 90 sites across NSW, Victoria and SA, she was chosen as Wagga's Woman of the Year, a humbling award, but very much deserved.

Having lived in Wagga her whole life, Judy has always understood the issues facing regional communities and is passionate about rectifying them. For eight years, she served as Chairperson of the Committee 4 Wagga. The Committee achieved great things under Judy's leadership. Projects that came to fruition included the introduction of CCTV to the CBD, the levee bank upgrade, the Riverina Intermodal Freight and Logistics Hub, the Riverside Precinct redevelopment, the UNSW Medical School and improvements to the city's cycleways.

Today, Judy is still serving the community in volunteer roles with organisations including Carevan. Most importantly, she gets to enjoy spending time with her family and grandchildren. Her pace of life may have slowed, but her passion for the community that has given her so much will never wane.

I have always felt very passionate to work in an industry where we get the opportunity to make a difference in people's lives.

We are very fortunate in Wagga to have many talented young women achieving some amazing feats in business, the arts, politics, community, medicine, education and on the sporting fields. I used to think that there was a misconception that women from the country were not competitive with their city counterparts however the tyranny of distance is no longer an inhibitor, and our young women compete successfully with their metropolitan counterparts. There are some significant local support groups and mentors available to enable them to succeed and I know we can all be proud of the young women of Wagga and the Riverina region.



Anne Gorman

When Anne Gorman enrolled in a writing course run by her friend Bridget Brandon, little did she imagine that the intensely personal memoir she produced would not only be published but would also resonate with so many of her readers.

Anne Veronica Austin was born on 17 January 1934 at Mudgee, NSW, the 11th of 13 children of Ivor John and Christina Austin (née Donovan). Anne had a special relationship with her father.

Anne was five years old when her mother suffered a nervous breakdown and was institutionalised for a year. This heralded a tragic period in Anne's childhood, as she and her siblings were sent to boarding school. There, she missed her father terribly, only seeing him sporadically. When she was six, she lost her beloved father, who had spent much of their time apart gravely ill.

How did our mother endure? Was resilience in her genes or learnt through the circumstances of life? I know for sure it was a quality she encouraged in her children.

For Anne, her mother Christina was a magnificent, resilient role model. Upon learning of her husband's illness, she pulled herself out of her despair and took control of her household and Ivor's business. It was most likely these adolescent episodes experienced by Anne, that in adulthood, made her as emotionally robust and strong in character as her mother had been.

Despite childhood dreams of being either an opera singer or a journalist, after leaving school, Anne decided to follow her sister Joan's lead and enrol in social work at Sydney University, eventually graduating with a Bachelor's Degree and qualifications in medical social work.

In 1955, Anne travelled to Wagga for a friend's wedding and met Bruce Gorman, the man who would become her husband.

Bruce and Anne married in 1957 and settled at 'Fairfield', her husband's home in Yerong Creek. For a city girl, moving from the bustling streets of Sydney to the

relative quiet of Wagga (and so far from her family) was a baptism of fire for Anne, who felt a mix of depression and homesickness in those early days. However, with time, her new home was a place she came to love.

As is expected within rural communities, Anne became an active citizen, joining the Red Cross, Country Women's Association, the local tennis team, and attending church meetings. In addition to her domestic duties, her days were full.

***A life in the country!
This was to be my destiny.***

In a period of five and a half years, Bruce and Anne welcomed five children. With the birth of Alexandra, Austin, Vanessa, Henry and Rebecca, their family was complete.

Following the Second Vatican Council of Pope John XXIII, Anne began taking the contraceptive pill, meaning as her children grew up, she was able to recommence working, with the full support of her husband.

It had become clear to Anne that people living in regional areas like Wagga had a higher incidence of poverty than those in urban cities. Furthermore, the services which could help alleviate the effects of poverty were non-existent in rural Australia. Working with the Good Samaritans, Anne became Wagga's first community social worker in 1970 and encountered families in dire need of assistance, living with violence, extreme poverty and instances of child abuse.

Her work led to a full-time social worker being recruited from Sydney. In 1973, Anne's return to her profession began in earnest, when she accepted a job as assistant lecturer at Wagga's Riverina College of Advanced Education (now Charles Sturt University). In that role, she was on a team responsible for developing a new course for welfare workers.

In 1967, Anne's husband Bruce was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer, from which he tragically passed away in 1973. Like her mother, Anne was left a single parent, and juggled raising her children, running the farm and her own career, which was a remarkable one.

***My intellectual horizons
quickly expanded beyond
my boundaries on the
farm...***

Several weeks after Bruce's death, Anne was invited to stand for preselection in the Senate, having been involved with the Labor party in the federal seat of Farrer. She was unsuccessful, but it was the beginning of great things. Over the coming years, Anne worked as a Social Planner at the Albury-Wodonga Development Corporation, was employed by the Wran government to implement the childcare policies that had been part of Labor's election promises, led a delegation to Moscow for an International Year of the Child conference, and undertook a travelling fellowship from the US Children's Defence Fund to study childcare policies in America.

Anne's life has been one of tragedy and triumph and extraordinary achievement, all of which can be read about in her aforementioned memoir, *The Country Wife*. Today, Anne is working on the publication of a second book, and in her own words, 'more of the best is still to come'.



Lynne Graham

When Lynne retired from her teaching career, she did all the things that people do in retirement. She travelled the world, spent time with family, tackled outstanding jobs at home, and enjoyed meeting up with friends for coffee. But she had a sense that something was missing.

Possessing a strong Christian faith, she asked God to show her what she could do to make a difference. Two words came to her, 'soup kitchen.'

So, in 2017, Lynne set up the Community Kitchen at the Wagga Baptist Church. Working together with a team of volunteers, around 60 homeless and needy people within the community were provided with a two-course meal every Wednesday night.

However, it soon became apparent that this weekly service wasn't enough to meet the greater need.

In early 2018 a small team from Wagga visited the Carevan Foundation in Albury, with a view to establishing Carevan Wagga. On their return, public interest within the community was so overwhelming that under Lynne's management, Carevan Wagga Inc. was launched on 30 November 2018, with the first meals ready to be served in February 2019.

Throughout that first year, Lynne's vision for a service to provide support to locals experiencing hardship, food insecurity, social isolation, homelessness, domestic violence or disadvantage, went from strength to strength.

My days were busy, but I felt a need to do something that would make a difference to someone, somewhere.

Wagga high schools were enlisted to do the cooking, and the former Tolland Hardware Store on Fernleigh Road was acquired and refurbished as a purpose-built facility, including a commercial kitchen, storage space, cool room, office and boardroom.

When Covid was declared in March 2020, Carevan activities and meals were suspended. In response, Wagga Mayor Greg Conkey initiated a special meeting at Council, with service providers and welfare agencies invited to attend. The result was Carevan providing meals that could be cooked, packaged and frozen to be distributed by service providers. This alleviated the hardships for the needy until Carevan was able to resume their sit-down meals at venues across the city in June 2022.

Currently over 550 meals are distributed each week through service providers to their clients. Carevan also runs sit-down night meals at four venues across Wagga, and the number of guests varies between 50-80 each fortnight. Carevan's total output for 2023 was 25,000 meals!

This award is throwing the net out a little bit wider to what women across the community can do and have done.

Wagga has been Lynne's home for 40 years, but she has never been a woman who sought recognition within the community. So, it came as a surprise to her when she was recognised as Wagga's Citizen of the Year 2020. But undeniably that recognition was well deserved.

Over the past five years volunteering as Carevan manager, Lynne has spent many hours working on the programs offered and making sure that the operation runs smoothly every day. Her biggest challenge has been trying to ensure a suitable work/life balance, which has not always been easy, but luckily, she has been supported by her husband and family.

On Monday 18 December 2023, Lynne handed over the managerial reins to Wendy Fritsch and is looking forward to enjoying more quality time with her loved ones, while hopefully taking time to 'smell the roses.'

What a legacy she leaves behind!

People have said to me "You are Carevan", but I always reply that "WE are Carevan."

Coinciding with International Women's Day Lynne was named the 2024 Wagga Woman of the Year. It was not only a fitting end to her time with Carevan but a well-deserved reward for the woman who has worked tirelessly to help those less fortunate - in the process, making the city a better place to live.



Laurinda Kelleher

Laurinda Kelleher is one of only a handful of drag kings in the Riverina.

A lesser-known representation of drag culture, drag kings can be loosely described as an individual who consciously adopts a masculine persona.

It was, perhaps ironically, at Burning Seed 2019 that a lifechanging seed of an idea was planted in Laurinda's mind. It was there that her friend Rose Quartz (a well-known Wagga drag queen) suggested to Laurinda that she should try drag.

As a burlesque artist, for Laurinda, drag was a perfect fit. As a child, she loved two things – dressing up in the costumes her mother Glenda made her, and her grandfather, Roy. Both aspects are embodied by Laurinda's alter ego, Tom Roy.

While Tom Roy is a tribute to her tomboy youth, he is also a nod to that special relationship she shared with her grandfather.

Laurinda built Tom's "look" by combining some of the strong male personalities from her childhood. In Tom, we see glimpses of Gene Kelly, David Bowie and Jimmy Barnes. In Laurinda's words "quite the mishmash!"

***I love to wear a suit...
I feel so powerful.***

Debuting at Romano's Hotel, Tom took to the stage alongside a trio of burlesque performers. For the country-inspired number, Laurinda managed to borrow a pair of genuine leather cowboy chaps resplendent with stars. Since then, she has amassed for Tom a collection of outfits that are as flamboyant as both her personality and her on-stage persona.

Performing in drag has not only given Laurinda the freedom to indulge her masculine side, she also enjoys pandering to her inner 'show pony' - something that her four children love to tease her about.

So many positives come from Laurinda taking to the stage as Tom, but their relationship is mutually beneficial. While her everyday job as a teacher gave Laurinda

the confidence to stand up in front of a wide variety of people, performing as Tom feeds her creativity - in the long run, making her a better teacher.

Perhaps most importantly, drag kings are challenging society's preconceptions surrounding gender.

Being born in the Riverina, Laurinda has first-hand experience in how difficult life can be for those who don't fit the accepted 'mould' dictated by society. When Laurinda performs drag, she is helping to break down existing stereotypes. She is also able to live her life more authentically and with greater acceptance.

For those wanting to follow in her footsteps, Laurinda gives the following advice: "dress up and dance in front of the mirror to your favourite songs... fall in love with yourself and the way you move, deep dive online and find the kings you admire and surround yourself with supportive people."

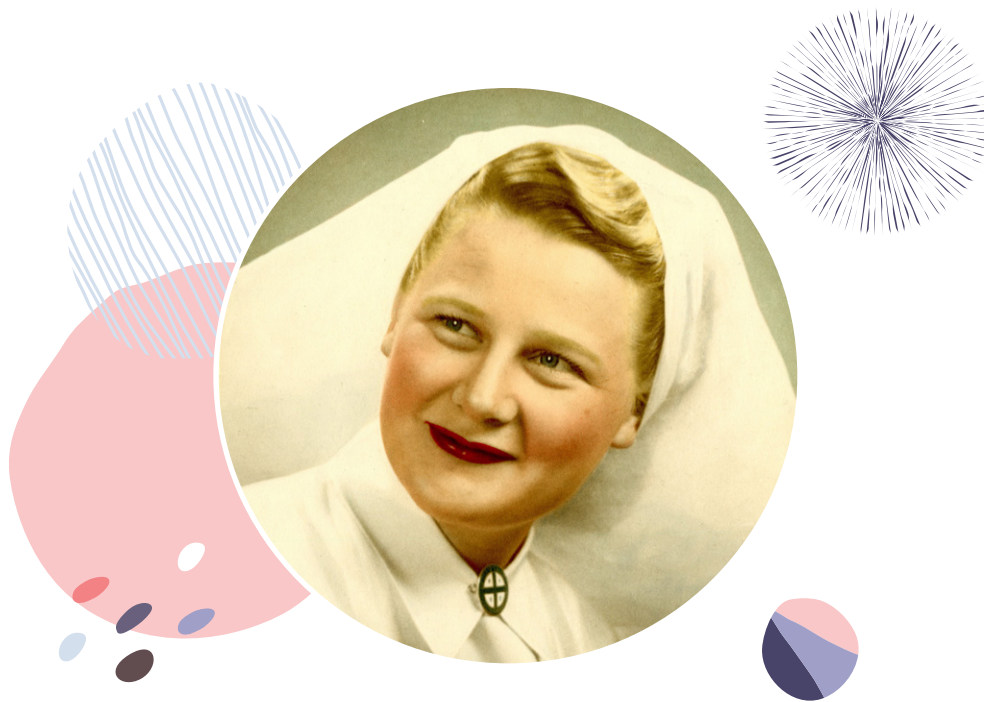
As for the future?

Laurinda's greatest hope is that every woman in Wagga can be 'whoever the hell they want to be without fear of recrimination or upsetting the establishment.' In the grand scheme of things, that's not too much to ask is it?

Women tend to take on more of the role of maintaining the household, looking after the children; the art and the drag gets put to the side in favour of the family coming first. Drag, burlesque, or art feeds you and helps you become a better parent, so it's important to make sure that you find the balance between caring for your family and nurturing and caring for yourself.

I've come a long way. I think I have learnt to embrace all sides of who I am: the feminine and masculine.





Heather Kancans

Visitors who press the electronic bell at Heather Kancan's front door are greeted by Offenbach's *Infernal Galop*, recognisable to many as the energetic piece of music made famous by the Cancan dancers of France. The door is answered by Heather, a sprightly 93-year-old with a cheeky smile and twinkle in her eye. Her choice of doorbell chime is not only a nod to her married name but also instantly reveals her keen sense of humour.

Heather May McLean was born on 7 March 1931 in Goulburn Private Hospital, the only daughter of Myrtle and William McLean. Heather's two older brothers – Russell and Bill – were 12 and 9 years older than her respectively, and both saw active service during World War II. At the time of her siblings' enlistment, Heather was a primary school pupil, first in Murrumburrah and then at Goulburn.

At school geography was Heather's favourite subject. She enjoyed learning about the environment, what the rest of the world looked like as well as discovering different nationalities. Heather hoped to become a teacher when she grew up.

After 57 years, Wagga Wagga feels like home...

However, in the post-war era, it wasn't a given that girls would continue onto higher education, especially university when they left school. Great importance was still placed upon conservative social values, and in adulthood, many young women were expected to undertake domestic responsibilities within the home rather than

participate in public life or enter the workforce.

Despite her adolescent dreams of teaching on leaving school Heather enrolled in a business course at TAFE. There, the practical office skills she acquired, including typing and shorthand, greatly aided her in gaining employment in the offices of Goulburn solicitors Galland & Co.

But a career as a secretary wasn't to be. Finding her office job unfulfilling, Heather determined to undertake further study in the hope of becoming a nurse. With friends already training in Sydney, it was an easy decision for Heather to make. Leaving her

hometown behind, she commenced her four years' nursing training at Camperdown Children's Hospital.

Trainee nurses worked long hours and divided their time between hands-on training and theory lessons spent in the classroom. Practical nursing procedures included (but were not limited to) patient sponging, methods of hospital bed making, bandaging, invalid cookery, preparing patients for surgery, mastering surgical dressings, learning urinalysis and how to chart the vitals for each patient on the ward.

With each passing year, increasingly complex skills were added to the repertoire of the trainee nurse as they took on greater responsibilities on the wards.

When Heather moved to Camperdown, she worked with babies and children, regularly nursing infants suffering from either polio or tuberculosis (TB).

After completing her time in Sydney, Heather moved to Adelaide in 1954, where she undertook 12 months of specialist training in obstetrics.

Now a registered nurse, Heather returned to Goulburn, before taking her first position at Crookwell Hospital in 1955. The hours were long, and during that time, she frequently dealt with premature births, which prior to the invention of the humidicrib, took a great amount of extra care, requiring Heather and her colleagues providing each infant three-hourly feeds day and night.

Having nursed at Crookwell for three years, in 1958 Heather was appointed Sister in Charge of the children's ward at Goulburn Base Hospital. It was there, during a major upgrade to the hospital, that Heather met Latvian emigrant Alfred 'Fred' Kancans, who was foreman on the building site.

Fred and Heather became friends and married in Goulburn on 11 February 1967 before settling in Wagga, where Fred continued working in the construction industry. Fred built the family home in Tolland and they welcomed two children, Lisa in 1967 and Robert in 1970.

Sadly, Fred died in 1976 at the age of just 54. Shortly afterwards, Heather's brother Russell and his wife Jessie moved from Albury to Wagga to help support Heather and the children. Life continued for Heather, and her children kept her busy. Both Lisa and Robert attended university and went on to have children of their own.

Music also helped Heather in her loss, having always played a large part in her life. For many years Heather played the organ at St. Aidan's Presbyterian Church on Coleman Street and she relished being a part of that community. In addition to playing the piano and organ, Heather also worked for Sturt Home Nursing, in a role that saw her looking after Veterans and their carers.

The arrival of grandchildren has brought much joy to my life.

Today, Heather still lives in her family home, which is filled with so many happy memories. When the time comes, Heather will be reunited with her beloved Fred, and rest for eternity alongside him at the Wagga Lawn Cemetery. Until then, with the encouragement of her many friends and precious family, Heather will continue to enjoy life, and bring a smile to all who cross her path.



Karen Kime

Karen Kime has always been committed to social justice for all Australians.

Karen's family are of the Dingo clan of the Biripi nation whose totem is water. Her people have a long history of struggling for human rights.

Karen grew up in the western suburbs of Sydney. As a young woman, she witnessed the arrival of the 'boat people', whose struggles in a new land influenced her deeply. Karen left school at the age of 14, and after several years of working in Sydney, she travelled remote Australia. It was here she developed a deep love of the outback and its many small communities.

Settling in Wagga in 1983, Karen enrolled at Charles Sturt University (CSU), graduating with a Bachelor of Arts (Sociology) and a Master of Arts in Applied Science with a focus on Cultural Heritage. In 1996 she felt a calling to ministry and enrolled in a BA in Theology at St Marks Theological College in Canberra.

Cultural Heritage is very much immersed in 'Country' which nurtures and watches over us. It holds the history and the stories of our people. Likewise, I have always had a fascination and love of people. For me, both go together naturally and are interconnected.

In 2000 Karen made history, becoming the first Indigenous woman ordained into the Anglican Church of NSW. Based in the Riverina, Karen served as parish priest in the Koorawatha Parish (near Young) and the joint parish of Coleambally and Darlington Point, before returning to Wagga in 2010, where she served as acting rector of St. John's for 18 months, then as a priest for 10 years.

As a Reverend, Karen's passion for social justice and her vivacious personality hadn't gone unnoticed by church leaders. In February 2012 she was appointed Archdeacon - Indigenous Ministries for the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, the first Indigenous woman ordained as an Archdeacon in the Anglican Church of Australia.

Karen has used her position to better the lives of the disenfranchised, especially women and Indigenous Australians. In 2013 she attended the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations in New York, where she delivered a national report on domestic violence experienced by First Nations people. That same year, Karen was appointed as a national ambassador for Reconciliation and spoke at national and international gatherings on its importance.

Being a woman AND Indigenous has meant that acceptance as a leader has involved many struggles.

In her time employed at CSU, Karen developed the first Indigenous subjects in the areas of primary education, social work and theology. She was also an Indigenous Academic Fellow and lectured in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. Today, her journey with CSU continues. Karen has a great belief in the power of education.

The Anglican Church continues to commit to Reconciliation. In her role as General Manager (Indigenous Services and Education) for Anglicare (Goulburn and Canberra), Karen contributed greatly to this outcome. Leading a Working Group in the development and implementation of Anglicare's first Reconciliation Action Plan, she helped ensure that Aboriginal children, young people and families who are connected to Anglicare, receive the care that they need.

I hope to see fewer barriers and more opportunities for all women.

Going forward, Karen has great hopes for the future women of Wagga. She believes every woman has something important to

offer and that we must work against discrimination and all barriers between people. Karen hopes to see an appreciation of the importance of diversity, and a celebration of such within our institutions and everyday life. Only then, she says, "can we all be enriched."





Nabiha Koriaty

Nabiha Koriaty is a local treasure.

35 years ago she opened Nabiha's Kitchen in the Neslo Arcade. A small, unassuming café, redolent with the smells of exotic spices, it is here Nabiha can be found most days, shrouded in wonderful aromas that must surely remind her of her birthplace in a land far away.

Born in 1941 at Rashaya Al Foukhar, Lebanon at the height of World War II, Nabiha was just one month old when her family fled their village due to fighting and trekked across icy mountains seeking refuge.

After losing her mother to heart disease at the age of three, Nabiha was raised by her three brothers and her father, who was a potter by trade. After the war Nabiha's father travelled selling his pottery to buy food for his family. Despite the hardships of her childhood, growing up without electricity, gas, running water or even a toilet, Nabiha had a close bond with her family and was surrounded by love and laughter.

At 16, Nabiha moved to Beirut, to work at the English School. Employed as a domestic cleaner, she used to finish her chores quickly so she could spend the rest of her time in the kitchen. It was here that she asked the chef a lot of questions and learned to cook Lebanese food.

In 1967, Nabiha met and married her husband Karam. Due to both family pressures and financial strain, their first few years of married life weren't easy. After Karam lost his job as a printer in 1968, the couple made the decision to emigrate to Australia. Karam went first by plane, and Nabiha followed on the ship 'Australis', bringing their daughters Angie and Jos aged two and four.

I left everything in Lebanon, except my Bible.

Even though Nabiha couldn't speak English when she arrived in Australia, she immediately went to work, finding jobs where she could. After three years in Melbourne and the birth of a third daughter, Viki, the family relocated to Wagga in 1973.

Throughout it all, Nabiha cooked and in 1980 began selling her food at the Sunday Markets. In 1989 she opened her café Nabiha's Kitchen. Even though Karam had been against the idea, Nabiha knew she could make it a success, so she went behind his back, surprising the whole family when her business opened its doors to the public.

For the past 35 years Nabiha has been tempting customers with her falafel, baklava, Turkish Delight and other homemade delicacies. Not to mention serving up some strong Lebanese coffee! Nabiha's Kitchen is more than a simple café serving and selling a range of savoury and sweet delights. Over the years, the store has seen thousands of new (and familiar) faces come through its flyscreen door. In addition to Nabiha's regular customers, countless new arrivals to Wagga particularly from the Middle East have received a warm reception from the Kitchen's owner. At Nabiha's they discovered companionship, made connections in their new community and in a sense, found a 'home away from home.'

***That's why I am here,
I like to help.***

In 2013 Nabiha published a book, Lebanese Recipe of My Life in which her life story is told through photographs, snippets of memories of her life across the last eight decades and recipes for the Lebanese food that even today, ties Nabiha's soul to her home far away and the loved ones she has lost.

I never sit down, and I love it.

Now 83, Nabiha has the energy of someone half her age. Typically working a 14-hour day, she not only cooks in the kitchen, but runs the restaurant and even grows her own vegetables. She also finds time to attend church daily.

To the residents of Wagga, Nabiha is more than just a cook. Since opening her kitchen, she has supported those in need within the community, from feeding the homeless and university students, employing those down on their luck, or just providing a welcoming place for people from all backgrounds to connect.

One thing is for sure. Long after she is gone, Nabiha will be remembered for more than just her food. She'll be remembered for her kindness and her incredibly big heart.



Aunty Gail Manderson

Proud Wiradjuri Elder Aunty Gail Manderson is Wagga born and bred. She came into the world as Colleen Wilma West, delivered at the Wagga Base Hospital on 17 April 1952. At just five days old, she was adopted by a loving local couple, Doreen and Jimmy Barrett.

As no records of her adoption have been found, Gail does not know whether she was part of the Stolen Generation. Her unknown heritage is something that not only affected her childhood, but like a stone dropped in a pond, has sent ripples reverberating through her adult life.

Despite not knowing why her mother gave her away, Gail was grateful for her adoptive parents, being especially close to her mother who, she says “was a very special person.” Sadly, her father died of tuberculosis when she was seven, and ten years later, she lost her mother. Both losses were a great shock to young Gail, who was still just a teenager.

When she was 19, Gail fell pregnant with her son Brett. Although still mourning her parents, the little boy brought joy to her life. When Brett was two and a half, Gail married Steve Manderson, and together, they had a daughter, Eliza-Jane. The family moved around, living in several places including Moruya, Sydney, Griffith, Yass, Blackheath and Maclean. When her marriage broke down after 17 years, Gail returned to her hometown, and continued tracing her birthmother.

Growing up, I knew I was different. There was always something drawing me home and when I came back, I felt at peace.

In Wagga, she met people who had known her mother. In fact, she found out that their paths had crossed many times previously. But Gail's mother was resolute in her decision to not meet her daughter, and it is something that Gail has come to accept.

Having been raised by white parents, Gail felt that she had lost that natural connection to her cultural heritage and began searching for her

own Aboriginality. A great turning point in her life's journey came on 28 October 2003, with the bestowal of a 'Confirmation of Aboriginality' upon her. With her Aboriginality officially recognised, the Indigenous community embraced Gail, and she was invited to join the Wagga Wagga Aboriginal Elders Group. The Elders have brought Gail peace, and today she considers them her second family.

Aunty Gail is now a Senior Elder, a much-respected figure in the City of Wagga. She has actively worked on educating future (and current) generations about the culture that is so much a part of her.

More than 60 years after her adoption, Aunty Gail finally learned the Wiradjuri language, graduating in 2016 from Charles Sturt University with a Graduate Certificate in Wiradjuri Language, Culture and Heritage. This has allowed Gail to keep her language and heritage alive, especially for her grandkids.

In 2019, Aunty Gail wrote and launched My First Wiradjuri Dictionary. The children's book was created with the help of a class at Turvey Park Primary School and is to assist future generations of young students learn the Wiradjuri language, in a fun way. Gail now has over 17 years' experience as a school educator, teaching Wiradjuri culture through song, language, games, stories, weaving and cooking.

Aunty Gail is one of Wagga's most exceptional Master Weavers. She creates woven baskets, mats, dillybags, jewellery, string bags, Aboriginal dolls and animals, nets and scoops. There is a collection of her work in the Museum of Sydney, and she has also sold baskets to Museums Victoria and to private collectors in Seattle, New York and Milan.

Wagga is a far better place now that Aunty Gail is ngurambang (home).

When I'm talking in Wiradjuri, it feels like I've come home.





Jada Mathysen-Whyman

Born and raised in Wagga, professional footballer Jada Mathysen-Whyman is a proud Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta woman.

As a child, Jada played AFL. But with no female teams in Wagga, her beloved pop, Hewitt Whyman suggested that she give football a try. And she did, playing her first match at Wagga's Bolton Park aged just ten. For Jada, success followed quickly. Within a year, she was selected for the NSW Country Team. In 2013, she was selected to play for the Young Matildas in the Asian U16 Women's Championships in Nanjing, China.

I think being an Indigenous athlete at this time, it's great to be able to be a role model for young kids. I don't sometimes see myself as one, but I guess I do things that might inspire some kids. Being a female Indigenous athlete, all these barriers that have been in the past for people that shouldn't be barriers ... I think overcoming them now and showing that other people can do it is a pretty cool position to be in.

Five years later, she became part of the main Matildas squad, playing friendlies in France and England. Today, she is goalkeeper for Sydney FC and is a rising star in the W-League.

But the road to success was one full of challenges. If it wasn't for the constant support of her family, Jada may not have realised her dream.

At 14, Jada joined the Macarthur Rams, a semi-professional football club based in Campbelltown, NSW. Whilst a great opportunity, it meant a lot of weekly travel for both Jada and her mother Vanessa. Every Friday, the pair would travel from Wagga to Canberra, where Jada was training with Paul Jones at his elite Canberra goalkeeping academy.

Then, every Saturday afternoon, it was off to Sydney to play for the Rams the following day.

In the end, Jada, her mother, stepfather and three siblings temporarily relocated to Canberra to live with a relative. While this arrangement worked initially, the family ended up living in a tent for more than two months due to overcrowding.

One positive that emerged from this situation, was a realisation within Football Federation Australia (FAA) that more needs to be done to support Indigenous footballers to make it in the sport. Especially those living in remote areas.

The family eventually moved to Sydney, where Jada attended Westfield's Sports High School, a move that paid off. In 2015, Jada signed to play for the Western Sydney Wanderers, becoming the second youngest ever W-League goalkeeper with her debut in the Sydney Derby.

In recent years, Jada has spent her fair share of time sidelined due to injury. This brought her to the realisation that injuries are a big part of sport. It's tested her commitment to the game she loves, but also given her the knowledge to look after her mind and body a little better because of these experiences.

But she still has many football ambitions for the future.

Jada dreams of playing in a World Cup and at the Olympics (both things that are entirely possible) and would like to move overseas to play football. Her other main priority at present, is finishing her Bachelor of Commerce degree at Sydney University.

A role model for female Indigenous Australian football players, Jada doesn't believe that she needs to bestow any particular wishes or dreams on Wagga's future Indigenous women. Why? Because she knows they're already all deadly as!

It was a dream come true. To be among and train with top players is a privilege, but also to represent your country at the highest level is also a huge honour.





Janine Middlemost

As we continue our journey into the 21st century, society seems to be increasingly preoccupied with instant gratification. We expect high speed internet, next-day shipping, and fast food. But it isn't just our food that is fast, it is also our fashion.

Step into the store Middlemost, and you will find owner and creator Janine Middlemost surrounded by her colourful creations, her store a calm oasis at the centre of this fast-paced maelstrom we call modern life.

Born in Cooma, NSW, Janine moved to Wagga with her parents in 1985. After completing her senior schooling at Mt Erin and Holy Trinity, she left for Sydney in 1987 to study fashion design at East Sydney Technical College (now the National Art School).

Returning to Wagga to live in the 1990s, Janine continued her studies at Wagga TAFE, learning garment manufacture, pattern making and pattern grading. It was at this time that she discovered her love of vintage fabrics. Having always been an avid op shopper who enjoyed wearing vintage clothing, it was a natural progression for her to start sourcing fabrics and textiles on these thrifting expeditions.

Janine started making clothing and accessories to sell in 2002 and decided to use her surname as her label. Her business grew quickly, and in addition to selling online, she also sold her stock wholesale to approximately 15 retailers across Australia.

Everything made by Janine can be described as 'slow fashion'. A movement created as a direct response to the harmful impact of fast fashion on both the environment and garment makers, slow fashion advocates for making clothing choices that are kinder and more sustainable to people and the planet.

I love the history. I love that the fabrics have had a previous life. It's a beautiful thing to rescue someone else's work in embroidery or patchwork and give it a new life.

In 2020, Janine took the next exciting step in her career, when, alongside other local creatives, she was given the opportunity to participate in the Renew Wagga program (an initiative of Eastern Riverina Arts). Middlemost, a bricks and mortar shop in Wagga's CBD, was born. When Renew Wagga concluded after a year, Janine stayed in her shop, taking on a commercial contract, and has never looked back!

Today, Janine sells her unique bespoke clothing not only in her shop and online, but also attends fairs like The Makers & Shakers Market in Sydney and Melbourne and the Handmade Market in Canberra, bringing her creations to a wider audience.

Janine sees her current journey in slow fashion continuing well into the future. With sales being a primary focus for growing her business, she also hopes to empower others to 'make do and mend.' This, she does through an annual series of workshops, introducing new audiences to not only the joys of op-shopping, but teaching them the skills required for them to create their own bespoke garments.

I design and make all of my pattern blocks, and each garment is made so it fits a variety of body sizes and shapes. This is primarily because I only make one of each garment, no two are the same.





Kate Morell

Kate Morell has never been defined by her disabilities.

Asked to describe herself in five words, Kate responds with daring, empathetic, compassionate, stubborn and introspective. These words can be viewed as the character traits that have served Kate well on her life journey so far.

Born in Sydney, Kate moved to Wagga in 1982 with her family – parents Ray and Helen Mullins and brothers Lachlan and Brian. Her life changed at the age of two, when her parents discovered that she was deaf. Kate's second challenge came at 15, when the condition retinitis pigmentosa led to a diagnosis of Usher Syndrome, a rare genetic disease that affects both hearing and vision. Doctors warned Kate that she could be blind by the age of 40.

Being young, Kate didn't entirely grasp the implications of her condition, thinking somehow, someday, there would be a cure. Meanwhile, she got on with her life.

And live she did.

After graduating from Charles Sturt University with a degree in Graphic Design, followed by a few years working in Sydney, Kate followed the well-worn path of many young Australians, heading overseas on a working holiday. Armed with a keen sense of adventure, Kate relished stepping off the beaten track, travelling extensively throughout the UK, Scandinavia and Europe.

The one thing I'd like people to do is to forget my ears and forget my eyes – it's such a minor part of who I am. Just see me.

From sleeping under the stars on ferry decks while island hopping in Croatia to hiking the Swiss Alps and wandering the cold, damp streets of Venice seeking the warmth of the winter sun, to being detained overnight at the Hungarian/Slovakian border. Then, and on successive holidays, Kate created memories that would last a lifetime.

It was on a later holiday to Cuba that Kate met her future husband, Adolfo.

As if her extensive world travels weren't inspiring enough, Kate's next step was intensely personal, when she decided to 'come out' publicly and reveal the frailty of her vision to the world, with a unique fundraiser 'Lap the main with my cane.' Picking up her white cane, Kate took to the streets of Wagga, lapping the main not in a car like most locals, but on her own two feet.

Despite almost being wiped out by a careless driver on a pedestrian crossing on the first day - a huge hit to her confidence - Kate persevered and Ushering Kate, a global awareness campaign, was born.

To me, it was going from invisible to visible. Like, "Hey world, look at me. See, I have a cane!"

Kate's subsequent project came about when she was watching a sunset, and Sunsets for Kate was conceived.

Wondering what she would miss if she was blind, Kate told her husband that after family, she would most miss the beauty of sunsets. Calculating that she would miss 14,610 sunsets if she lost her vision at 50 and lived to 90, Kate appealed to the public to share their sunsets with her.

First, she was excited to receive ten. But then the Australian photographic community embraced the project, and Channel 10 weatherman Tim Bailey promoted it live on air. Soon, Kate was flooded with thousands of sunsets from across the globe.

So where to from here for this brave and fiercely independent woman?

I treasure travel memories of places I experienced 'off the beaten track' (before tourism brought crowds) and 'off grid' (before mobile phones and internet connection).

With a love of writing and art, Kate sees herself penning not only a memoir, but non-fiction articles and essays, a work of fiction involving characters with similar life experiences to her own, children's picture books, and an immersive

art exhibition about her life with Usher Syndrome. And of course, sunsets. Let's not forget the sunsets.

Whatever eventuates - and we are pretty sure it will be all the above - Kate is an inspiration, and we are excited to see where her future path will wind.



Mariam Rehman

In mid-2022, Wagga's Daily Advertiser newspaper featured an article announcing that Habibi Chicken, a Middle Eastern-Australian charcoal chicken shop, was opening soon on Fitzmaurice Street. Looking out from the accompanying photograph was the smiling face of 23-year-old Mariam Rehman, co-founder of the business.

Although born and bred in Wagga, Mariam proudly embodies both her Australian and Pakistani-Muslim heritage. It is these two cultures that have been combined to produce something truly unique in Wagga's foodscape with Habibi Chicken.

An enterprise conceived by her older brother during Covid-19, Habibi Chicken was not Mariam's first foray into the business world.

Mariam was just 16 when she applied for her first ABN (Australian Business Number) and started her own commercial photography business. Hired to shoot weddings, private events and portraits, this early venture provided the teen with invaluable first-hand insight into business basics, the good and the bad.

In 2024, it is not surprising that at just 25, Mariam has become a successful businesswoman, with three businesses already under her belt.

Creativity has always encouraged me to think outside of the box, even when most people are taught to stay inside of it.

After leaving school, Mariam 'followed the herd' and took the expected path, enrolling at university, to study accounting and finance. After winding up her photography business, she began to dabble in digital marketing, even freelancing for a period. Discovering a natural talent in client management and strategy, Mariam created the agency Cre8tive Co., and found it was there that her heart lay.

Mariam always felt that her potential was being limited to her geographical location. When a desire to push against the odds sparked her curiosity, she wondered if her existing skills could be used to create

an organisation that combined her business acumen and her passion for marketing and branding.

It was during a family trip to Pakistan in 2018 that Mariam decided to abandon her studies and pursue her creative dream and brand consultancy Monale (monn-nal) was born.

As Managing Director of the company, Mariam works with large global clients including Jurlique, Nutrien Ag Solutions, Southern Cross University, Hamilton Locke, Ronald McDonald House Charities, PCYC and more.

Monale also works with local businesses, for example Al Maghrib on Fitzmaurice Street. While most just see a Moroccan café, Mariam sees 'a place where each guest is treated as a traveller visiting Morocco for the first time.' Her unique approach to marketing is evident in their beautiful branding.

Today, Mariam still resides in Wagga, and through Monale, leads teams across Australia and Dubai, continuing in her vision to inspire others to achieve growth through creative thinking, despite their geographical location. As for Habibi Chicken, she has great ambitions. With a view to growing the business, she has plans to retail their sauces and potentially expand into other states through franchising opportunities.

It is evident that Mariam is a young lady with not only a promising future, but an exciting one! Watch this space.

I'd like to start a family of my own and become more community involved... I hope to give my own children the tools to make their own life decisions, nurture their talents without forcing them on a particular route and grow their self-confidence so that they can make positive change in the world.

Being in Wagga was the catalyst to my life and business experience.





Katrina Retallick

It wouldn't be surprising if you found Katrina Retallick's face familiar.

From her first stage performance playing a glow worm and spider in the musical Cabbage Patch Corner as a student of Louise Blackett's Children's Theatre (aged about 11), to television, film, and theatre roles, this incredibly talented and versatile actress has become one of Australia's foremost leading ladies.

But careers don't happen overnight. Katrina began to hone her craft with 'on the job' training. Her first big shows were with the Wagga Wagga School of Arts, performing alongside the adult company in musicals including The Music Man, West Side Story and Oklahoma!

With that first taste of musical theatre and a focus on classical voice in her HSC,

Ensemble, 'handmade' theatre thrills me the most. While I appreciate and enjoy being in the bigger shows with huge budgets, my real passion is in the transformative power of the performer.

Katrina went on to study a BA at Sydney University, and during that time, performed in over 15 shows with SUDS (Sydney University Dramatic Society). After graduation, she moved to London to study Creative Theatre Making at the Central School of Speech and Drama. A highlight of that period was performing in a Richard O'Brien cabaret at the Edinburgh Festival.

Her first lead role in a stage musical came in August 2003, when she starred as Ensign Nellie Forbush in South

Pacific at Melbourne's State Theatre. Since then, Katrina has been fortunate to play many wonderful and well-written characters. From Alice Bienenke in The Addams Family and Alice Bean in Titanic to Guinevere in Camelot and Diane in Come from Away, yet Nellie still holds a special place in her heart.

In addition to treading the boards, in an impressively long list of productions, Katrina has also worked in television and film. She was a regular cast member on Nine's sketch show Comedy Inc. for four seasons and has also appeared on ABC's The Chaser's CXXX and Backberner, in season 3 of Bump and in Network Nine's Love Child. Her next TV role is in a soon to be released series for Disney Plus called The Last Days of the Space Age.

Her film credits include the operatic feature film The Eternity Man (2008) and Accidents Happen with Geena Davis (2009). In 2006, she worked as an in-studio reader in Flushed Away, where she relished the opportunity to observe Hugh Jackman and Miriam Margoyles voice their roles. Katrina also enjoyed playing opposite Noni Hazelhurst in the recent Australian feature film June Again.

In 2020, Covid-19 surprisingly provided Katrina with the opportunity to create something fun, fantastic and experimental - Australia's first live-streamed musical, Who's Your Baghdaddy. With rehearsals taking place mostly via Zoom, the cast made this satirical off-Broadway musical a reality (in isolation) for five performances.

Each actor performed in their own room with a camera, monitor, headphones (and high internet speed!) It was a great success and garnered critical acclaim both here and in New York.

Today, Katrina spends much of her time teaching, both privately and at Sydney's Brent Street Performance Academy. She has a show coming up mid-year and continues to audition whenever possible, all of this while parenting her nine-year-old daughter and three step-kids!

Having successfully navigated her way through more than 20 years in the industry, Katrina has become an audience and critic's favourite alike, while also becoming a passionate and motivating role model for our performers of tomorrow.

I was always interested in singing, song writing, playing musical instruments, acting, design and art making. I was never sure which one to focus on!



Jan Roberts

Jan Roberts has always been rebellious. A personality trait characterised by non-conforming tendencies, free-minded independent thinking, passion, intelligence and determination; it is one that has served Jan well throughout life in her unending quest for social justice and women's rights.

Born in Corowa, NSW in 1950, Jan was three when her family moved to Leeton, and there she spent her formative years, attending Leeton Public and Leeton High Schools.

Desirous of following in her grandfather Oscar Broderick's footsteps as a teacher, Jan knew that in order to "escape" her small conservative hometown, she would have to excel in the HSC and win a scholarship.

***As long as I can remember
I always believed that the
world should be fair.***

Sydney, that vibrant action-filled city, was her desired destination. After being awarded a teacher's scholarship in 1969, Jan commenced her studies at The University of Sydney; her academic ambitions fully supported by her parents Anne and Bill.

It was there she made history, as one of the first 40 female students admitted into Wesley College. Housing 240 students, Wesley was under the leadership of the radical Methodist Reverend Norman Webb. Unlike the other university residences, which segregated men and women's accommodation, the sexes mingled freely at Wesley, a move that at the time was viewed by many as scandalous.

In addition to readying her for a career as a high school teacher, university exposed Jan to activism, perhaps unsurprising considering the social and political upheaval of Australia during that era. Already against conscription and the Vietnam War that was then raging, to that, Jan added an interest in women's rights.

Having joined the NSW Teachers Federation in the early 1970s, Jan discovered that female members, sick of being treated differently to their male counterparts within the Federation had formed their own caucus. Their objective was to work against sexism in the workplace, the Federation, in curricula and in existing attitudes towards female students.

After five years living in Sydney, Jan moved closer to home, taking up the position of history teacher at Wagga's Mt. Austin High School in mid-1974. Having settled into her new life, Jan continued with her activism. She always attended Union meetings, joined the Wagga branch of the Labor Party, and the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL). Her time in Sydney had opened Jan's eyes to some common issues facing women, especially when it came to their reproductive health.

Whilst a student at university, Jan had become used to on-campus health services prescribing the contraceptive pill on demand, with no issues surrounding morality, relationship status and the like. However, society in her new hometown wasn't as permissive. In Wagga, Jan discovered that women's control of their own fertility was in no way a given. Contraception was a vexed issue and talk of abortion in the public arena forbidden.

Wagga was, and still can be, a very Catholic town.

The first project that Jan worked on in Wagga was as a member of the WEL, organising local events to tie in with the United Nations International Women's Year (IWY) in 1975.

IWY had a great impact for women all around the world, even in conservative Wagga! It furthered the objectives of the Wagga branch of the WEL and gave hope to the dreams of women within the local community, who hoped for a better status for women's health in all its aspects. After all, if Sydney had feminist Women's Health Centres and access to Family Planning, then why couldn't a large regional centre like Wagga have the same?

The most enduring result of the IWY was the establishment of the Wagga Women's Health Centre (WWHC) in 1979, but this was not an easy task. Following four years of intense lobbying, meetings, public presentations, fundraising, and keeping in the face of local politicians, bureaucrats, local

We were here and no one was going to stop us.

conservative women's groups and local media, Jan and her colleagues realised that there was no interest within the community to fund a women's health service.

And so, the WWHC was established without any funding from the NSW Government but relied on volunteer labour for the first six years. Jan was one of those volunteers. She gave up teaching, and undertook training at Family Planning Australia (NSW branch), the Rape Crisis Centre and Liverpool Women's Health Centre. Through the WWHC, the women of Wagga had free access to information, contraception, support and choice. All things that had previously been denied to them.

Fast forward to 2024, and today, Jan looks back and marvels at how she and her group of likeminded activists took on the conservative, misogynistic, male-dominated Wagga power structures and achieved their goal.

Now, at the age of 74, Jan still holds many hopes for the future women of Wagga; fully funded services regarding birth control, the provision of abortion at the Public Hospital and domestic violence prevention and accommodation for those leaving DV relationships.

Most of all, Jan wants women's voices and wisdom to be heard and valued in every aspect of life – family, local, national and international. It is her belief that this is the only way that balance can be restored to a world that is in chaos.



Dawn Smith

Born in Bendigo, Victoria, three-year-old Dawn moved to Wagga with her family in 1943 when her father took over the Capitol Butchery on Baylis Street.

From her first job at Huthwaite's Department Store as a ticket writer and window dresser to her final business venture, Studio Australia, all of Dawn's endeavours since leaving school have involved the arts.

Dawn's career began in 1968, when she took up metalwork and pottery. Her first exhibition followed three years later, with a selection of her copperwork displayed at the Greta Collins Gallery on Gurwood Street. In 1973 she was amongst the first intake of students at the Riverina College of Advanced Education (now Charles Sturt University), enrolling in a Diploma of Creative Arts. The only mature age student, Dawn majored in silversmithing/jewellery and minored in ceramics and textiles.

Her skills in metalworking led to Dawn being approached by the Wagga Community Advancement Fund in 1975, to create a crown that would not only represent the tradition of the Miss Wagga Quest, but also be a symbol of the city itself. The result was the Mural Crown. A handcrafted work of art based on heraldic tradition which is still treasured today.

Art practice is very important for everyone, not just children. We all have some creativity in us, and we need to explore it.

After graduating from the RCAE in 1976, Dawn launched Rondon Gallery and Craft workshops, at her home in Lake Albert. This small craft gallery featured work by local craftspeople and a metal workshop, where Dawn conducted weekly classes in silver jewellery making.

Pursuing further studies in 1977, Dawn graduated from the RCAE with a Diploma in Art Education. She also undertook courses at the Mitchell School of Creative Art in Bathurst. Both experiences allowed her to teach adult classes through the Wagga Technical College (now Wagga TAFE). These included metalwork and jewellery on

the main campus, and painting and drawing at the College's satellite campuses, Lockhart, Urana, Coolamon and Junee.

Throughout the 1980s in addition to jewellery making, Dawn offered classes in candle making, china painting, watercolours, calligraphy, silk painting, batik, lead lighting, papermaking, folk painting and metalwork, all taught from her home studio.

When Dawn's husband Ron's sight began to deteriorate, affecting his employment, they went into the Hobby Ceramic industry together. Later, they were joined by daughter Cynthia.

In 1990, Dawn and Cynthia established Studio Australia. They specialised in the design and creation of Australian-inspired ceramic art, including their most popular piece, the Cockatoo table lamp. It was a niche market, but one that is still very successful today.

A high point for the business came in 2008, following a phone call from the secretary of Hollywood costume designer Catherine Martin.

To coincide with the release of Baz Lurhman's epic, Australia, Studio Australia was commissioned to create 300 ceramic kangaroos. Each handmade and hand painted 'roo was shipped all over the world to promote the movie - a once in a lifetime opportunity and a great accolade to Dawn's craftsmanship.

In 2023, Dawn and her family decided to sell the business. Aged 82, Dawn was ready to retire from full-time ceramic work and relax. Today, Studio Australia is based in Port Macquarie, but its heart still very much beats in Wagga; whilst Dawn is still creating ceramic art in her Wagga studio.

Our family located to the back garage of our home and continued to produce Australian birds and animals. We then began to make some of the bird figurines into lamp bases. In a very early episode of the TV series The Block our Sulphur Crested Cockatoo Lamp was featured. This was incredible advertising, and sales for all our lamps increased dramatically.



Ruby Riethmuller

Family has always been an inspiration to Ruby Riethmuller.

With her parents Jenni and Jeremy both running small businesses, Ruby learned about hard work, perseverance, resilience, building strong foundations and giving back to the community from a young age. She watched her parents make sacrifices, take calculated risks, create communities and bounce back after setbacks, all the while staying present for the people and things that they valued.

People don't necessarily change the world with the ideas in their mind, but the conviction in their heart.

For a young lady, these were big life lessons and ones that Ruby has not only taken on board, but has applied to *Womn-Kind*, the business she established in December 2020.

Born and raised in Wagga, Ruby was a pupil at South Wagga Public School before attending The Riverina Anglican College and then

Sydney's Ascham School for her senior years.

Growing up, Ruby considered several career paths. In primary school she wanted to be a vet, while in secondary school she hoped to become a movie director! However, after leaving school, she enrolled in a Bachelor of Design and Visual Communication at the University of Technology, Sydney.

Taking a gap year following her graduation in 2019, Ruby took full advantage of this pause in life between tertiary education and pursuing a career to experience the opportunities which lay beyond Australia's shores. She worked in a summer camp in America, volunteered as an English teacher in India and in between, fitted in a lot of travel.

Being a teenager is tough and for those suffering with anxiety as Ruby did in high school, it is even harder. When seeking guidance, she found that much of the existing mental health support available to herself and her friends felt out of touch, old-school and intimidating, rather than being a service tailored to youth.

In 2020, after returning home from her travels, Ruby felt a calling to create an organisation that would make this challenging period a little easier for girls like herself. She wanted to provide young women with life skills - inspiring, empowering and instilling hope within them rather than just responding to crisis situations when they arose. Ruby also aimed to create something more informal and relaxing for girls, which would hopefully make them more willing to engage.

The inspiration for Womn-Kind came from the belief that when girls rise, we all rise.

Built around the common refrain “I thought it was just me”, Ruby created *Womn-Kind*, born out of the lived experiences of Ruby and her peers during adolescence, and her realisation that teenage girls face a uniquely different set of challenges to their male counterparts.

The decision to remove the ‘e’ from ‘women’ is an attempt to make the name and organisation inclusive for anyone who identifies as a woman and for young people who are gender diverse. *Womn-Kind* is a business built around kindness, camaraderie and innovation. ‘Camaraderie’ is illustrated by the ‘big sister’ mentor program, in which recent school-leavers provide support to teenage and pre-teen girls to help them feel less isolated.

It feels like having the advice of a big sister in your pocket anytime, anywhere and always.

‘Innovation’ is demonstrated by the creation of the *Womn-Kind* App, which was made possible when Ruby won the \$30,000 ‘Buy from the Bush Big Break’ competition in 2021. This app is a first of its kind social wellness app, designed by the *Womn-Kind* team and a network of allied health professionals in consultation with over 400 young people from across Australia.

The *Womn-Kind* App presents young people with so many unique opportunities, providing them with access to hundreds of blogs relating to health, wellbeing, relationships, employment, study, sexual health and safe habits.

Since founding *Womn-Kind* Ruby has been shortlisted for the Young Australian of the Year, selected as a Future Women NSW Rural Scholar, a finalist in the 2024 Agrifutures Rural Women’s Award, nominated for the NSW Young Woman of the Year, a finalist in the Australia Post Diversity and Inclusion Impact Award, a NEXUS delegate and nominated as a Westfield Local Hero.

I have absolute confidence that the young people we are helping will leave this world a better place than they found it.

The part of her job that Ruby most enjoys is working with, learning from and supporting young people in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote communities across Australia. To know that on the ground, the service provided by her organisation is having a genuine impact on the lives of so many young people is not only satisfying but an honour.

There’s a well-known adage that the future of the world is in the hands of our children and it’s gratifying to know that with people like Ruby creating opportunities for our nation’s youth, our world is in great hands.



Sharon Spackman (Wilson)

On 1 September 1992, Sharon Spackman became one of the first (and few) female firefighters in the region and state, having been appointed as a Retained Firefighter¹ with the NSW Fire Brigade, based at 472 Turvey Park Fire Station.

Describing herself as compassionate, trustworthy, loyal, respectful and diligent, Sharon is also a bright spark. A delightfully appropriate characteristic for a firefighter.

Sharon's interest in firefighting came about quite by chance. The first time she became a firefighter, her then-partner was a Retained Firefighter. As she was often in his car when he was called to attend a fire, she made numerous trips to the fire station he was attached to.

***I became a firefighter
for the challenge in life
helping out the community
and just giving something
new a go...***

It was during one such call-out that Sharon was approached by the station's female firefighter, Tanya McMaster, who said "Why don't you just come and join, you're always here waiting for the truck to return, when you could be attending the incidents?"

Excited by the idea, Sharon applied and the rest, as they say, is history.

Even though firefighting was and continues to largely be a male-dominated field, Sharon found no male vs. female comparisons in her workplace, with the crew all working as a team to get the job done. The only challenges she faced were personal ones, building her confidence, strength and abilities to fulfil her duties as a firefighter.

The one downfall Sharon did face, was being a female firefighter in a time when the industry did not grant maternity leave. As a result, in 2000, when Sharon decided to have a family, she resigned her position.

¹ A Retained Firefighter is one who is on-call 24 hours, seven days a week, responding to local emergency incidents from their home or workplace.

Happily, Sharon was re-employed by Fire & Rescue NSW on 25 August 2016, this time based at 480 Wagga Wagga Fire Station. Recommencing her employment as an on-call firefighter has had its challenges, with Sharon no longer being the carefree 21-year-old she was upon joining the first time. Now a wife and mother of four and a nan, there have been some challenges in prioritising and balancing fire calls around other family commitments, especially considering the duration of any one fire incident can never be predicted.

As well as fighting fires, Sharon is also interested in fire investigation, an interest borne after attending a drill night conducted by the late Fire Investigator Alan Easy. Consequently, Sharon's husband and children supported her undertaking further studies via distance through Charles Sturt University. She completed her Graduate Certificate in Fire Investigation in 2012. The course ran over a two-year period, and included a practical component, taught at the Police Academy in Goulburn.

Today, Sharon is employed full-time as an Office Manager at a local accounting firm and still enjoys being a firefighter, not only for the challenges the position offers, but for what the role teaches her, especially in the areas of teamwork and communication skills.

2024 is an exciting time for Fire and Rescue NSW, as they celebrate 140 years of serving the community. From the hand carts of the past, to now boasting a fleet of more than 700 modern vehicles, in the past 140 years, they have grown into an organisation of almost 7,000 strong, with 335 stations across the state.

To the women of Wagga who might be interested in taking up firefighting, Sharon has eight words to impart - "Give it a go or you'll never know".

The most rewarding things about being a firefighter is knowing that I've made a difference in the lives of others, keeping people safe, providing assistance when needed and educating the community about fire prevention and safety.





Preshika Wagle

After graduating high school, Preshika Wagle dreamt of continuing her studies abroad. It was something her parents, mother Pramila and father Shiva-Hari, agreed with, but only if she chose Wagga as her destination. Being her first time away from home, they wanted their daughter to have some support, which she would in Wagga, being home to her aunt Antima.

And so, in 2020, Preshika traded her birthplace Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal (population 1.6 million) with Wagga (population 68,337).

With a love of mathematics, technology, computers, and the internet, Preshika enrolled in a Bachelor of Information Technology at Charles Sturt University. A degree which offers students the opportunity to specialise in a particular field, Preshika chose to pursue Cyber Security and found herself to be the only female in her class.

Moving to a new country is difficult enough, but any initial culture shock that Preshika may have felt was compounded when, soon after arrival, the Covid pandemic was declared. Borders were closed and lockdowns ensued. As a result, Preshika spent much of her first eight months in Wagga confined to her room.

It made me feel a little bit bad, coming to a different country, to a small town and being alone in the city, in the uni, it was quite frustrating.

Having been a social person from a young age, Preshika always enjoyed volunteering, not only through her school, but independently within her community. Starting life in a new place, she wanted to be known and heard, so began searching for volunteer opportunities. No mean feat considering Covid restrictions.

Preshika's first step towards volunteering was becoming involved with her university's Student Representative Council (Wagga SRC). It was a great beginning. Next, she became

a volunteer with the Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga (MCWW) and was also welcomed into Wagga's Nepalese community.

In just two short years, Preshika had fulfilled her dream of finding a voice within the community.

2022 was an incredibly busy year for Preshika. In addition to her full-time study, volunteer work and role as an international ambassador for CSU, the 22-year-old entered the Wagga Show Young Woman Competition. While she didn't win, the experience was a positive one. From it, she gained not only a tangible sense of belonging within her new community; she also made history, becoming the first overseas entrant in the Wagga Show's 156-year run.

In July 2023, Preshika graduated from CSU. With qualifications as a network engineer, IT technician and cyber security engineer, it will be exciting to see where her future lies. Whilst she hopes to continue at CSU with postgraduate studies and sees a future for herself in the city she has grown to love, the world truly is an oyster for this energetic young lady with so much to give.

Being the first person to do this ... it was a really wonderful experience, they think that I'm unique, so that made me feel very good...

There are a few dreams that I want to achieve, some of them are very big and some are small. One of them includes doing something for this Riverina community who have done a lot for me.





Heather Wall

In 1962, seven years after this impromptu performance, Heather migrated to Australia with her family, eventually settling in Wagga. In Edinburgh, her mother Margaret sang in choirs, and had dreamt of becoming a musical theatre performer. Heather, on the other hand, wanted to be a nurse.

Throughout her childhood in Scotland and Australia, Heather sang at local concerts, weddings and in school productions. Her first major role came soon after arriving in Wagga, when she was given the lead in Turvey Park Primary's yearly production *The Wooden Madonna*. Countless roles followed, from *Annie Get Your Gun* at Mount Austin High to later performances with the Riverina Theatre Company, School of Arts, University Theatre Ensemble and in Wagga City Council productions.

Many people steered Heather's career, however, two stand out. Luke Livisianos, a teacher at Turvey Park Primary, and John Rosengren, who mentored her at Mount Austin High.

Despite her enjoyment of singing, Heather was still determined to be a nurse and when she left school, started nursing in Kempsey. Rather than complete the training however, she returned to Wagga. Enrolling at the Riverina College of Advanced Education (now Charles Sturt University), she graduated with a Teaching Diploma in 1981.

I apparently used to stand on the bus seat in Edinburgh and perform for the other passengers. I was two at the time.

Heather became a private singing teacher in 1989, and it could be said that it was then that her singing career took flight. In 1997 she was recruited by then Director of the Riverina Conservatorium of Music (RCM) Patrick Pickett, to a contemporary singing teaching position. In 2003 she successfully applied for the position of Head of Department - Vocal Studies, a position she held for 13 years.

In 1998 Heather came up with the idea of producing a small concert to raise funds for the Riverina Conservatorium Scholarship Fund. It turned into the concert series

“Something to Sing About”. This immensely popular event not only showcased the talents of many contemporary vocalists, since its conception, more than \$40,000 has been raised for local and national charities and services.

Beyond her teaching life, Heather has continued performing as an actress and singer. She has been starstruck many times, and it’s easy to see why. She has supported Barry Crocker and Peter Cousens, as well as providing backing vocals for Toni Lamond, Hugh Jackman and Kerrie Biddell.

Heather has performed in musicals, playing Aldonza (Man of La Mancha – her favourite performance), Madame Thenardier (Les Misérables) and Marion Woolnough (The Boy from Oz). She has also worked with some of Australia’s best musicians, touring with the Australian Army Bands of Tasmania, Melbourne, Sydney and Wagga.

In 1982 she performed with the band Legato in a residency on board the cruise liner “Oriana”, travelling to Fiji, New Zealand and New Caledonia, and performing in the Stern Bar every evening.

Having taught (and sung) everything from classical through to gospel, rock and pop, in the end, it was Heather who was able to fulfil her mother Margaret’s dreams of a career in musical theatre and performance.

Watching, listening, and performing with consummate performers is a great way to learn your craft.





Sister Margaret Walsh

As nuns fade from the mainstream, Sr. Margaret lives vibrantly. She and her fellow sisters took the dusty roads less travelled to bring education, justice and love to rural communities.

Born in Narrandera in 1945, Sr. Margaret spent the first seven years of her life in Ganmain before moving with her parents and siblings to Wagga in 1952. After completing her secondary education at Mount Erin High School, Sr. Margaret joined the Presentation Congregation at Mount Erin.

The Presentation Sisters came to Wagga from Kildare, Ireland, in 1874, tasked by Pope Pius IX to teach not only the poor, but also the children of landowners living in rural areas of Australia. Following in the footsteps of her predecessors, Sr. Margaret took up teacher training, working in many rural primary and secondary schools throughout the Riverina.

A passionate and tireless leader, she was Principal three times during her career, the first time aged just 27. It was a lot of responsibility for a young woman - a position made more challenging by the fact that many of the schools were badly

Margaret has been the inspiration to young people and old, giving them life skills that have made our world a better place.

under resourced, not even possessing the most basic of necessities. But Sr. Margaret persevered. Her first “win” came in the form of obtaining \$10 for petty cash to be used for essentials like postage.

Keen to increase literacy and knowledge among her pupils, Sr. Margaret knew more books were needed. Told that funds didn't even stretch to purchasing a set of encyclopaedias, undeterred, she

implemented a fundraising system within her schools that ultimately allowed their libraries to grow.

Her resilience was often tested. In one position, she was responsible for the well-being and education of 130 young female boarders. With her charges willing to test the limits of their teacher, it was her inner strength and sense of humour that got Sr. Margaret through.

In 1997-98, as part of her ongoing professional development, Sr. Margaret undertook a Masters in Christian Spirituality and Spiritual Direction at London University.

On her return home in 1999, she was employed by the Catholic Diocese of Wagga Wagga to offer Adult Faith Formation programs. This led to her establishing the Breath of Life Ministry, in which she offered workshops to train women as leaders within their own communities, allowing them to facilitate programs in faith, health and wellbeing.

She has empowered rural women to have a voice of their own.

Between 2000 – 2018, 86 women and men trained as leaders, and 67 weeks of renewal programs were offered in 27 towns including Berrigan, Lockhart, Boree Creek, Urangeline, Savernake, Barooga, Buraja, Mulwala, Finley, Jerilderie, Tocumwal, Daysdale, Urana, Oaklands, Hay and Booligal.

In her role as spiritual counsellor, Sr. Margaret could often be found talking to women, wives and mothers around the kitchen table about issues including domestic violence, depression and everyday problems affecting them and their families. Taking the programs to rural locations made them accessible to people living on the land in isolated areas with very few resources.

Over the years, Sr. Margaret has continued to offer a variety of programs, including Presentation Associates in Wagga, Lockhart and Young, and the impressively ecumenical Sophia Circle which is offered in person or via Zoom. Both have enabled women to be informed and empowered.

Sr. Margaret continues to live a life of service to others. Today, she remains an inspirational leader, showing by example how to lead a better life.



“We are gradually waking up to the fact that we are reasonable thinking beings, placed in the world for a higher purpose than just to bake, brew, wash and mend”.

Mrs Irving, of Wagga Wagga, at Women's Conference

The Sunday Times, 16 June 1912

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