

Chairman's Report

Address by Mary Ritchie at the Society's AGM on 20 March, 2025

Good morning everyone, a very warm welcome to you all, old members, new members and visitors. A special welcome to those of you who have travelled some distance to join us today, our Vice President Prof Pat Irwin and his wife Anne who have joined us from Grahamstown, members of our 'sister association' Historic Bathurst and members from Kenton and Kasouga.

"The past no longer belongs only to those who lived it; it belongs to those who claim it, explore it, and infuse it with meaning for the present."

This quote from Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood perfectly reflects the mission of our Society, and I believe we achieve this admirably.

Our membership remains strong, we have a total of 156 members and we extend a warm welcome to new members who have joined us this past year. It is wonderful to see our society grow, bringing together individuals who share a passion for history and heritage.

At this moment however, I would like us all to pause and remember those members who have died in the past year: Marygold Harman, Rolfe Mathews, Des Forword and Jocelyn Guest.

The Lower Albany Historical Society (LAHS) was established in 1958, and today we are proud to hold our 66th Annual General Meeting. The Society is dedicated to promoting the rich and diverse histories of the Eastern Cape, with a special focus on Lower Albany. We actively research, document, and share information about historically significant people, places, structures, and artefacts, while also advocating for their preservation.

We are fortunate to have a strong and valued relationship with Historic Bathurst and the Bathurst Agricultural Museum, which now houses the artefacts and library of the Kowie Museum.

Each year, we are privileged to attend presentations here at the Don Powis Hall in Settlers Park and we also organise outings, offering members the opportunity to experience historical sites firsthand.

To our members, we deeply appreciate your support at both indoor meetings and outings and we value feedback—hopefully positive, but constructive if not. However, please remember that this is your Society and its success is driven by your enthusiasm, attendance and participation. We welcome and encourage new ideas

for speakers and are always on the look-out for people to join the Committee. I am sure many of you have a fascinating story to share—so let's keep the spirit of history alive together!

Our Facebook page is now up and running, thanks to the dedicated efforts of Sue Gordon. This platform provides a wonderful space for members to stay informed, share insights and engage with the rich history of our region beyond our meetings and outings. Your participation will help make it a vibrant and valuable resource for our Society.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge and thank my fellow Committee Members for their dedication and hard work behind the scenes. Our Committee meetings are never dull—you need to stay on your toes, much like learning to play bridge! But while our discussions are always lively and full of ideas, they are never a chore, and the enthusiasm of this team is truly inspiring.

Although our President, Dave Hawkins, is unable to be with us today, I am pleased to share that he is in good health and has fully recovered. Our Vice President, Professor Pat Irwin, provides invaluable guidance, while I, Mary Ritchie, serve as Chairman, supported by Theo van der Walt, our Treasurer, and Quenton Dick, our Auditor. A special thank you to Margaret Snodgrass, our scribe, whose vital newsletters keep members informed and whose diligent management of our membership database ensures everything runs smoothly. Heather Howard, our dedicated Secretary, keeps us all organised - particularly me, I would be lost without her and Gwynn Crothall, our Past Chair and current Deputy Chair, who is our mainstay, contributing on every level.

We are deeply grateful to Sue Gordon, who, among other things, is responsible for the editing and publishing of the *Toposcope Journal*. Daphne McNeil does a wonderful job helping to organise outings and indoor talks. Lyn Brown plays a crucial role in managing and coordinating catering for our various events and at front of house, Suzette Lampier Grist and Joy Billing provide invaluable assistance, ensuring that events run smoothly and that members feel welcomed.

A special mention goes to our technical team—Rob Crothall, whose expertise in handling visuals on the screen is invaluable, and Tony Mitchell, who ensures that our sometimes-temperamental sound system behaves itself. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Robin Collett and Lyn Brown, whose warm welcome, along with tea and coffee, always sets a friendly tone for our gatherings.

Finally, a very big thank you to Settlers Park for allowing us the use of the Don Powis Hall—a first-class venue that provides the perfect setting for our meetings and events. Your support and generosity are truly appreciated.

In March 2024, at our last AGM, we were treated to a lively and amusing presentation by Ross Purdon, who shared the fascinating history of the Pineapple

Cricket Tournament. His engaging storytelling brought this unique sporting event to life, much to the delight of our members.

In May, we enjoyed an interesting presentation by Julia Wells on Thomas Stubbs, an early 1820 Settler. Her talk shed light on Stubbs' controversial yet intriguing life, making for a thought-provoking discussion.

Moving to July, Professor Pat Irwin provided an enlightening lecture on Signalling Through the Ages. His expertise made this complex topic both accessible and fascinating.

2024 saw the Diocesan School for Girls in Grahamstown celebrating 150 years. In August, Jane Ritchie, Head of DSG Junior School, gave an excellent presentation titled "150 Years of Sisterhood." Several former DSG students were in attendance, adding a personal connection to the history shared.

In September we were treated to an engaging and thought-provoking presentation by LAHS members Margaret Snodgrass, Heather Howard, and Yvonne Surtees. Their discussion, "What's in a Name?", explored the historical significance of our river, town, and society's name. Yvonne also provided an important update on the closure of the Kowie Museum at the Old Station and the relocation of its collection to the Bathurst Agricultural Museum.

In October, we had the privilege of welcoming the late Jocelyn Guest, who delivered a wonderful presentation on "The History of Theophilus and Kasouga." Joc's storytelling transported us back in time, painting a vivid picture of Kasouga's past with the help of numerous photographs. Born at Settlers Hospital in Grahamstown, Joc spent most of her life in the Eastern Cape, making invaluable contributions to the community. Her talk was a fitting tribute to her lifelong passion for local history, and we were truly fortunate to hear her speak.

Finally, in February 2025, Professor Paul Maylam delivered an insightful talk on Rhodes University 1904-2024, some historical reflections offering a deeper understanding of its history and significance.

For outings, we have a fully stocked first aid kit to handle minor injuries and emergencies. However, we kindly remind members that if you have specific medical needs, such as prescribed medication or allergy treatments, please bring them with you.

In April, we were fortunate to spend a beautiful, sunny morning outdoors at Hope Farm, where Darian Keeton graciously hosted us at the historic Keeton family home, just outside Port Alfred.

In June, with excellent weather on our side, we visited the Governor's Kop Signal Tower before making our way to Upper Gletwyn Farm, where Gill Wylie welcomed us into her stunning garden to relax with our picnics. Gill captivated us with stories of

the farm's rich history and later led a guided tour of the house and views from the farm. Gill's warm hospitality was particularly appreciated.

In November, we took to the water, travelling upriver aboard the Lady Biscay for a truly enjoyable and sociable morning. While some historical insights were shared, the emphasis was on appreciating the beauty of the river and enjoying lively conversations. Tea was served by the Committee, and we were fortunate to extend our journey well beyond the usual 90-minute cruise, a particularly special outing.

Going forward, we have decided that in months where outings are scheduled, often appealing to only a limited number of members, we will also try to offer a talk. This ensures a presentation every month, with the exception of the festive Christmas season.

In August, the 25th edition of the *Toposcope Journal* will be released. A portion of our membership subscriptions goes toward producing this prestigious publication, of which we are immensely proud. This next edition marks Sue Gordon's sixth TJ, but sadly, also her last.

Sue has served tirelessly on the LAHS Committee for over 10 years, dedicating herself to numerous aspects of research, preservation, and the safeguarding of historical legacies in the Lower Albany area and beyond. While we are reluctant to see her step down, we are grateful that she has graciously offered to assist and support us in the future, whenever needed. Fortunately, Sue will remain an LAHS member and will always be just a phone call away!

Sue, on behalf of LAHS and the Committee, it is an understatement to say that your passion, knowledge, commitment, and tireless dedication over the years will be greatly missed. Thank you so much for everything!

Heather Howard, our Museum Secretary, kept us well informed throughout the year with regular updates on the relocation of the Kowie Museum to its new home within the Bathurst Agricultural Museum. This was no small task—the process was arduous and painstakingly slow, yet it was executed to perfection by Yvonne Surtees and her dedicated team.

The results have exceeded all expectations. The Museum's existing large screens have been cleverly used to create an engaging and immersive "wander-through" experience. It has been a truly remarkable transformation—a job exceptionally well done! The official opening on 24 September, Heritage Day, was a fitting celebration of this incredible achievement.

On a personal note, it has been an honour to serve this flourishing Society as Chairman. This role has given me the opportunity to learn and grow so much, and I am most fortunate to have the support and guidance of a truly inspiring and unique group of people that comprise the Committee. Our meetings are always enjoyable,

never dull, and consistently productive. It has been a very special experience, and I sincerely thank you all.

Mary Ritchie