

Chairman's Report

2023, or rather 2023-4 (as our year runs from March to February) was as always, a full year for the Lower Albany Historical Society, with seven indoor meetings and four outings. Our membership stands at 155 and our bank balance is steady and sufficiently healthy to allow for the printing of our annual journal, *The Toposcope*, a publication of which we are justly proud.

We began in March with a talk by Serena Gess entitled ***“Into the Thick of It: The Settlers in the Albany Thicket”*** – a fascinating look at what the 1820 Settlers faced when they arrived in the Eastern Cape after months at sea.

In April we visited the **churches of Bathurst**: St John's Anglican Church and graveyard, with Maryna Shephard as our extremely knowledgeable guide, and the Methodist Chapel, where Tom Penlington spoke about its history. We finished with a delicious lunch at the Bathurst Bistro.

In May, William Martinson, Chair of the Border Historical Society in East London, and a heritage architect, gave a presentation entitled ***“Art in Unexpected Places – Ceramic Studio tiled art panels in 1930s South African Post Offices”***, many of them in the Eastern Cape, and one of which we visited in Riebeeck East in 2019.

In June Stephanie Victor gave an erudite but accessible talk on ***“Petitioning Power: Female Royalty (Amakhosikazi) and their Written Grievances to the Colonial Authorities (1839-1899) in South Africa's Eastern Cape”***.

On our second outing, in July, we visited Grahamstown, taking in a tour of **Rhodes University's Cory Library, the Old Gaol in Somerset Street, and the Observatory Museum**.

In August Alan Weyer gave us ***“Spirits of the Past”***. During the 1800s, the intrepid British soldiers, Irish immigrants and European explorers left their shores to begin a new life on the southern-most region of the African continent, where they encountered the spiritual San and mighty amaXhosa. What awaited them in this region of wide horizons eclipsed their wildest imaginings. Alan's talk gave a rare and unique insight into their lives, the profound influence of this region's proud history, and its far-reaching consequences.

September saw our third outing: to **Salem: the old church, new church, the graveyard, school, and Salem Club**, led by our extremely knowledgeable committee member, Daphne McNeill.

In October we visited **Somerset East to see the Walter Battiss Museum and the newly restored Glen Avon Mill**. This was a bonus outing as the Mill had just been opened to visitors, and the owners were able to accommodate us a couple of days later.

Also in October, Penny Elliot spoke about the two **'1820 Settler' groups chosen for one of the first reality TV shows, in 1983 – The Volunteers**. She showed us many photographs of the site on Bradfield's farm on the Bushman's River, shared her experiences of trying to live as the settlers did, and even brought two of the dresses she wore. So heavy and cumbersome!

The final talk for 2023 was given by a duo of old Graemians, Peter Breetzke and Peter Reed on **'A brief history of 150 years of education at Graeme College, 1873-2023.'** Peter Breetzke has written a book on the history of the oldest public school in Makhanda (Grahamstown) and spoke about the early years of the school: its founding, the people who laid the foundations and established the 'flavour' of the school and the stories of some of the people who passed through its doors. Peter Reed, a former headmaster of Graeme for 22 years, covered the modern era and the trials of being a headmaster in the present day.

Our most recent meeting, in February 2024, was addressed by Basil Mills. Basil has a BA degree in Fine Arts, is a wildlife expert, historian, raconteur, artist and illustrator, conservationist, one of only 18 people in South Africa licensed to fire a cannon, recently retired education officer at Amazwi, South African Museum of Literature and an amazingly interesting person. He spoke about the **185th Commemoration of the Great Trek held at the Karel Landman Monument on December 16th, 2023**: a short talk but with a lively and wide-ranging question time afterwards.

It only remains for me to thank the Committee for their support, for their enthusiasm, and their hard work. I would also like to thank our loyal LAHS members, who attend our meetings and join us on outings and are invariably interested, engaged and enthusiastic.

Thanks too to Eddie Hosek and Tony Mitchell for their technical support, and of course to Settlers Park for the use of the Don Powis Hall.

I would like to append a note from the Chairman of the Kowie Museum Board of Trustees, Yvonne Surtees: "Moving" Museum News.

After several years of uncertainty about its tenure of the Old Station Building, the custodians of the Kowie Museum reluctantly had to accept that a move was inevitable. This was in spite of valiant efforts by everyone concerned, including Tourism and the 'Little Train Dons'. The reason was simple: the premises had been promised to another tenant.

So, ironically, instead of 40th anniversary celebrations, the Trustees and the Volunteers were forced to pack up the Museum's treasured collections and move out of their historic 1884 premises.

Fortunately, the Bathurst Agricultural Museum has kindly found space for us, and relevant displays will be set up there. For instance, the original plaques from the Toposcope, replaced

with modern materials, will now be displayed close to their original home. And many other items of particular local interest will vie for a place there.

The fine collection of history books, some of them valuable, are mostly from the Historical Society's archives and had been housed at the Museum. They have been handed back to LAHS. And the Museum's vast and fascinating collection of old photographs and papers are in safekeeping for the time being, requiring careful sorting and re-cataloguing.

The owners of items lent for display have been invited to retrieve their property if they wish to.

There was much to be done within the set time frame. The Kowie Museum as we knew it has finally closed its doors. The sorting, packing, and moving out continues, and in the meantime a new tenant has moved in.

Gwynn Crothall