

“History is not a burden on the memory but an illumination of the soul.” — John Dalberg-Acton

Annual Report 2026

By Mary Ritchie (Chairman)

That thought reminds us that history is far more than simply a record of past events. It illuminates the lives, stories and experiences that have shaped the place we call home. Through your shared interest, dedication and curiosity, this Society plays an important role in preserving the rich history of our area. In many ways, each of you is a custodian of those stories — helping to ensure they are not forgotten, but continue to be discovered, appreciated and passed on to future generations.

Of course, the more we explore the past together, the more we realise that there is always another story waiting to be uncovered. The support of all our members — both at indoor meetings and on outings — is vital to the success of the Society. Your interest, interaction and attendance are what make these events worthwhile. Feedback from members is always welcome and valuable, and we encourage suggestions for speakers. We are also always on the lookout for new candidates willing to serve on the Committee.

The Lower Albany Historical Society is fortunate to enjoy valued relationships with organisations such as Historic Bathurst, the Historical Society of Port Elizabeth, the Border Historical Society in the East London area, and the Military Historical Society, to mention just a few. These groups often work closely with local museums and heritage bodies to preserve the region’s rich and sometimes complex history — from early trade to the frontier period.

Membership has remained consistent and continues to grow, and on behalf of LAHS I extend a very warm welcome to those who have joined us during the past year.

New Members: February 2025 – February 2026

Mr & Mrs Pete & Agneta Abrahams
Mrs Gillian Armstrong
Mr & Mrs Marco & Olenka Brutsch
Mr & Mrs Tim & Ruth Cockbain
Mrs Vanessa Forrester
Ms Sue Leeming
Mr James Lobban
Mr & Mrs Justin & Eleanor Mildenhall
Mr Fergus Satchwell
Prof. & Mrs John & Ann Rogan
More recently we welcomed:

Mrs Elsa Barnard — February 2026
Prof Kirsten Nieser — February 2026

Before we continue, please could we take a moment to acknowledge and remember those members who sadly passed away during the past year.

Martie Truscott — 31 December 2025
Tony Border — 5 February 2026
Barry Luckman — March 2026
Mr Fergus Satchwell — June 2026

Their contribution to the Society will not be forgotten.

Thank you to Settlers Park for generously allowing us the use of Don Powis Hall for the presentations we hold throughout the year. It is a wonderful venue and provides the perfect setting for our meetings.

Our Facebook page, thanks to Sue Gordon, has become an active and important platform for the Society. It allows members to stay informed, share insights and engage with the history of our region beyond our meetings and outings. Your participation helps make it a lively and valuable resource. I would also like to thank Sue for her consistent hard work and dedication to the annual production of the LAHS Toposcope Journal (TJ). After six years, the 2025 TJ was Sue's final edition — and she certainly bowed out on a high note. The LAHS TJ has become something of an emblem of the Society, and one of the finest publications of its kind. Its articles range widely — from palaeontology to the anecdotal — ensuring that there is something of interest for everyone.

The backbone of this Society is its committee — a unique, multi-talented and flexible group responsible for the management and smooth running of the organisation. Our President, Dave Hawkins, is always available with sound advice and assistance, often multitasking on a variety of levels — and, apart from anything else, he makes a very fine milk tart. Our Vice-President, Professor Pat Irwin, provides invaluable guidance and input. I serve as Chairman, supported by Eddie Brown, our new Treasurer, and Quenton Dick, our Auditor. Margaret Snodgrass, our scribe, produces the regular and informative newsletters that keep members up to date with presentations and trips away. Her knowledge and attention to detail are legendary. Margaret also maintains our membership database and always keeps a finger firmly on the pulse. Heather Howard, our dedicated Secretary, keeps us organised and on track. Gwynn Crothall, our Past Chair and current Deputy Chair, has been a mainstay of the Society for many years, contributing on every level. Their commitment, collective knowledge and enthusiasm are inspiring, and the opportunity to work with them is indeed a privilege.

We are also grateful to Trish Middlebrook, who has taken on the responsibility of editing and publishing the Toposcope Journal. Daphne McNeill does a wonderful job helping to organise outings and indoor talks. Lyn Brown plays a crucial role in managing and coordinating catering for our events. At the front of house, Suzette Lampier-Grist and Joy Billing provide invaluable assistance, ensuring that our events run smoothly and that members feel warmly welcomed.

A special mention goes to our technical team — Rob Crothall, whose expertise in handling the visuals is invaluable, and Tony Mitchell, who ensures that our sound system behaves itself.

Our gratitude to Robin Collett, who after many years, continues to assist with the organising and serving of tea for members at our gatherings.

This year we are sorry to say farewell to three of our stalwart committee members, Gwynn Crothall, Daphne McNeill and Trish Middlebrook. Gwynn has served tirelessly for more than ten years, dedicating herself to many aspects of research, preservation and the safeguarding of historical legacies in the Lower Albany area and beyond. Gwynn will remain as a member but will be sorely missed on the committee. Daphne has been a valued member of the committee. Her long standing ties to the Eastern Cape, combined with her extensive knowledge of the area has enriched the Society's activities. Trish Middlebrook was co-opted onto the Committee some time ago, however, unfortunately for us (not for Trish), she has the opportunity to travel widely and regularly, and has therefore tendered her resignation. We shall miss her quiet balance and wisdom. We are most fortunate however, to welcome both Prof John Rogan and Prof Trish Alexander onto our committee.

2025 began on a high note at our AGM in March, which drew a record number of attendees thanks to Judge Kathy Satchwell's interactive presentation, "Consider Your Verdict," recounting surprising legal judgments made during World War 1 — a highly politicised time when judges often held high office in various provinces and there was widespread paranoia about "the enemy among us". It was a thought-provoking talk, reminding us how closely the legal system often reflects the society in which it operates.

In April, Mike Coleman, an East London-based rural and agricultural land-use planner, gave fascinating insights into the history of the Khoi people of the Eastern Cape in his talk "The Khoi — The Invisible People: Pastoralists, Herders and Stock-keepers." His presentation included new perspectives from linguistic and DNA studies that reinforce the connection between the San and the Khoi.

In May, Daphne McNeill shared the remarkable story of her grandfather, Harold Trollope, in her presentation "Vukani — Hunter to Conservationist." Harold lived an extraordinary life that included involvement in the Anglo-Boer War and both World Wars. An exceptional tracker and renowned marksman, he later became deeply

committed to conservation and played an important role in the early development of both the Kruger National Park and the Addo Elephant Reserve.

In June, members enjoyed an outing to visit the newly relocated Kowie Museum within the Bathurst Agricultural Museum. Our visit included a stop at the moving “Lonely Grave” on the Bathurst commonage, where Nick Cowley told the poignant story of the Dold and Ayliff families. Afterwards we enjoyed tea at the museum before exploring the newly established Kowie collection.

July’s speaker, Alan Weyer, drew a large and enthusiastic audience with his talk on “Turning Points in Eastern Cape History”. Alan has a wonderful ability to bring history to life, focusing on the human stories behind events and the resilience of the people who shaped the region.

In August we heard from Phumeza Mntontishi, curator of Anthropology at the Albany Museum and a sangoma, who spoke about “The Value of Preserving Indigenous Knowledge through Storytelling and Oral History”. Her engaging presentation reminded us how storytelling preserves cultural heritage and strengthens communities.

September saw a fascinating outing led by Professor Pat Irwin and his wife Anne, where the participants travelled from Fort Selwyn in Makhanda along the historic Queen’s Road to Fort Beaufort. Members visited Fort Brown, explored the newly renovated KwaMaqoma Museum, and later enjoyed a guided tour of the restored Healdtown.

In October the Committee tried something new with a Local History “Show and Tell.” Four residents brought artefacts connected with the history of the 1820 Settlers and shared the stories behind them. The format proved wonderfully interactive and was extremely well received.

Our final talk for 2025 was “Our Bennebroek Adventure,” presented by Belinda Huse and John Goldsmid. Their long exploration of the Hamburg coastline has uncovered numerous porcelain fragments from the VOC ship *Bennebroek*, wrecked there in 1713 while sailing from Ceylon to the Netherlands via the Cape of Good Hope. Their discoveries continue to reveal fascinating insights into this historic shipwreck.

In December 2025 a happy morning was enjoyed by about 42 members who ventured up river to the Mansfield site. Dave Hawkins gave a brief account of the history of the Mansfield Mill and the farm on which the well-laid out picnic site is situated. The farm, mill and windmill date back to the 1830s and was built on the land belonging to William Holder. When William’s wife died, the Mill was given to James Powell in trust for William’s children. In 1831 James Leppan was given 800 acres of land to lease and in 1844 the farm and Mill were bought by John Montague who sold them in 1855 to Chas Slater, a butcher. It was only in 1868 that the new owner, Joseph Wood, completed the Mill, part of which remains today. A small village grew around the Mill as workers and families settled within the quiet peaceful area

on the banks of the Kowie River – and ideal position from which goods could be loaded and transported easily.

Other names who appear on the records as owners of the Mill and surrounding land, include Mr Scheepers, the Reed family, Messrs. Deity-Rudolph - Sun Trail Estates, and the present owner, Mr Webster, who bought it in 1981.