

HISTORY

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- Peter Hobbins** – Three Metres from Catastrophe: Sydney’s 1971 Airliner Collision
Roslyn Russell – Documenting Women’s Lives Across a Century: Miss Porter’s House
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2023 RAHS CONFERENCE

The Way Ahead: Local and Community Histories for our Future

Wagga Wagga RSL, 21–22 October 2023



Image caption: The Bushman's Home, Wagga Wagga, 1910 (Museum of the Riverina).

The Royal Australian Historical Society is coming to Wagga Wagga for its 2023 annual conference. This two-day history conference will focus on the importance of local and community histories and ways to strengthen community connections through preserving and sharing our histories. The City of Wagga Wagga and the Riverina Region is the perfect location to discuss and share the different ways to preserve, research and share the interconnected and diverse histories of the people and places of New South Wales.

RAHS President Dr Iain Stuart explains that both local participants and those who travel from across the state will enjoy talks and panel discussions that 'focus on history initiatives and practical how-to explanations that will inspire anyone involved or with an interest in local and community history'. Our keynote speaker, Adjunct Associate Professor Bruce Pennay OAM, will discuss how a local history society is working with the Aboriginal community to unravel stories about contact and post-contact engagements between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people at the Murray River Crossing Place.

The conference program features topics on the Riverina Region, the benefits and challenges of undertaking digitisations projects, the unique perspectives provided by oral histories and a panel discussion on the future of museums. There is also plenty of opportunities to network, including a welcome reception on Friday 20th of October hosted by Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society at the Historic Council Chambers. On Sunday 22 October, we will be presenting the RAHS Certificates of Achievement and Appreciation, which recognise the invaluable contributions made by individuals to historical societies throughout New South Wales.

For more information and to book online visit <https://www.rahs.org.au/2023-rahs-conference/> or call us on (02) 9247 8001.



First 'Builders' in Wagga Wagga

Sherry Morris

Many of Wagga Wagga's early builders were itinerant bush carpenters, extremely versatile artisans who were engaged in almost any form of construction, from hewing the raw timber to building a fine homestead. In 1847 a courthouse and lockup had been constructed of slabs tied to a wall plate with green hide and covered with bark roofs. Several bark huts surrounded these buildings and were occupied by constables. A crude blacksmith shop had already been established by John Franklin nearly halfway down the bank of the creek that came into the Murrumbidgee River.

The first buildings in the little village of Wagga Wagga were all quite primitive in construction. John Franklin's blacksmith shop, the police buildings and the first hotel were all crude slab and bark huts. Since nails and bolts were scarce, green hide from Robert Holt Best's *Wagga Wagga* run was used to fasten the rafters and beams. Only the courthouse was more elaborate. It too was constructed of forks and saplings walled in and covered with bark, but its roof was shingled.

After the sale of town allotments in 1849 and 1850, the purchasers began building in earnest. In 1851 there were only four stone or brick houses and twenty-three constructed of weatherboard, slab or inferior material. Of these, six had shingled roofs, while the remainder were of bark. Many of these houses had been erected by those 'jacks of all trades', James Walsh and William Brown. Walsh built a two-storey brick hotel which, he said, had ten rooms on the ground floor, nine rooms on the upper, and a 'good and capacious' cellar underneath. Walsh built another substantial brick hotel on the other side of the river in North Wagga, known as the Swan Inn, and the first school in Wagga in 1849. Then he left to try his luck at the Victorian goldfields. In his absence, the great flood of 1852 damaged his hotels, the schoolhouse, and most of the town's buildings.

William 'Tinker' Brown, originally a hawker and quite a colourful character, established the first hotel in North Wagga, a slab and bark construction called the New Ferry. He later replaced this with a brick-and-stone hotel. Although smaller than Walsh's Wagga Wagga Inn, it was quite substantial. Brown boasted that it had: '18 inch' walls, a handsome balcony and

verandah, a capacious bath, and three parlours with a large room above. The building was occasionally used as a ball or assembly room. It contained five bedrooms, two parlours, a 'first rate' bar and a 'very large' tap room. He claimed he had spent £600 on the erection. Before long, a considerable portion of the fabric suddenly fell to the ground, disclosing walls four inches only in thickness. According to the *Goulburn Herald*:

It was a mercy that the inhabitants of this sworn costly building were not buried under its ruins. I say mercy, because an industrious man was its occupant; but had Brown himself been the dweller therein, and such a catastrophe had happened, everyone who knows the man (and *who does not know him in this neighbourhood*), could only have exclaimed in the language of holy writ, and a firm belief in a Divine Retribution – 'Great and Just are thy judgements, O Lord'.

Eventually Brown left the district after establishing a circus known as the Australian Amphitheater and Roman Coliseum. He died in 1855 when the Circus was in Beechworth and his remains were brought to Wagga Wagga for burial.

In the next five years (1856–1861), the population almost doubled from 336 to 627 and during that time, six houses were constructed of brick or stone and fifty-three of weatherboard or slab. A few specialist builders, sawyers, carpenters and shinglers began replacing the bush carpenters of previous years. In 1859, John McIntosh, a Scotsman who arrived in Wagga Wagga in 1859, entered a partnership with Andrew Cruickshank. They took on carpentry and building contracts in addition to a business in Baylis Street. They completed the school building in Tarcutta Street (later the Riverine Club) by September 1860.

By the 1860s, Wagga Wagga was expanding rapidly, and the population increased dramatically to over two thousand by 1869. It was incorporated in 1870. Citizens were now erecting more permanent dwellings, often brick. By 1873, sixty houses in the East Ward (Baylis Street side of the lagoon) were of brick and forty-five of slab, wood or inferior material, while ninety in the South Ward were brick and seventy-five of slab, wood or inferior material. Many specialist builders – bricklayers, stonemasons, tinsmiths and



The Union Bank building at the corner of Fitzmaurice and Johnston Streets was built in 1884 by Charles Hardy and Co. The Union Bank was established at Wagga Wagga in February 1876 and originally occupied space in the Australian Hotel building. The 1884 building was designed by William Wilkinson Wardell, a Sydney architect who worked with Walter Vernon for a period (Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society).

plumbers – joined the sawyers, carpenters and shinglers, notably the Englishmen Thomas Hodson and Charles Hardy.

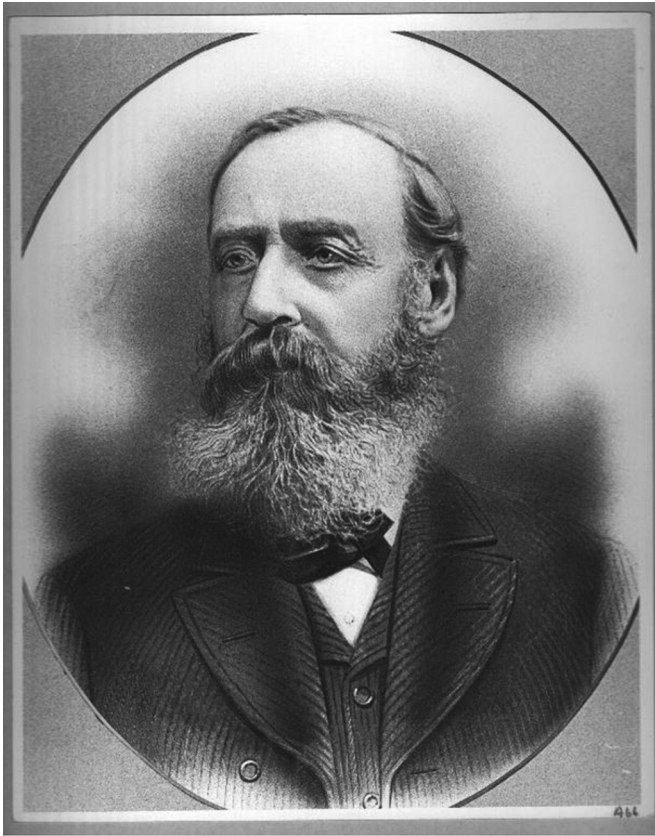
Charles Hardy

For many years Charles Hardy worked in partnership with Thomas Hodson, constructing the jail in 1862, a new wing to the hospital in Tarcutta Street, the Australian Joint Stock Bank and the new courthouse. They established their brickyards, lime kilns and a large timber yard. They even obtained a steam engine and sawmill plants, which they erected at Cowabee Station to cut all types of colonial timber. Both Thomas Hodson and Charles Hardy were later prominent Mayors of Wagga Wagga.

Hardy also built the first Methodist Church, ‘a plain little brick church’ which was opened in May 1865; a large general store for Charles Wall in 1866; a grandstand for the racecourse from his own design in 1867; the new school and headmaster’s residence on the sandhill in Gurwood Street; David Copland’s Hall

of Commerce described as the ‘finest business premises yet erected in Wagga’ in 1872, and the Bank of New South Wales in 1874.

By 1875 the buildings in Wagga were chiefly of a substantial character. Although Wagga Wagga had many outstanding builders, Charles Hardy remained the most influential without a doubt. He stayed in Wagga the longest and his business was taken over by his son, also named Charles. Many of their buildings can still be distinguished in Wagga Wagga today. After 1875, most of the major buildings in Wagga Wagga were constructed by Charles Hardy and Co., including the new Methodist Church on the corner of Johnston and Fitzmaurice Streets (1877); Bomen Railway Station (1878); Wagga Railway Station (1879–1880), and most other station buildings in the area; the Wagga Council Chambers (1881); Union Bank and Manager’s Residence on the corner of Fitzmaurice and Johnston Streets (1884); Murrumbidgee Co-operative Milling Company Mill (1887); the Court House and the Clock Tower (1900–1902).



Charles Hardy (Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society).

Hardy was the successful contractor for many school buildings, including the original sections of Gurwood Street Public School and the North Wagga Public School residence, and for many domestic buildings in Wagga Wagga and throughout the Riverina.

A countless number of cottages built by the firm still stand today, including several in Johnston Street, No. 77 (classified) as a residence for W.J. Monks, the architect; No. 79 (classified); No. 81, a two-storey terrace style he built for his own family (later a doctor's surgery and residence); No. 85 as a residence for H.S. Headley as well as No. 20 Simmons Street (classified) for the Eyles family (now used as professional rooms).

Hardy insisted on a high standard of work. He brought most of his tradesmen from England and personally supervised most of the building, travelling long distances in a sulky. His operations extended to Deniliquin, Euston, Corowa and Albury.

The original site of Hardy's business premises was at the corner of Trail and Gurwood Streets, but subsequently moved to the corner of Johnston and Trail Streets near the school where the contracting firm of Hardy and Co. developed into a timber and joinery

works. By the 1880s, the business included a steam joinery at Newtown and Wagga, steam sawmills at Devlin's Siding (Ganmain), brick and tile works at Docker Street, and stone quarries at Buckenbong near Narrandera.

By 1897 it had sawmills at Cockatoo Island forty miles from Wagga, and in 1899 Hardy purchased the Federal Brick and Pottery Works in Gurwood Street from J. Lipscombe. Around 1906, Charles Hardy senior transferred the business to his two sons, Charles and William Henry ('Harry'), and the Federal Brickworks to his son, Walter Slade Hardy.

Charles Hardy senior was considered a 'thoroughgoing Englishman of the old school'. He was a progressive citizen and had a keen interest in state and local politics. He was a staunch fighter for the Protectionist cause when Sir George Dibbs was returned as the member of the Murrumbidgee Electorate. When the Municipality of Wagga Wagga was formed, he and G.A. Elliot were appointed valuers in July 1870 and made the first valuations of the town's property. As an Alderman and Mayor, he was practically the initiator of the sewerage system. He advocated the thorough testing of the pump well as an auxiliary to the normal pumping operations at the waterworks. He was also a member of the Mechanics Institute and the School of Arts, the hospital committee and the finance committee of St John's Church of England. He lived at Dorset Cottage on Trail Street. He died on 9 May 1908 and was buried in the Anglican Section of the Wagga Wagga Cemetery.

The business, later situated in Baylis Street, was ably carried on by his sons. Charles Hardy and Co. continued to build many private residences and public buildings, including the kitchen block and nurses' quarters at the new hospital on Edward Street, the new skating rink (1910), the new Drill Hall (1911), the Great Southern Picture Hall (1915), quarters for the Officer in Charge of the Wagga Fire Station (1915), Wagga High School (1916–1917); and the new Post Office (1926).

About the Author

Sherry Morris OAM, BA (Honours) UNE, is a freelance historian and researcher who has written numerous books, including *Wagga Wagga: A History* for the Council of the City of Wagga Wagga in 1999. The book won the New South Wales Premier's History Awards: The New South Wales Community and Regional History Prize in 2000.