



Celebrating 125 years in 2026



2025 AFFILIATED SOCIETIES SURVEY KEY FINDINGS

Image: Mudgee Town View
[Walker Glass Slide Collection, RAHS Library Collection]

Who we support: Our Affiliated Societies

Overview of our affiliated societies

Although each RAHS affiliated society is unique, the 2025 survey shows that many share similar experiences, strengths, challenges and priorities. Most groups are small with 100 members or fewer, volunteer-run and deeply connected to their local areas. They take pride in preserving the stories, people and places of their communities. With 165 responses, representing 45 percent of the network, the survey's findings provide a clear and reliable picture of the wider membership.

Profile of a 'typical' affiliated society according to the survey:

- Is fully volunteer-run
- Focuses on local or place-based history
- Produces publications, does research projects and organises history related events for their members and communities.
- Is based in regional NSW
- Has 100 members or fewer
- Is an incorporated association and a registered charity but does not have Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, so donations are not tax-deductible
- Has been a member of the RAHS for 20+ years

Some interesting statistics

Geographic reach: 97 percent of affiliated societies are based in NSW, and the majority of these are based in regional areas.



Volunteer power: Respondents reported around 3,000 active volunteers in total, with 33 percent of societies relying on a core group of ten or fewer active volunteers.

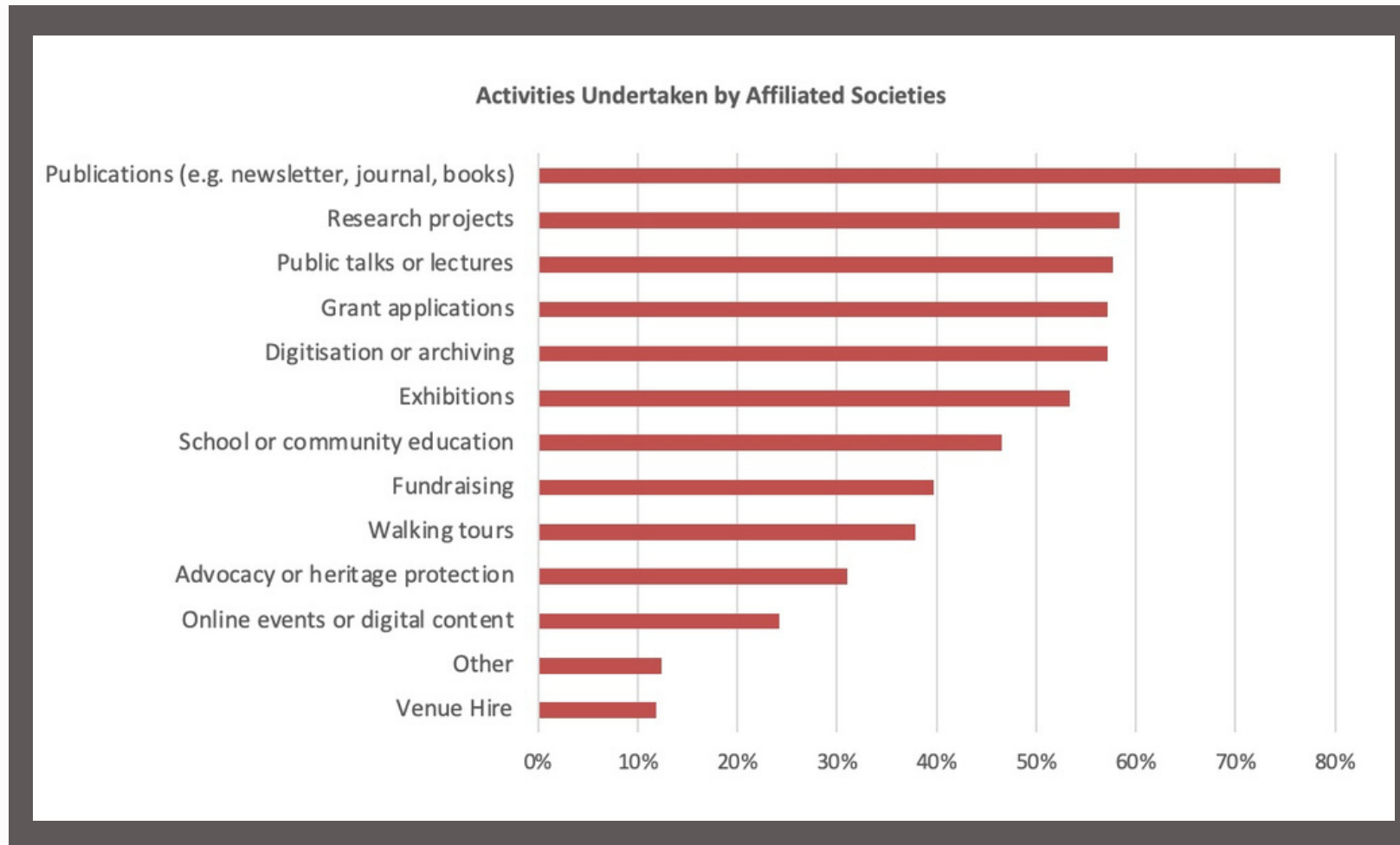
Publishing strength: 75 percent of respondents publish newsletters, journals or books that contribute to the understanding of NSW history.

Digital access: 57 percent of respondents are digitising their collections, expanding access to NSW history sources.

Meeting Places: Only 14 percent of respondents own their premises, while 4.9 percent operate entirely online.

The majority use a mix of shared spaces, including council rooms, libraries and museums.

Our Affiliated Societies - Activities



The 2025 survey highlights how affiliated societies are involved in a wide mix of activities that connect them with their members and communities. Publishing and talks remain at the heart of what they do. Many are also working on digitisation projects, archiving, exhibitions, education programs and online content, showing how societies share and preserve history in different ways. Grant applications are an important activity for many societies as grants provide essential funding for their work. This blend of research, publishing, public programs and digital projects shows the creativity, commitment and cultural contribution of our affiliates across NSW.

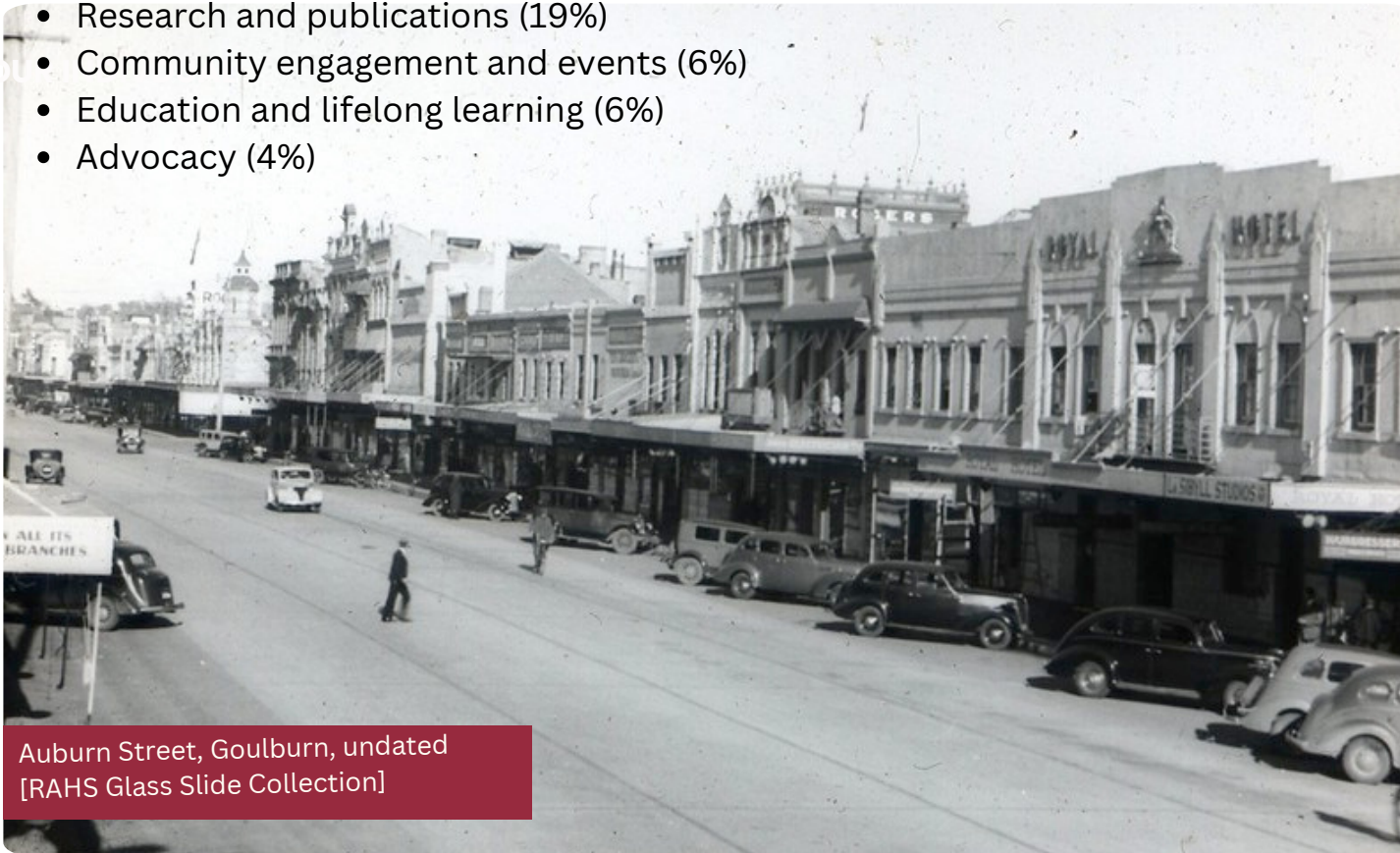
Joys and Challenges

We asked affiliated societies what brings them joy and what keeps them awake at night.

The Joys

In the open question about what you value most in your work, respondents shared a wide range of joys. These were the most common answers:

- Preserving collections and local history/heritage (30%)
- Running museums and exhibitions (22%)
- Research and publications (19%)
- Community engagement and events (6%)
- Education and lifelong learning (6%)
- Advocacy (4%)



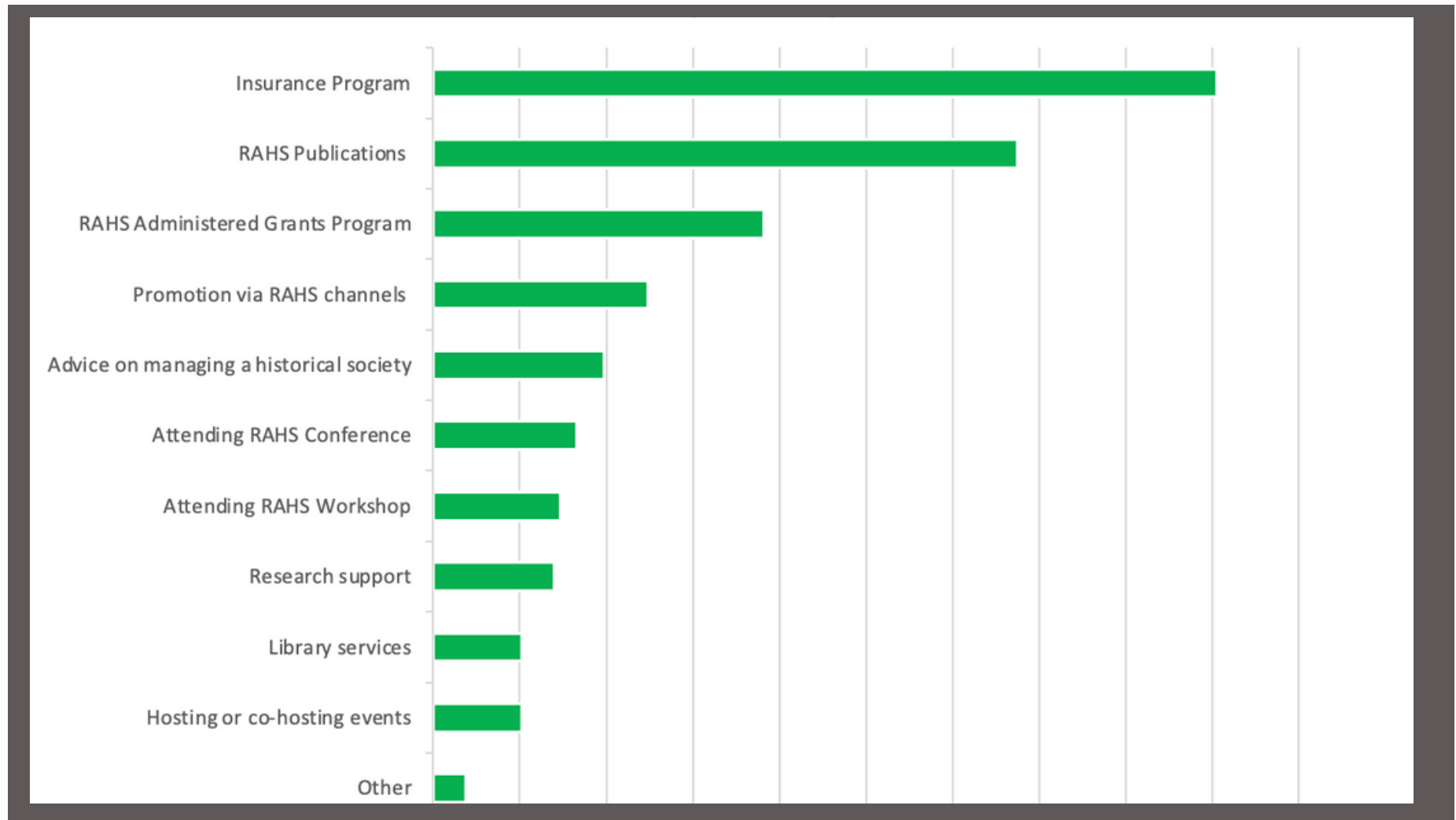
Auburn Street, Goulburn, undated
[RAHS Glass Slide Collection]

The Challenges

When asked to rate the challenges they face on a five-point scale (where 5 meant 'very important'), respondents identified several pressures that scored above 4. These were the highest-rated challenges:

- Recruiting new members (4.65)
- Keeping existing members engaged (4.53)
- Attracting or retaining volunteers (4.53)
- Succession planning (4.40)
- Raising public awareness (4.38)
- Maintaining a website or digital presence (4.20)
- Insurance and legal obligations (4.10)
- Managing, preserving or digitising collections (4.03)

RAHS membership - what do you value ?



The 2025 survey shows that the RAHS administered Insurance Program is the most widely used service, with nine in ten societies relying on it for affordable public liability insurance for their activities and group personal accident insurance for their volunteers. In 2025, 325 affiliated societies accessed affordable insurance through this scheme. Publications were the second most used and valued RAHS Membership benefit. Around one-third of respondents value the RAHS-administered grants programs funded by the NSW government, reflecting the importance of grants to support their projects. Many respondents also use RAHS promotion channels or seek advice on managing their society, while smaller numbers participate in events, library services and co-hosting events. Some respondents were not aware of all the membership benefits, so improving how we communicate these benefits is on our to-do list.

RAHS Services: Your Priorities and Suggestions

Most helpful RAHS Services

We had 157 respondents rate which RAHS services would be most helpful for their society.

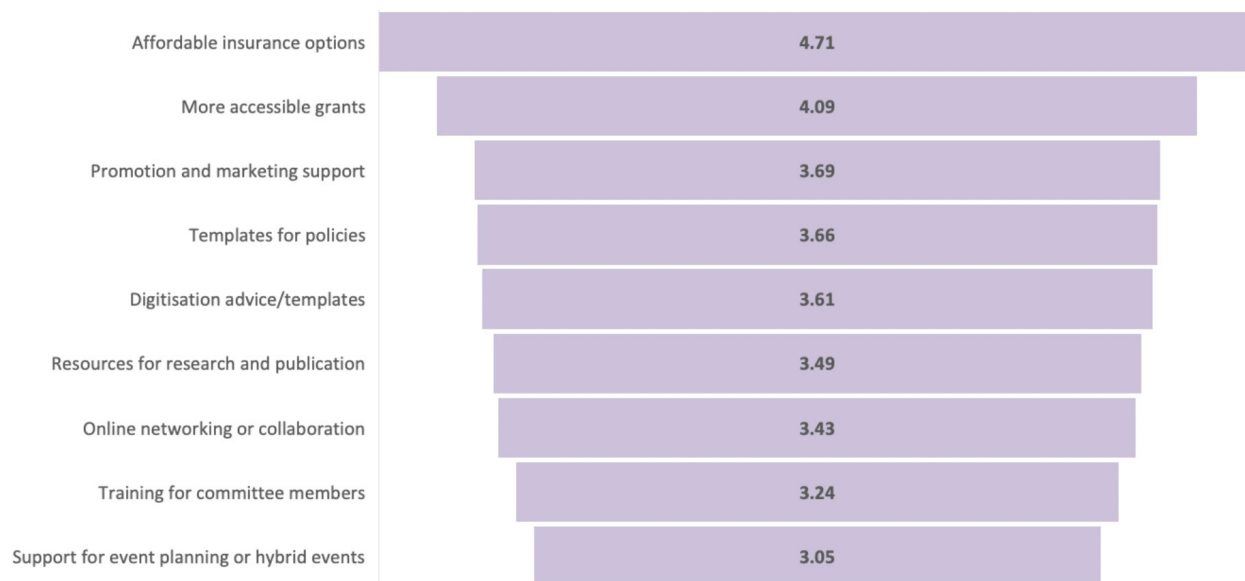
- **Very high importance:** Affordable insurance options and more accessible grants came through as the strongest needs, highlighting how crucial affordability and funding are for volunteer-run organisations.
- **High importance:** Promotion and marketing support, policy templates and digitisation advice were all rated highly, reflecting a desire for tools that help societies lift their profile, strengthen governance and care for collections.
- **Moderate importance:** Research resources, online networking and committee training were seen as helpful

Looking ahead

93 respondents answered the open question “Is there anything else you would like to share about how the RAHS can help you?”. Here are the suggestions/comments that came up most often:

- Regional workshops and online options (22%)
- Happy with current support (21%) - [but the RAHS will better promote all the membership benefits].
- Updates and clearer information on how RAHS can help (15%)
- Provide or help source speakers (10%)
- Guidance on identifying and applying for grants (8%)
- Increase promotion and visibility of affiliate work (7%)
- Advocacy (6%)

What services would be most helpful ?
Rate all services out of 5



RAHS Conference



The first gathering of affiliated societies was held by the RAHS in 1961. Over time, this evolved into the RAHS Conference, hosted in collaboration with local historical societies in locations across NSW. In 2025 we trialled a hybrid model at History House, with affiliated societies taking part in person and online. The 2025 survey results provide an opportunity to consider what future conference formats could look like and how we can make them more accessible and relevant for our network.

Key Survey Findings (165 respondents)

- **Interest in attending is mixed:** 21% would attend, 24% would not, and 55% were unsure.
- **Location is the strongest factor when deciding if to attend**, rated 4.28 out of 5, with distance and travel cost major barriers to attending
- **Program relevance is critical**, rated 4.04 out of 5, with respondents favouring practical advice and history-focused topics.
- **Affordability matters**, with 62 percent of respondents preferred a conference priced under \$100 per day, and within that group 35 percent preferred a fee below \$50.
- **Hybrid access is increasingly important**, rated 3.76 out of 5, enabling broader participation for those unable to travel.
- **Practical skill-building components**, such as workshops, rated 3.68 out of 5, though some respondents suggested these may be more effective as stand-alone training sessions rather than part of a conference.



TROVE

Collections & Community

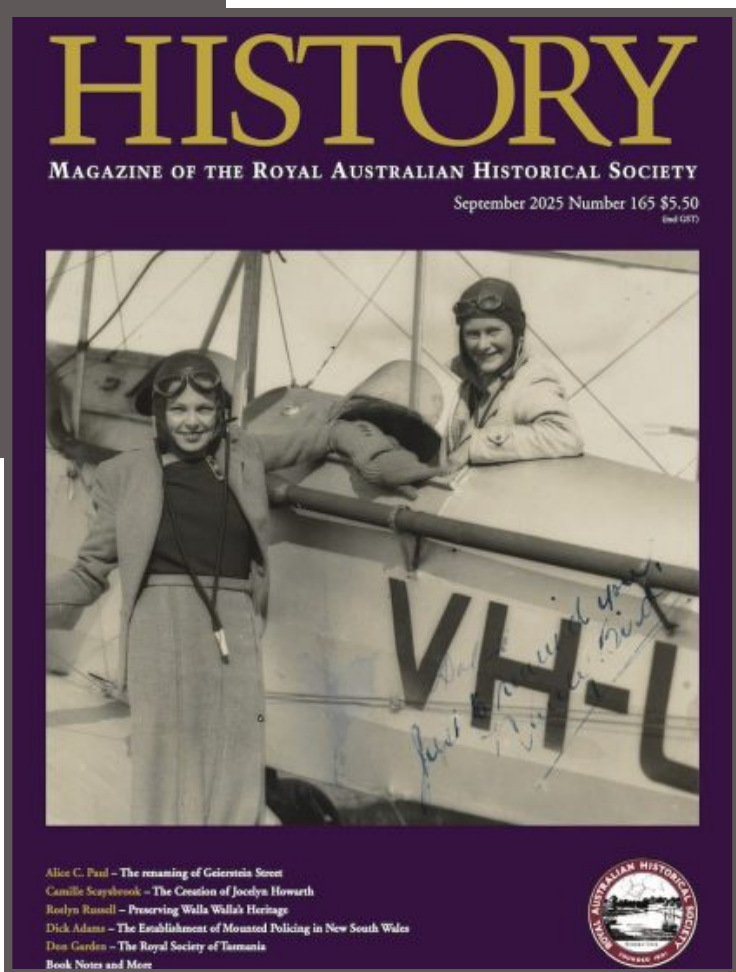
Trove & NSW Historical Societies

Tuesday 11 November 2025

History House & Online

2024 RAHS Conference was held in Campbelltown
2025 RAHS held hybrid event at History House

What the RAHS is planning next



Front cover of *History Magazine*
Edition September 2025

Based on what you told us, RAHS will focus on practical, useful support that helps affiliated societies in their day-to-day work. Our short-term plans include:

- Emailing pdf copies of our journal and magazine to our affiliated societies, so they can more easily share them with their members [the magazine will still be posted out, and all publications are also available in members' area of the website].
- Launching a new eNewsletter column to answer member questions and share practical advice/experiences from other affiliated societies.
- Hosting affiliated societies' events based on your priority areas, with a focus on accessible hybrid events.
- Promoting your societies more actively — send us stories, photos or event notices and we'll share them.
- Prioritising grants information in the eNewsletter to help societies identify and apply for funding.
- Running a workshop ahead of the launch of the new Create NSW funded grant program that will support local and community history projects [this will replace the Cultural Grants program].
- Using your feedback to shape and update the RAHS Strategy, which we plan to launch at the April AGM.

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Thank you to all our affiliated societies. Your work plays an essential role in preserving and sharing the histories of NSW's places and people.

Image: Kiama, Aerial view of Kiama looking south east over the coastline and town, 1936 [Adastra Aerial Survey, RAHS Library Collection]

