



Celebrating 125 years in 2026



2025 MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Individuals, Seniors, Pensioners, Households, Students

Image: Macquarie Street, circa 1880
[RAHS Photograph Collection]

Our members

Overview of our members

The 2025 Membership Survey received responses from 26% of RAHS individual members, giving us a reliable picture of who makes up our community. Just as with our affiliated societies, each RAHS member is unique. Yet the survey also reveals clear patterns in how members engage with history and with the Society. These shared characteristics help us understand the profile of the “typical” RAHS member.

Profile:

- Highly engaged with Australian history
- Actively contributes to history, by writing, researching, teaching or volunteering in their local historical society
- Is aged 65 or older, often with a long-standing interest in Australian or NSW history
- Has been a member for more than ten years, reflecting loyalty and sustained engagement
- Lives in Sydney (followed by Regional NSW)



Some interesting insights

Community links: 60% of members belong to the State Library of NSW, 57% belong to their local library, and 50% are involved with local or family history groups.

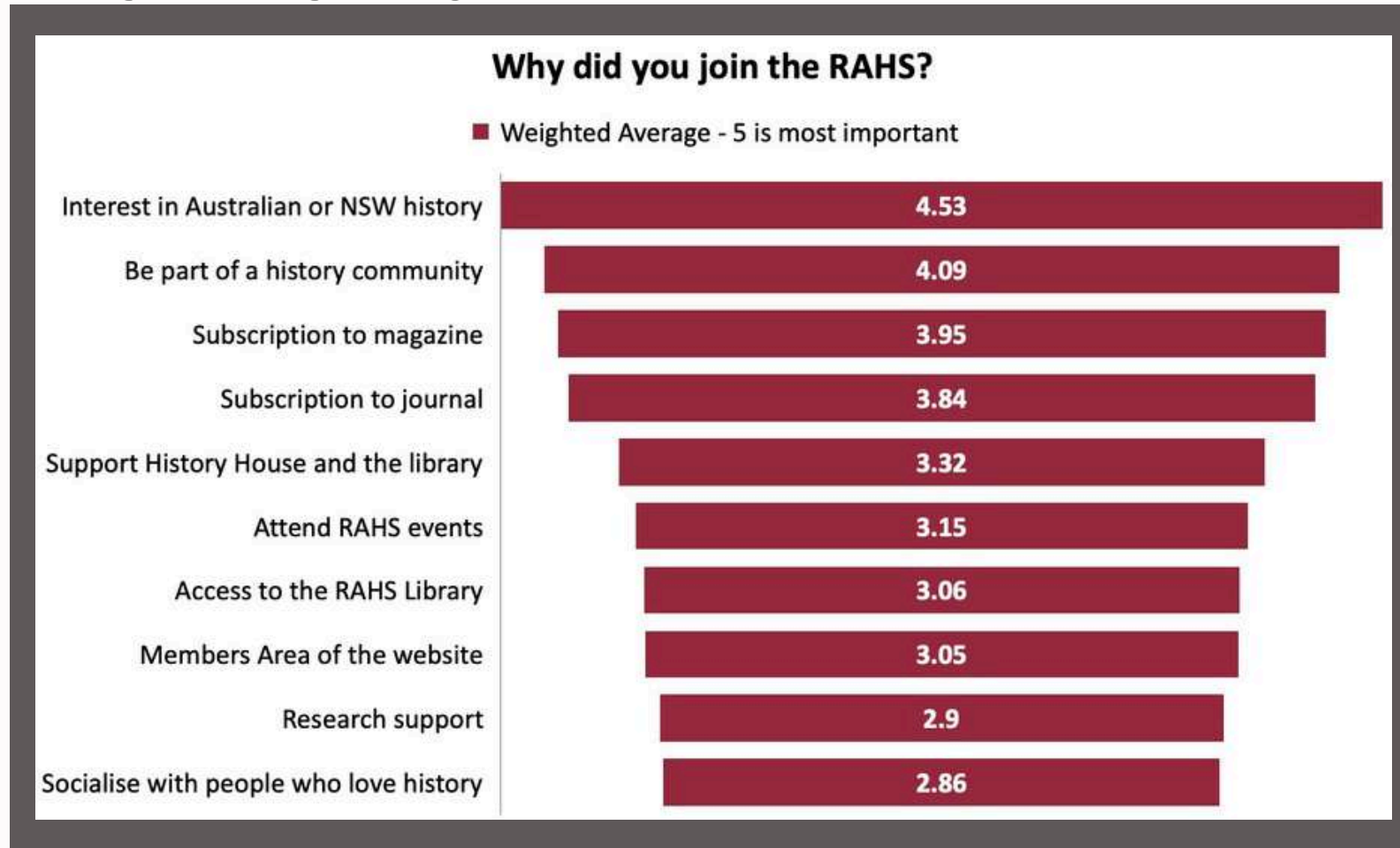
Later-life membership: One-third of respondents aged 65 and over joined within the past five years, showing that many people actively engage with the RAHS later in life.

Reading and viewing habits: Reading remains the strongest way members engage with Australia’s past, consistently outperforming all other activities regardless of age or location. Many also watch documentaries and online history videos, but reading remains the most relied-on and valued way to explore historical subjects.

Places matter: Members welcome digital engagement, but in-person experiences remain essential. Events at History House and excursions remain highly valued opportunities for connection and learning. The RAHS Library, with its browsable shelves and the research support provided by Librarian Donna Newton, continues to be valued as a place for research, with online resources enhancing rather than replacing the space.

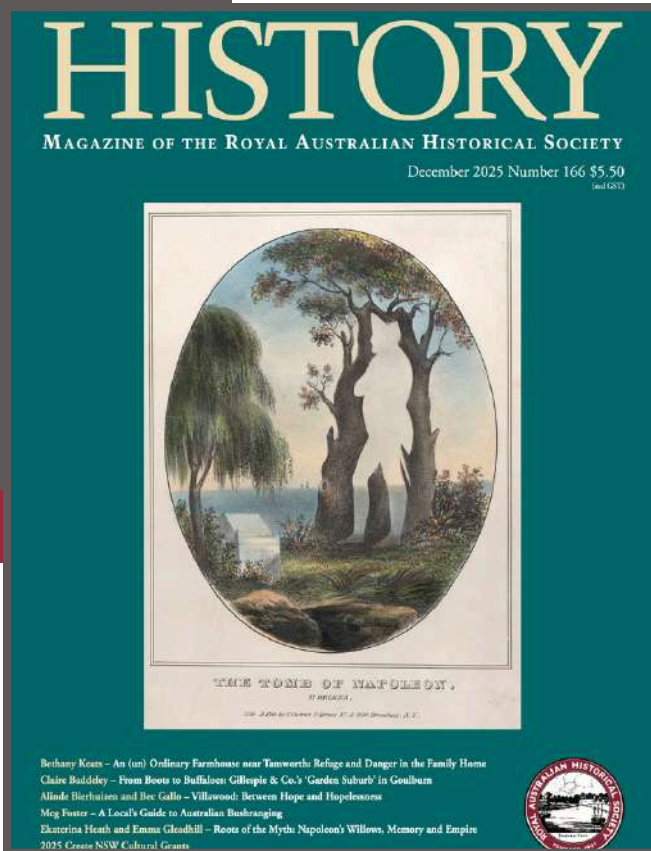
Image: RAHS members and friends on guided tour, *Water, Water, Everywhere!* Judith Dunn OAM led the tour of Hyde Park's fountains and water features.

Why did you join the RAHS



The survey shows that most members join the RAHS because they have a strong personal interest in Australia's past and NSW history. Many also value being part of a community that shares their commitment to learning and contributing to a deeper historical understanding. Importantly, a significant number join not only to benefit from RAHS programs, but to support the Society itself, including the preservation of History House and the RAHS Library. Publications and access to the Library remain important membership benefits. Events and online resources are also an important membership benefit. Overall members are motivated by a combination of personal engagement, shared purpose and a desire to support the ongoing work of the RAHS.

RAHS Publications: Core membership benefit



Every respondent reads at least one RAHS publication — *History* magazine, the *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society (JRAHS)*, or the RAHS eNewsletter.

Content that Connects: Publications continue to play an important role in how members stay connected with the RAHS and with NSW history. Members consistently favour content that focuses on people and places. These interests highlight the strong connection members have with the landscapes, communities and lives that shape NSW's past.

Reading Preferences: Many members prefer long-form material in printed formats, which may explain why the printed quarterly *History* magazine has a higher readership than the digital bi-annual *JRAHS*. A clearer understanding of how members use print and digital formats will guide future decisions about publication design and distribution.

Staying up-to-date: 86% of respondents said they were regular RAHS eNewsletter readers. Members appreciate receiving regular updates about RAHS activities, news from affiliated societies, advocacy issues and upcoming events. Distributed by email, it offers short, focused updates that members can read quickly and easily share with family and friends.

Top Image: Front cover of *History Magazine*, December 2025.

Bottom Image: *JRAHS* Editor Dr Samuel White joined past contributors on 25 February 2025 for *A Legacy in Print*, a discussion on the journal's history and ongoing role in Australian historical research.



RAHS Events: Connecting with history



Events play an important role in how members engage with the RAHS. Many respondents told us that attending talks, lectures and excursions was a meaningful part of their membership.

Formats that work: Members appreciate different event formats to stay engaged with the RAHS, reflecting our geographical reach. In-person talks at History House (61%), live online events (57%), recorded sessions (50%), and walking tours or excursions (45%) each play a part in how members can participate in the events program.

Topics of interest: Members are especially drawn to topics that help them understand the people, places and communities that shape NSW's past. The most popular topics include colonial NSW history, local and regional history, convict history, biography, and social history.

Images:

1. The Dog on the Tuckerbox (RAHS Postcard Collection). Associate Professor Richard White gave an RAHS Day Lecture on the poem that inspired the statue.
2. The 2025 RAHS lecture on Hardy Wilson's Old Colonial Architecture, presented by Hector Abrahams and Dr Cameron Logan, followed by an excursion to the exhibition at Fisher Library, University of Sydney.
3. Historian Stuart Read spoke on Chinese Australian Heritage: Sites, Landscapes, and Cultural Legacies at History House on 19 March 2025.
4. Portrait of early Australian film star Joy Howarth (Photo courtesy of Camille Scaysbrook). Camille spoke about this forgotten actress at History House and is author of a forthcoming biography of Joy Howarth.

Hardy Wilson's
*Old Colonial
Architecture...*
1924-2024

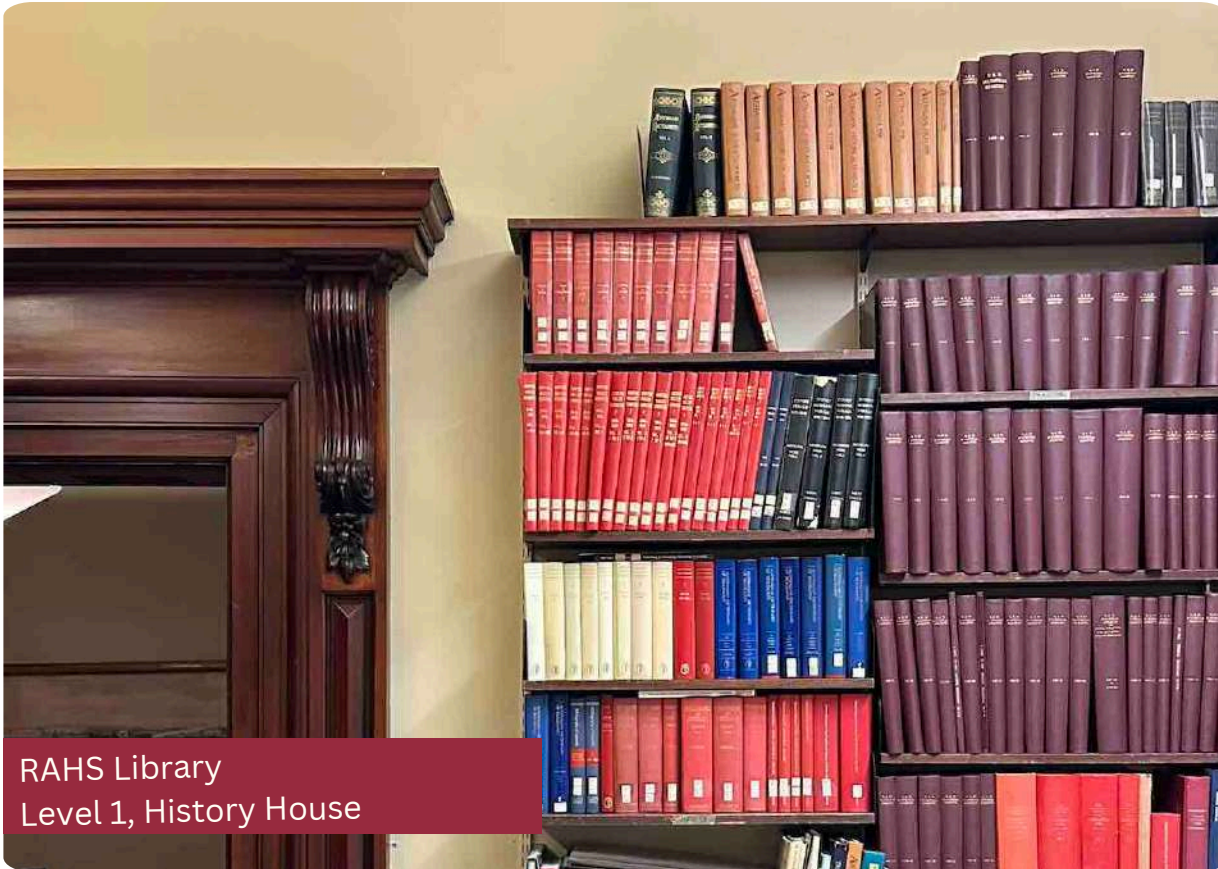


RAHS Library

The RAHS Library remains central to the Society's work and is highly valued by members, whether they visit in person or seek research support online.

What our members value in a Library

Members were asked: "What do you value most when using the RAHS Library?" The strongest response by far was the Librarian's personalised support (82%), followed by browsable shelves (68%) and quiet study areas (58%). Members also valued access to digitised resources, confirming the importance of balancing physical collections with digital access.



RAHS Library
Level 1, History House

Planning for the Future

As the RAHS approaches its 125th year, we are focused on improving the Library and making its nationally significant collections more visible and accessible to members and researchers.

Survey insights guiding this work:

- Members value personalised support from the Librarian above all.
- Many want more quiet and comfortable research space.
- Improved online discovery tools would help members explore the collection from anywhere in NSW.
- Digitised resources and practical research aids (guides, instructions) will also support members who cannot visit in person.
- Members see the Library as both a place where they can visit and research to explore, and also as supporting NSW research across the state.

History House

History House remains at the heart of the Society's work and is highly valued by members who engage with us in person or online.

Future of History House - Key Insight

Members see the conservation and future use of History House as a clear strategic priority. The highest-rated focus area was ensuring the building's long-term sustainability and accessibility (weighted average 4.33 out of 5), followed by undertaking urgent conservation works (4.27) and developing History House as a welcoming community space (4.14).



Roof works showing completed lead dormers and copper diverters, 9 December 2025. Photograph by Stephanie Thelin, Hector Abrahams Architects.

Members View on History House

Members shared thoughtful views on History House, highlighting why the building matters.

- Members saw History House as the home of the Society and an essential part of its character.
- Many said the building gives the RAHS a sense of continuity and a tangible connection to the past.
- Visiting History House makes some members feel part of something bigger than their own research.
- Another recurring theme was that improved accessibility would allow more people to experience the building's value firsthand.
- Members expressed strong support for staying in History House and moving ahead with the renovation project. Two respondents raised questions about remaining in the building. Four others noted the challenges of owning a heritage property.

Final Words

The 2025 Membership Survey shows a committed and loyal RAHS community. Members report high satisfaction with their experience (4.27 out of 5) and strong value for money (4.24 out of 5). Many have been part of the Society for more than ten years, and new members often join because they want to support our goals as much as for the membership benefits.

Members value the RAHS for its publications, events, Library and sense of community. Their feedback points to two clear strategic priorities: continued investment in History House, including improved disability access, essential conservation works and a building that is welcoming and easy to use, and ensuring flexible participation through a mix of in-person and online activities that meet the needs of members across NSW.

As we approach our 125th anniversary, these insights provide a clear guide for planning. Members recognise the challenges of maintaining a heritage building and running a small not-for-profit, yet they also express strong confidence in the Society's direction and purpose.

Most importantly, the survey reflects the patience, goodwill and ongoing support of our members. Thank you to all our members for your interest in and passion for Australian history, and for helping us continue to contribute to a deeper understanding of the histories of our people, places and events that connect us.

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Thank you to all our members. 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]

