

1949 and employed ten workers. As well as the former houses, he built three cabins for single workers.

**14. Once Don Hargans' home** later the residence of George and Betty Wilson when they retired from the land near Bellbrook.

**15. Don Hargans built** this home for Josh and Alma Hudson in 1950. At the rear was Laurence's sawmill. The timber cut at this mill was mostly white and red mahogany and tallowwood. The timber for the Anglican Church and the CWA room was donated by local landowners and milled free of charge by this sawmill.

**16. St. Thomas Anglican Church** was built in 1954. Raymond Dew gave the land and the builder was Bill Lee. The original church built in 1906 was on the outskirts west of the town.



Willawarrin War Memorial.

**War Memorial.** Pause a moment and read the names on the monument. The Willawarrin and District Ex-services and Citizens Club was formed in 1958. The club placed this memorial to record the names of the people who enlisted from the area. The memorial was designed by Charles Jarvis of Kempsey and built by Harry Walker and Sons. The dedication took place on 11th November 1961. Note the pine tree nearby, this tree was raised at Keswick Barracks from seeds gathered from Lone Pine, Gallipoli.

**17. The Country Women's Association** was formed in 1954 and three years later land was given for a "Rest Room" by the Lawler family (publicans of the hotel). The Rest Room became the project of a huge community effort and the building was officially opened in 1964.

**18. The Willawarrin Hotel** is the third hotel to be built in the town. This hotel dates from 1926 and the first publican here was John O'Neill. There are stories associated with the old hotels the first of which was built in 1893. The paddock beside the hotel was the birthplace of the legendary stockhorse Abbey, in 1955. Abbey was owned by Harry Ball. He and Abbey won 23 camp drafts in seven and a half years.

**Our walk ends here** but further on was Cecil Booth's dairy. Dairying and timber were the main industries around Willawarrin. A race course was constructed in 1902 and was described "as far away the best track on the river." The sports ground has a history of rodeo and camp draft events. Some notable riders have achieved Australian and world recognition.

There are two houses east of the Catholic Church. The one close to the bridge was once the home of the Chapman family. One of the sons, Sam Chapman, served in WW1. He was known as The Bard of Nulla Creek. His poems were published in local and rural newspapers.

The other house close by was the home of John Hudson and his wife Islet who also retired to live in town. John was a well known "bullocky". His Daughter, Ivy Waters wrote the poem Old Rusty Bell, as a tribute to her father. It was set to music by Shorty Ranger and recorded by Slim Dusty.

5-8-2008

HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.



step back in

*time*



Walks in History

# WILLAWARRIN

MACLEAY RIVER

*This is a footpath walk only. You do not have permission to enter private property. Park your car outside the hall and walk back to St. Johns Catholic Church.*

Willawarrin township lies on the road to Armidale and was an ideal place to stop in the days of horse drawn vehicles. When a traveller reached Hickeys Creek it would have been time to change the horses. Most of the original buildings have gone and Willawarrin is, for the most part, a 1950s town.

**1. Start the walk here.** The church was built in

1896 and was opened by Father Buggy. The splendid timber building has been in constant use until recently. Notice the ecclesiastical styled windows. St. Johns makes an attractive entrance to the town. The first baptismal font was a large shell brought out from Ireland by Margaret Mainey.

**2. Continue walking west** and see the cottage at No. 22 which was built for Mick Clarke in 1945. The house was built by Reg and George Brenton. The timber and mouldings came from Haydon and Dunn's mill at Carrai.

**3. Next door the old bakery** was first built by Cyril Clarke in 1920s. The first bakery was burnt down following the falling of a large tree which collapsed on the building. The bakery was rebuilt and in 1936/7 passed to Cyril's brother Mick. He gave up the bakery in 1950. The bakery was sold to Jim Shaw in 1972. The last owner was John Mahoney and the business closed in 1990s.

**4. The hall** replaced an iron structure below the hotel and close to the creek. The present hall was built in 1940. The builders were Jack, Gordon and Tom Allen together with Harold Bull. The timber is local white mahogany. Five residents took out a mortgage to enable the hall to be built. Travelling shows such as Slim Dusty, Joy McKean, and Barry Thornton performed in the hall. In the dressing room are messages written in chalk left by these artists. The Slogetts, a pantomime and circus also played in the hall. The tallwood floor was regarded as an excellent dance floor.

**Notice the Heritage Trail marker** erected by the Rotary Club of West Kempsey. This shows Willawarrin is a town famous for horsemen and riding events.

The open ground adjoining the hall was where Elrington's livestock saleyards were in action. Sales were conducted each fortnight. The yards were built in 1949. AML&F Company built saleyards two kms west of the town in 1955. Willawarrin was an important selling centre until 1970.

**5. The general store** was first built in 1900c by Jack

McCarney. The store and residence were fitted with carbide gas lighting. In 1940 the Post Office was relocated to this building. The manual telephone exchange closed in 1972 and the subscribers were connected to Toorooka. Don and Robyn Ryder operated the telephone exchange until then and they recorded that the lines were exceptionally busy during the time the antimony mines were in operation in 1960s.

**6. The house** at No. 48 was brought to Willawarrin in 1974. It was originally the teacher's residence at Greenhill School just west of Kempsey.

**7. Known as Mrs Kyle's house** this place at No. 52 was built in 1950. Mrs Kyle was the grand daughter of Henry Davis, the founder of the private town of Uralgurra 6kms east of Bellbrook. Before her marriage Hilda (Gower) taught at a subsidised school near Moparrabah. She married Norman Kyle and they owned a dairy herd of 50 pure bred jersey cows. Hilda and Norman retired to town in 1950 and were held in high esteem as citizens of Willawarrin.

**8. Harry Dowling's home** (no 54) was built in 1951 by Reg Brenton. The timber was cut at Laurence's mill. Harry ran the farm called "Holmwood" up the hill behind the sport's ground.

**9. Panton's Cottage.** (no 62) Mary Panton and her brother Aubrey lived at this address. They were the grandchildren of early settlers at Warbra Station. Their great grandfather was George Panton, Postmaster General in 1819.

**10. Where this house** is built at No. 68 was the site of Don Hargans' workshop. Hargans had an engineering and mill workshop here. He designed the Hargans Saw, a revolutionary portable saw which proved to be a boon to sleeper cutters. The saw could be wheeled on site and used horizontally, vertically or converted to a swing saw. It was used extensively until the chain saw was perfected. At one time he employed ten men. Hargans put through the road from Hickeys Creek to Taylors Arm working with two old international crawler tractors.

**11. At No. 70 this old building** was the first garage in Willawarrin. Mick Hawes was the agent for Ford Anglia cars. He operated from 1947 to 1970. The house next door was his residence.

*Continue walking and cross the road to see the school.*

**12. Willawarrin Public School** was built in 1920. Classrooms have been added throughout the years as enrolments increased. In 1983 the school at Comara closed and the building was brought to Willawarrin where it is now the library/activities room. Education in Willawarrin dates from 1901.

**Two houses** down from the school on this site at no 81 Tom Laurence built a workshop to service the timber mill equipment. Laurence was the proprietor of the local sawmill. The building was later leased in turn as a garage by Kevin Ruscoe, Reg Hudson, Barry Parish and Ray Mahoney.

**The next four cottages** (79 to 73) were built by Tom Laurence to house his employees who worked at the timber mill. They are built of local timber, milled in the town. At No. 77 see the Illawarra flame tree planted in 1966 by Lily Laurence.

**13. No. 71 was the home** of Tom and Lily Laurence. He brought his mill from Spencers Creek to Willawarrin in



*Mick Hawes garage.*