

# Shire of Wickepin



## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The following historical overview was compiled by Laura Gray the consultant responsible for the preparation of the Municipal Inventory for the Shire of Wickepin.

The overview is a compilation of historical research which provided the Heritage Consultant with a foundation from which to extract the thematic framework of the Municipal Inventory.

The early settlers were isolated, and worked constantly to establish their land, with little time, energy or opportunities for social interaction. Helping out, welcoming new settlers, and picking up mail or supplies were often the only interaction for the women on their isolated homesteads.

Horses were integral within the lives of the settlers, providing transport of goods and people, they also featured in some of the leisure activities. Horse racing at Mungerungercutting attracted big crowds in the early days, for the annual race days. The race day provided a great social interaction, usually completing the day's festivities with a dance. Lake Yealering also provided horse racing activities and even established the Lake Yealering Turf Club as early as 1914.

Social activities were few, but thoroughly enjoyed. Impromptu meetings took place when collecting mail or provisions. The introduction of the railway lines united groups of settlers in vying for spur lines and sidings, and even towns.

Education of their children was an important priority of the early settlers. Although the children were required to do chores and work on the farm, parents were keen to establish schools within a reasonable distance from their homestead. One room schools were established and in most areas continued to operate within a minimum requirement of eight students. One teacher taught all grades, usually the female teacher boarded with a local family. Schools provided a special link between the communities and were often the venue of social functions prior to the settlements constructing a hall.

Progress Associations developed in most settlement areas as the settlers combined energies to establish schools, mail services, dams, bores, tanks, roads, rail sidings, and generally improve conditions and facilities in their area. Each progress association was very mindful of their isolation, and the need to establish facilities to ensure their survival.

Equally important to survival of the settlers was the availability of medical services, and in 1911 a public meeting called for a resident doctor at Wickepin. The same year law and order was established in Wickepin with the construction of the court house and lock up for the constable who had been appointed the previous year. In 1912, a licence was issued by the Health Board to establish a private hospital in Wickepin. Facilities were strained to the limit over the forthcoming year with a typhoid epidemic. An epidemic again in 1921 meant that plans were made for the isolation facilities to ensure their survival.

Town people made their own amusements in between establishing their homes and businesses, and the occasional card evenings or more seldom dances were the most common activities

Sport was an important social interaction, and the football teams to Williams prior to the First World War were a very popular event. As early as 1913, Yealering Tennis Club was formed, with the rifle range established in 1915. Yealering Lake was a venue for many recreational activities, boating and sailing. In 1921, the inaugural Boxing Day Sports was held at Lake Yealering, and proved to be a popular event for many years to come, as people flocked to the lake by all manners of transport, including train. The steamer "Kookaburra" was a popular attraction on Lake Yealering. In 1926, Wickepin established the Golf Course, and Yealering established a motorcycle interest. By 1935, Yealering was also hosting a bicycle club. Wickepin established tennis courts near the Town Hall in 1935.

Social activities were a saviour during the depression years, as the Wickepin district's settlers forged their communities. Picture shows provided another major source of entertainment in Wickepin and Yealering, with movies screened in the hall regularly from 1921 in Wickepin, always attracting a full house, everyone went. Charlie Rose at the piano was a regular attraction at the numerous dances and get-togethers throughout the district.

The women in the community looked to local needs and improvements in their community, town and region, and in 1929 a group of likeminded women formed the Wickepin Branch of the Country Women's Association with the Yealering Branch establishing in 1932.

With the advent of World War Two, most community and social activities responded to the war effort, The Yealering Home Defence Corps formed as early as 1940, and other organisations followed suit, the Civil Defence Council in 1942, and the Air Observers Corp in the same year, following the Japanese participation in the war. The community war effort provided a great morale boost and community cohesion and interaction during the war years.

Every Saturday night during the war there was a dance in one of the towns. Dances were a popular social activity. The history of dancing was very social, a family affair, many of the men was away at war, and the dances were a wonderful social celebration of welcome whenever soldiers came home. Everyone, even the children, danced, and took a plate for supper.

Post-war Wickepin district was stimulating and progressive, and with the lifting and rationing, the community was eager for excitement after the wartime austerity. Yealering was progressive in establishing a youth club in 1946.

Health was a serious issue in 1949, when all schools in the district were sprayed to prevent the children being infected with Poliomyelitis.

The 1960s was a time of prosperity, but there was a marked decline in the popularity of the dances and the regular movie shows had ceased in the Hall. There were more social choices. The Wickepin Bowling Club was established in 1960, followed by the Tennis Club in 1963, and the Wickepin District Sports Club opened their club rooms in 1967.

In 1961, legislation changed the name of the local governing bodies from Roads Boards to Shire Councils with an expansion of responsibilities to provide for community needs in addition to the provision of roads and services. In 1964, the Wickepin District Hospital reopened its inpatient service, after functioning as an outpatient facility for a number of years.

The seventies saw the final agricultural show in Wickepin taken place in 1971, and the disbanding of the Agricultural Society in 1975. The town of Wickepin was experiencing a decline in patronage which was further emphasised by the closure of the railway station in 1981. "Back to Wickepin" celebrations in 1979 culminated in a Ball in the Wickepin Town Hall.

Community activities and interests continue to weld the fabric of the country communities. In 1984, the Arts and Crafts group established in Wickepin and subsequently located in the former Masonic Lodge.

During the 1980s, the Wickepin District Sports Club became the main venue for the community social and sporting functions, rivaling the existing Wickepin Town Hall. More recently, the Wickepin Community Centre provides excellent facilities for community functions in Wickepin. The other town centers within the Wickepin Shire are well served by their respective community facility; Yealering Hall, Tincurrin District Hall, and Harrismith Community Centre, all of which have remained the focus of social functions in their respective areas.