



WESTBURY & DISTRICTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Spring 2026 Newsletter

Preserving yesterday for tomorrow.

Welcome to our September–November newsletter. As spring brings new life and colour across the village, we're excited to share upcoming events, local stories and opportunities to connect with the rich history and community spirit of Westbury and surrounding districts.

Westbury Historical
Society Rooms
Lyall Street
Westbury TAS 7303

Open Wednesday &
Thursday
10:00am – 2:00pm

Visit our website
www.westburyhistorical.org

Contact us via our online
form

Westbury and Districts
Historical

Phone 03 6393 1006

Our collection of
photographs, documents and
memorabilia reflects
Westbury's rich convict,
military and Irish heritage.
We can provide displays for
local events, as well as
personalised walking and bus
tours.

Whether you are researching
family history, a local
building, organisation or
event, our volunteers can
assist using resources such as
the Pioneer Index,
Assessment Rolls, Cemetery
Records and other local
archives. We can also help
you navigate online research
tools or simply share our
knowledge of the district's
history.

Sammy Cox: Myth, Legend or Truth?

On 5th June 1891, at the Launceston Benevolent Asylum, a man known as Sammy Cox passed away. He claimed to be 117 years old and the first white person to live in Tasmania, apparently telling his life story to anyone who was willing to listen.

If his story is to be believed, he was born in England as Samuel Emanuel Jervis. His father, the owner of Shenstone Park near Lichfield, was killed by a fall from his horse, when Samuel was ten years old. He was taken in by his uncle Captain John Jervis, who later became an Admiral, accompanying him on a number of voyages to different parts of the world. The last voyage that Samuel made with his uncle was on the Regent Fox, which reached the northern coast of Tasmania in 1789, stopping to replenish their water supply.

His story continues that crew members of the Regent Fox had told Samuel that his uncle was planning to desert him, or even murder him, to claim his inheritance.

Fearing for his life, Samuel went ashore with the water supply party and decided not to return, instead hiding in the bush until the ship departed. He was soon found by a group of Aboriginals, who welcomed him to their tribe and with whom he lived for the next 23 years.



cont...

He later claimed that the group was led by an individual known as Black Jack.

In 1812, he made contact with a group of white settlers in the area of what is now Hadspen, and became attached to the family of Elias Cox, the surname that he then adopted for the remainder of his life. In his later years he worked as a gardener at Longford, Bishopsbourne and eventually Carrick. He lived at Carrick for over 50 years, and was friends with his neighbours, the well-known Monds family of the local flour mill.

Is Sammy's life story true? If he was the first white person to live in Tasmania, then his story is historically significant. Over the years there have been members of the Jervis family that have maintained that it is true. However, many researchers have been sceptical, questioning the details and providing alternative stories. If Sammy did live for so long with the Aboriginals, why didn't he provide any details of their culture and language in his stories? Why are the details of his uncle's naval history contradictory? Was Sammy in fact a convict, trying to hide the details of his crimes?

Despite the questions, the name of Sammy Cox and his stories have become folklore. At 107 years of age, Sammy apparently dug his own grave in the orchard of his home at Carrick, and kept a lighted candle in the grave to ward off evil spirits. Two years before his death, so presumably at 115 years of age, Sammy appeared before a Launceston magistrate on the charge of being intoxicated in the street. It seems that the magistrate held some respect for the 'old fellow' and gave him just the minimum fine of five shillings. A resident of Carrick later described him as a 'short kindly old fellow who spoke in a jerky voice, and boasted that he was in line for an Earldom in England'. What are your thoughts on the life of Sammy Cox? Is he a myth or a legend?

First published July 2025 edition of the
North Coast Post.



How the Society became to be...

The Westbury & Districts Historical Society was established in 1993 by a dedicated group of volunteers who saw the need to preserve our local history. Over 30 years later, the current volunteers are just as dedicated and are proud to continue the work of 'preserving yesterday for tomorrow'. Located in the old police station on Lyall Street in Westbury, the Society operates as a family history research centre and a local history museum.



Whatever you are researching – family history, local buildings, community groups, local events, etc – our team of volunteers are available to help. We have access to the Pioneer Index (which lists Births, Deaths and Marriages from 1803 to 1899), Assessment Rolls (from 1858 to 1958), Cemetery Records and other local documents. With a growing number of resources available on-line, our volunteers can also help in navigating these sites. Our top three websites for family history research in Tasmania are Trove, LIST (Land Information Systems Tasmania) and the Tasmanian Archives. We provide guided walking tours on the first Sunday of each month. Every month is different. The walks may focus on a particular theme (businesses, hospitals, midwives, schools, pubs, sports, etc) or a particular location (William Street, the Village Green, the Anglican Cemetery or Catholic Cemetery). Details of the walks are available on our website or Facebook page. We can also provide personalised tours for groups or customised displays for local events.

The Society has an extensive collection of photographs, scrapbooks, documents, publications and memorabilia that showcase the diverse past of Westbury and the surrounding districts. With support from Meander Valley Council and Arts Tasmania, we are currently in the process of cataloguing and digitising our entire collection. This is a massive project, but it is an important project to ensure the ongoing care of our collection and to improve the accessibility of our collection to the wider community. We are always keen to add to our collection. If you have something of interest, we would love to hear from you. Even if you don't want to donate the item to the Society, we would love to see what you have and perhaps record the details.



Our society is always keen to welcome new members. You do not need to be an expert – all you need is to have an interest in the history of our local area. Please contact us for further information.

Meet Our Secretary – Miranda Ward

Every successful organisation relies on strong organisation and dedication behind the scenes, and our Historical Society is no exception. As Secretary, Miranda Ward plays a vital role in keeping everything running smoothly, from coordinating communications to supporting the many activities that bring our shared history to life. We sat down with Miranda to learn more about her involvement, what inspires her, and her connection to our local heritage.



What first sparked your interest in history?

I have always had an interest in history. I grew up in East Farndon, a very old village steeped in history in West Northamptonshire, England. We often visited stately homes, castles and I had a teacher who brought history alive.

How did you become involved with the Historical Society, and how long have you been Secretary?

The first time we visited Westbury, I saw the sign for the Historical Society and thought it would be great to live somewhere that I could find out about the history of the area. A few weeks later, we found our home and that was the beginning of an interesting adventure. This is my first year of being Secretary. My role involves taking the minutes of the monthly meetings, communicating with members when necessary and helping out when required. I enjoy the feeling of making a contribution to our community.

What does your role as Secretary involve, and what do you enjoy most about it?

I think the most important role the Society plays in our community is being the caretaker of people's stories, personal items and artefacts. An incredible amount of information has been donated to the Society and we are in the process of organising a Cataloguing Management System, which will hopefully make the process of researching family histories and Westbury histories easier.

Is there a particular story, person, or piece of local history that stands out to you?

A story that stands out for me is the one of Alice Robson, who was transported for stealing fabric, stockings, handkerchiefs, an apron and a shawl. Her story of determination and strength is amazing.

Cont...

What has been one of the most rewarding or memorable moments during your time with the Society?

My most rewarding moments since joining the Society is completing my first walking tour. I most definitely had L plates on, had a lovely group of people who awarded me with my P plates when the walk finished!

What would you say to someone in the community who is thinking about getting involved or visiting for the first time?

To anyone thinking about getting involved, I say have a go. It is a great way to meet people, make friends, make a difference, learn and have some fun.

Westbury Silhouette Trail

Take a walk through the centre of Westbury and discover eight striking metal silhouettes that honour notable people from the town's past.

Trail brochures are available from the Great Western Tiers Visitor Centre, Meander Valley Council offices, Westbury Post Office and each Silhouette location.

WESTBURY Silhouette Trail

Eight exquisite artworks depicting treasured characters of the Westbury community

Publican
The Flapjack Sisters circa 1891-1994
Three sister sisters who ran Westbury's Flapjack's Inn with originality and style for more than 50 years.

Politician
Sir Walter Lee KCMG 1874-1963
Westbury and local lay preacher who became three times Premier of Tasmania and a Knight of the Realm.

Shopkeeper
Frank Mehegan 1885-1967
Beloved shopkeeper, soldier and humanitarian.

Priest
Father James Hogan 1825-1899
Westbury's first resident priest who served his community for 50 years and was revered by all denominations.

Sportsman
'Jack' Badcock 1914-1982
A prodigiously talented cricketer who toured England with Donald Bradman in the 1938 Ashes series.

Magistrate
John Peyton Jones 1809-1891
Magistrate and first Mayor, who as a young soldier fought in the Crimean War and was one of the first of many who escaped from the Gallipoli Peninsula to settle in Westbury.

Artist
Ellen Nora Payne 1865-1962
Wood carver whose work can be found in prestigious institutions all over Australia and Britain. Some of her finest examples rest in St Andrew's Church, Westbury.

Exile
John Mitchell and Thomas Francis Maguire were two of the many Irish who fled to Westbury to escape political exile. Aided by Westbury villagers they escaped and went on to become legendary figures of Irish history.

Silhouette Artist: John Parish

... that leads you on to wider discovery and delight

The Westbury Silhouette Trail is approximately 3.5 km long. It is recommended that walkers allow 60 minutes to complete the trail. For more information on the Silhouette Trail and the characters it honours, contact the Westbury and District Historical Society on phone 03 6381 1006 or at www.westburysilhouette.org

Supported by:
Meander Valley Council
Westbury and District Historical Society

WESTBURY Silhouette Trail

Extraordinary, everyday lives that thread the generations and echo across continents ...

Westbury was founded as a village in 1828 by Governor George Arthur. Centred upon a beautiful Village Green it was laid out on a grand scale in anticipation of becoming the main gateway to Tasmania's north-west. Although this never eventuated, its elegant buildings and countless quiet lanes are testament to this early ambition.

Set amongst fertile plains and bordered by the magnificent Great Western Tiers, Westbury grew to become a thriving agricultural centre with a rich farming heritage. It flourished amid the glorious coaching era and the subsequent arrival of the Western Railway in 1871.

Today, Westbury is renowned for its English country character and Celtic charm. Its towering oaks, hawthorn hedges and graceful colonial architecture offer a timeless experience of rural splendour.

Westbury's story is deeply embedded in British colonialism and Irish culture, formed by the dedication of early Irish clergy and the toil of convict, soldier and free settler alike.

The characters celebrated in the Westbury Silhouette Trail are examples of the many inspirational lives that have built this community. Quirky, skilful, stylish, bold and compassionate - they reveal the strands of humanity that bind communities and from which all good things grow.

What's Happening Around the Village



Westbury Historical Society Meeting – 2pm Last Monday of the month at Supper Rooms

- * 28 September
- * 26 October
- * 30 November



Westbury Historical Walking Tours – First Sunday of the month

- * 6 Sept Hospitals, Doctors & Midwives (meet Love Lucy Boots)
- * 4 Oct Catholic Cemetery (meet Cemetery)
- * 1 Nov Mystery, Murder & Mayhem (Meet Love Lucy Boots)



The Westbury Market – Third Saturday of the month at St Andrew's Anglican Church

- * 19 September
- * 17 October
- * 21 November

If you have something happening that connects to our village history please let us know for next quarters edition.

Visit Our History Rooms

Swing by and say hello! Our delightful volunteers are ready to help with all your family history mysteries, local sleuthing, and historical treasures. Everyone's invited, and the price of admission? Absolutely free!



Become A Member



Join for \$15 per year

By becoming a member of the Westbury Historical Society, you are:

- ✓ Supporting preservation of local archives
- ✓ Protecting important heritage sites
- ✓ Encouraging historical research
- ✓ Strengthening community connection
- ✓ Ensuring future generations know their story

We warmly welcome new members of all ages. Whether your family has been here for generations or you've only just arrived, there is a place for you in preserving Westbury's story.

Sunday Strolls

You are invited to join members of the Westbury & Districts
Historical Society for guided tours of Westbury

Hear fascinating stories of our village history

Meet on Sunday afternoons (first Sunday of the month),
starting at 2.00pm from Love Lucy Boots*
(*except for Cemetery tours)

Cost \$10 per person per tour

Contact Amanda for more information on 0467 097 791
or email amanda.m.taylor@bigpond.com

~~3~~ **May – Village Green and Town Common**

~~7~~ **June – William Street**

~~5~~ **July – Anglican Cemetery (*start at Cemetery)**

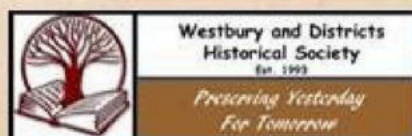
~~2~~ **August – Sportsground and Probation Station**

6 September – Hospitals, Doctors and Midwives

4 October – Catholic Cemetery (*start at Cemetery)

1 November – Mystery, Murder and Mayhem

6 December – Pubs and Inns



DELORAINÉ

HISTORY TOURS

SATURDAY 26TH SEPTEMBER

— LEAVING FROM EMPIRE HOTEL —



10AM

CONVICTS. BUSHRANGERS. CATTLEMEN.

Join us for an easy stroll of the river and main street
for 1.5 hours

\$25

2PM

OLD CHURCHES AND ORIGINAL BUILDINGS TOUR.

Entry to a couple – 1.5 hours

\$25



**DELORAINÉ HAS A GREAT STORY
TO SHOW AND TELL.**

BOTH TOURS VISIT CONVICT BURIAL GROUND.



MESSAGE OR PHONE TO BOOK: 0457 406040

PAY ON THE DAY.

WE WILL ENTER SOME BUILDINGS

2027 Sunday Strolls

You are invited to join members of the Westbury & Districts Historical Society for guided tours of Westbury and hear fascinating stories of our village history.

We meet on the first Sunday of every month, starting at 2.00pm from Love Lucy Boots*
(*except for Cemetery tours)

Cost \$10 per person per tour

Contact Amanda for more information on 0467 097 791
or email amanda.m.taylor@bigpond.com

- 3 January – Memorials of Westbury**
- 7 February – Village Green and Town Common**
- 7 March – Anglican Cemetery (*start at Cemetery)**
- 4 April – William Street**
- 2 May – Churches**
- 6 June – Meander Valley Road**
- 4 July – Catholic Cemetery (*start at Cemetery)**
- 1 August – Hospitals, Doctors and Midwives**
- 5 September – Schools**
- 3 October – Sporting History**
- 7 November – Mystery, Murder and Mayhem**
- 5 December – Pubs and Inns**

