

Whole Histories at St Clements, NSW



Cheryl Mongan holding a painted life model side up to the window

It was a pleasure for Chief Investigator Martyn Jolly and Research Fellow Elisa deCourcy to meet Cheryl Mongan, president of the Yass and District Historical Society at St Clement's Retreat and Conference Centre, near Galong, NSW. For many years Cheryl has been closely involved, along with the other St Clement's Historians Drs Richard Reid, Jeff Brownrigg and Geoffrey Burkhardt, in preserving the cultural heritage of St Clement's. As the fascinating museum which Cheryl helped create at the Retreat reveals, St Clement's began as the property of the Irish squatter Edward 'Ned' Ryan. Ned had been transported from Ireland for political rebellion in 1816, receiving his Certificate of Freedom 1830 which is displayed in the museum. His son John Nagle Ryan became a Member of Parliament, and on his death, with no issue, he left the 800 acre property, to the Redemptorists, an Italian missionary order. The Redemptorists built St Clement's, a monastery and school, which educated over 2000 boys between 1918 and 1975. After its closure

as a secondary college the various buildings, from a nineteenth century squatter's house to a tower to a twentieth century monastery, became a popular retreat and conference centre.

When they were working on the museum the historians found within the buildings the remnants of an extensive library, various educational and religious artefacts, and a large collection of lantern slides. Some of the hundreds of slides have been incorporated into the displays of the museum, others await proper cataloguing and rehousing. The collection is a very representative one. There are plenty of slides from which a show could be compiled to entertain the boys, mixing religious slides, travel slides, and comic slides. Religious topics dominate, with some sets documenting Miracle Plays, while there are also many travel slides, of Italy (the country of origin of the Redemptorists) and Ireland, the 'home' of many in the district. There are also plenty of popular comic sets, which would have been shown accompanied by someone reading a comic poem, these include the popular 'The Diverting History of John Gilpin' (a wild horse ride which also exists in the collection of Rouse Hill, run by Sydney Living Museums), and 'Bill Adams, The Hero of Waterloo' (about a braggart old Napoleonic soldier, which was one of 'turns' put on by the famous touring raconteur George Snazelle in the 1890s). The various 'title' slides which also remain in the collection, indicate that someone at St Clements took lantern shows very seriously.



Cheryl, Martyn and Elisa were also intrigued by a small set of collodion slides of Sydney, dating from around the 1880s, before the time when 'Galong House' was St Clement's. These documented many of the then significant buildings in Sydney, such as the Museum and the 'Immigrants Depot', which reverted to its original name as the Hyde Park Barracks in 1985.



'Colonial Secretary's Office, Sydney', collodion magic lantern slide, c.1880s.



'Government House, Sydney', collodion magic lantern slide, c.1880s.

Cheryl, Richard Reid and Jeff Brownrigg have organised a large gathering of local and family historians for the Yass and District Historical Society at St Clements from May 10 to 12 for the conference [*Whole Histories: Keeping the stories alive*](#). That will be an excellent opportunity to visit St Clements, to see the museum, and some of their lantern slide collection.