

HISTORY

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2024 RAHS Conference

Windows into Local History

Campbelltown Catholic Club, 26–27 October 2024



Campbelltown Railway Station, c. 1916 (Campbelltown and Airds Historical Society).

The Royal Australian Historical Society is coming to Campbelltown for its 2024 annual conference. The two-day history conference theme is *Windows into Local History*. With its intimate view of the past, local history can broaden and challenge our understanding of Australia's national history. Campbelltown's diverse historic sites, landmarks and festivals make it the perfect location to explore how local histories can enhance our understanding of the past.

RAHS President Dr Iain Stuart says, 'The theme reflects our commitment to uncovering and sharing the rich tapestry of our local communities. I look forward to meeting delegates at the conference and exploring these fascinating stories together.'

Our keynote speaker is Emeritus Professor Mark McKenna FAHA, author of several prize-winning books. In this year's Lesley Muir Address, he will

explain how local history will form the foundation of his forthcoming short history of Australia.

The conference program features topics on Campbelltown, the Fisher's Ghost Festival, and digital tools and resources to support your history projects. There are also plenty of opportunities to network, including a welcome reception on Friday, 25 October, hosted by the Campbelltown and Airds Historical Society at the Campbelltown Arts Centre. On Sunday, 27 October, we will present the Certificates of Achievement and Appreciation, which recognise the invaluable contributions made by individuals to historical societies throughout New South Wales.

For more information and to book online, visit <https://www.rahs.org.au/2024-rahs-conference/> or call us on (02) 9247 8001.

The Mawson of Mawson Park, Campbelltown

Stephen Coppins

Visitors and new residents of Campbelltown driving along Queen Street (the main road of the city) or walking from the railway station up Railway Street, will notice the prominent local feature – Mawson Park. Though most of these people won't be aware of the historical significance of this park and often assume it is named after the famous Antarctic explorer Sir Douglas Mawson, this is not the case.

The site that would one day become Mawson Park was where Governor Lachlan Macquarie had named the new township of 'Campbell Town' on 1 December 1820, in honour of his wife Elizabeth's maiden name, in front of his family, dignitaries and fifty to sixty local settlers. Earlier he had laid out the 175-acre site for a new township, located on the original Dharawal lands, in the middle of what was then known as the District of Airs.¹

For years, this site was simply referred to by locals as 'The Green', until the park was formally renamed in 1938, in honour of local doctor, William Mawson, Sir Douglas' elder brother.²

Who was Dr William Mawson?

William Mawson MD ChM obtained his medical degree from the University of Sydney in 1904 and after a brief period at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, practiced at Gundagai from 1906.³

William and his wife Jessie (née Davis), decided to move closer to Sydney, with William arranging to take over the practice of previous Campbelltown Medical Officer, Dr W.B. Dight.⁴ The Mawsons and their two young daughters moved into the grand two-storey Georgian home, Glenalvon, in Lithgow Street, in February 1908. Glenalvon had been rented out as a residence and surgery to Campbelltown's medical officers since 1891. Their son was born here in 1910.⁵

By 1914, the Mawsons built two new houses in Cordeaux Street, opposite St. Peter's Anglican Church. Their main home, named Mulwaree, was also William's new surgery, while the smaller dwelling built for his mother, and was sold after she passed away in 1917.⁶

Dr Mawson's medical care extended well beyond the limits of Campbelltown, often being called south to Appin or travelling as far north as Liverpool to treat illness, medical emergencies, accidents, or victims of foul play.

As the local medico, Dr Mawson was on the Bed Endowment Committee, which raised funds to cover costs for beds at Camden Hospital and the Renwick hospital for infants.⁷ He was also involved with the Liverpool District Ambulance Auxiliary. He continued with this work after both organisations were merged into the Campbelltown Hospital Auxiliary.⁸

Dr Mawson's name often appeared in the correspondence lists at Campbelltown Municipal Council meetings, bringing the Aldermen's attention to a range of health and safety hazards, from dangerous roads to unsanitary water issues.⁹

He was also involved with a range of community organisations, holding positions of President or Vice President on many of them, including the School of Arts,¹⁰ the Agricultural Society,¹¹ the Campbelltown Centennial Celebration Committee of 1920,¹² and a number of sporting clubs.

Dr and Mrs Mawson were also active with St. Peter's Anglican Church, with William serving on its parochial committee.¹³ They were also parishioners of the Presbyterian Church.¹⁴

The Doctor had a great love of music and led the Campbelltown Choral Society for many years as conductor, singer and piano accompaniment. This choir travelled across the district, performing at community events, or to raise money in support of churches of all denominations and community groups.¹⁵

By 1925, Dr Mawson had purchased the old Kendall Mill, located at the southern end of Queen Street. At this time, the mill and chimney stack were in a bad state and needed to be demolished. Mawson with the expertise of architect A.W. Mowle, restored and converted the mill house into Milby Private Hospital. The hospital was opened the following year where many of the district's new generation were born, until the hospital's closure in 1943.¹⁶

Mawson and Mowle moved straight into a second project, using some of the sandstone bricks from the old mill in the construction of a new building.¹⁷ This project was in the interests of community entertainment and the Macquarie Theatre, on the corner of Queen and Browne Streets, was opened in August 1926, and was managed by A. Holdsworth.



Crowds gathered to witness the unveiling of the memorial to Dr William Mawson in Mawson Park, Campbelltown, 1938 (Campbelltown City Library, Local Studies Collection).

The theatre was able to be converted from a cinema into a hall, as the needs required.¹⁸ In 1929, Dr Mawson, new manager E.H. Holdsworth and A.W. Mowle, undertook extensive renovations, improving the front entrance, installing extra seating in an upstairs dress circle, as well as a state-of-the-art sound system and electric lighting.¹⁹ Unfortunately, this continual workload eventually caught up with Dr Mawson in February 1931, when he suffered a stroke.²⁰

While recovering, Mawson went into partnership with Dr Karl Owen Jones.²¹ Eventually Dr Mawson was able to return to work, but in a limited capacity,²² and over the next few years was able to slowly increase his community work.²³

Community Esteem and Recognition

In July 1931, after Dr Mawson had recovered from his stroke, the Campbelltown Associated Friendly Societies arranged a social evening at the Town Hall in recognition of his many years of service. Over 300 members of the combined societies were in attendance

to present Dr Mawson with an illuminated address and Mrs Mawson with a cut glass rose bowl.²⁴

By March 1935, Dr Mawson's health had declined again, and he was forced to resign as Medical Officer for Campbelltown. His partner Dr Jones was appointed as his replacement,²⁵ and the Mawsons moved from their beloved community to be closer to the medical treatment required by William.

The following year, when news came that Dr Mawson had been placed into care, and unlikely to return to Campbelltown, the Council and community proceeded to arrange a tangible presentation in recognition 'for what he had done for the district'.²⁶

With the funds raised, Dr Mawson was presented with a bed reading table, inscribed with 'Presented to Dr William Mawson from the residents of Campbelltown and District in appreciation of services as a Medical Practitioner and as a Citizen'. Mrs Mawson was presented with a gold wristlet watch.²⁷

Enough money had been raised to allow for the



Dr William Mawson, 1904 (MHNSW-StAC, Photographs of Doctors Series).

construction of a commemorative pergola in the Green, to be renamed 'Mawson Park' in the Doctor's honour.²⁸ The Council also obtained a State Government grant towards the costs of constructing shelter sheds and other beautification works.²⁹

Although Dr Mawson was not well enough to attend himself, Mrs Mawson officially opened the commemorative pergola at Mawson Park in front of a large gathering of citizens on Saturday, 8 January 1938.³⁰

Reminders of Mawson

As is the case with many suburbs and towns, some of the physical legacies of Dr Mawson have been erased in the name of progress. The site of the old Macquarie Cinema is now replaced by shops and the Mawson Medical Centre.

Many years after the closure of Milby Private Hospital, the building was transformed into the popular Fisher's Ghost Restaurant in 1975.³¹ Unfortunately, the restaurant was damaged by fire in 2005 and remains derelict.³²

Glenalvon, the Mawson's first home in Campbelltown, has been heritage listed since 1965 and is owned by Campbelltown City Council. The Campbelltown and

Airds Historical Society, now call Glenalvon home, and regularly open it to the public and tour groups.

St. Peter's Anglican and the Presbyterian churches, where Doctor Mawson worshipped and performed, still serve the community, as well as another of his performance venues – the old Town Hall, which is now appropriately home to the Campbelltown Theatre Group.

And of course, the William Mawson memorial pergola still proudly stands in Mawson Park. The park has been used for nearly 86 years as the venue for community festivals, fundraisers and memorial services, as well as a playground for local children.

Following his death in Turrumurra, on 4 June 1939, aged 58, William Mawson returned to the town where he had spent so much of his life and had put so much work into. He was laid to rest at St. Peter's Anglican Cemetery, in the Mawson family plot, with his parents, son Robert, who had been killed in a RAAF plane crash in Victoria, in 1938, and later Jessie (d. 1951).³³

About the Author

Stephen Coppins has worked in the library sector since 1996, specialising in Local Studies since 2005. He joined the Campbelltown and Airds Historical Society in 2021 and has been President since 2023. He co-authored, with Jane Elias, *Pictorial History Holroyd* (2013) and worked on a number of newspaper digitisation projects, including *The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate*, *The Cumberland Mercury* and *The Broadcaster*.

Acknowledgements

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P.A.

A.H.C.G.

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G.U.O.O.F

CAMPBELLTOWN

JULY-1931

TO

William Mawson

M.B. ChM.