

The CSU Regional Archives is currently extending its opening hours to include the first Saturday of every month. On these days, the archives will be open from 10am to 3pm. The next Saturday opening will occur on February 4. This trial initiative has been put in place to cater for those researchers who are unable to visit the archives on weekdays during normal business hours. It is hoped that enough researchers and visitors will avail themselves of this service to warrant it becoming a permanent occurrence.

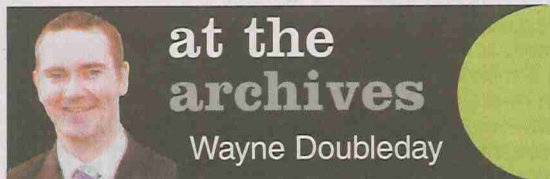


The headstones of Anne Saxon and her three-year-old son, Jonathan, can be found in Cowells Road, just east of Forest Hill.

Historic family tragedy revisited

what you need to know

The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building on South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue. Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with enquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straight-forward enquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour including copying and postage. For further information, phone 02 6925 3666, email archive@csu.edu.au, or visit our website at www.csu.edu.au/research/archives for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.



at the archives

Wayne Doubleday

Late last year, the CSU Regional Archives received a donation of a framed image of the Saxon family from the granddaughter of one of those depicted. It's an absorbing image, and not just because of its age, size or the details that were added by hand; for the tragedies that occurred in that family, and to others to whom they were connected, make a moving, albeit fascinating, story.

The photograph depicts the children of Jonathan and Anne Saxon in 1882, namely: Pamela, Alfred Edwin, Blanche, Emily, Frances Catherine Anne, Samuel, and Henrietta. Admittedly, they appear a large family by today's standards, but they were not so out of place during their own time. Their ages range from Frances at approximately 30 years old down to Emily at 12 years of age.

The sad tale of this particular photograph is based upon the family story that the children had gathered on this day, not only to have their photograph taken, but to hear the reading of their parent's will.

Jonathan Atherton Saxon had died on August 25, 1882, at the age of 51 years, the cause being "blood poisoning". One report suggests he had been bitten by a spider. His children's grief at their father's untimely death would have been compounded by the fact that their mother, Anne, had passed away 17 days earlier on August 8, at the age of 53, from cancer.

Jonathan and Annie are both buried in a private cemetery just outside Forest Hill, on Cowells Road. The family had been in possession of a farm in the vicinity of the cemetery called Kyeamba Meadows. Within the same cemetery is a headstone belonging to one of their sons, Jonathan Atherton, who died at the age of only three years and three months, pre-

SHOCKING TRAGEDY.

Murder and Suicide at Kyamba Creek.

One of those appalling tragedies that compass the double crime of murder and suicide—and which happily for society at large are of rare occurrence—was enacted within eight miles of Wagga Wagga on Monday morning. The particulars connected with this terrible event are so shocking in all their aspects, that one hardly knows how to describe it without offending the keener sensibilities of most readers; but it is impossible in doing justice to the sickening subject, to avoid the confines of sensationalism. The story, then, of the Kyamba Tragedy, may be thus briefly told:—

The opening paragraph of the *Wagga Wagga Advertiser's* report of the murder of Florence Cowell and the suicide of her aunt, Sarah West.

deceasing his parents by only five years. He was the youngest of his brothers and sisters and the only one born in the Wagga district.

In 1873, the eldest child of the Saxon family, Frances, married a widower who lived in the area, Thomas Australia Cowell. A number of their children who died young are also buried in the private cemetery on Cowells Road.

Thomas Cowell had a sad history before he married Frances. His first wife, according to the local papers, died in the mid-1860s. So, he moved to Forest Hill and passed the primary care of his two children, Florence and Thomas, to his brother- and sister-in-law, John and Sarah West.

The second (and possibly, greatest) tragedy of this family occurred some seven years later, in 1873,

namely, the murder of Florence Cowell by her aunt, Sarah West, and her subsequent suicide in Kyeamba Creek.

It appears that Sarah and 13-year-old Florence were in the house alone on Monday morning, while the men were working on a neighbouring farm. Thomas, Florence's younger brother, was sent back to the house about eight o'clock when he saw his aunt walking rapidly towards the creek.

Thomas continued into the house to find his sister dead in her bedroom. There had obviously been a struggle as the furniture in the room had been strewn about and covered in blood. The attending doctor later stated Florence's head was "one mass of fractures".

At the inquest, Sarah's husband reported that he had noticed a change in her manner in the past three years, that she had become "peevish" and jealous of the children. Sarah had apparently even threatened harm to the family on previous occasions, though nothing had come of this at the time.

The news spread quickly throughout the district of the "fearful tragedy" at the West house. "Shocking Tragedy—Murder and Suicide at Kyamba Creek" and "Fearful Murder and Suicide of the Murderess" headlined the news reports. The local papers published the sensational story across multiple columns with as many details as they could possibly fit in, including nearly all the statements made by the witnesses at the inquest, as well as the doctor's report of Florence's terrible wounds.

Perhaps this story can be summed up best by the elegiac reporter for the *Wagga Wagga Advertiser*, when he wrote,

"We willingly close the narrative of this fearful occurrence, and would, if possible, dismiss it from our mind. But it will indeed be many a day ere the Kyamba (sic) Tragedy shall have faded from the memories of those who may now peruse the details of this, the most awful instance of combined murder and suicide that has ever occurred in New South Wales."

Compiled by Jillian Kohlhagen
References: Image donated to CSURA by Grace Faulks (RW2900); *Wagga Wagga: Wagga Wagga City Council Rural Heritage Study* 1999; *Wagga Wagga Express*, January 22, 1873; *Wagga Wagga Advertiser*, January 22, 1873.