

# At the Archives



BY WAYNE DOUBLEDAY

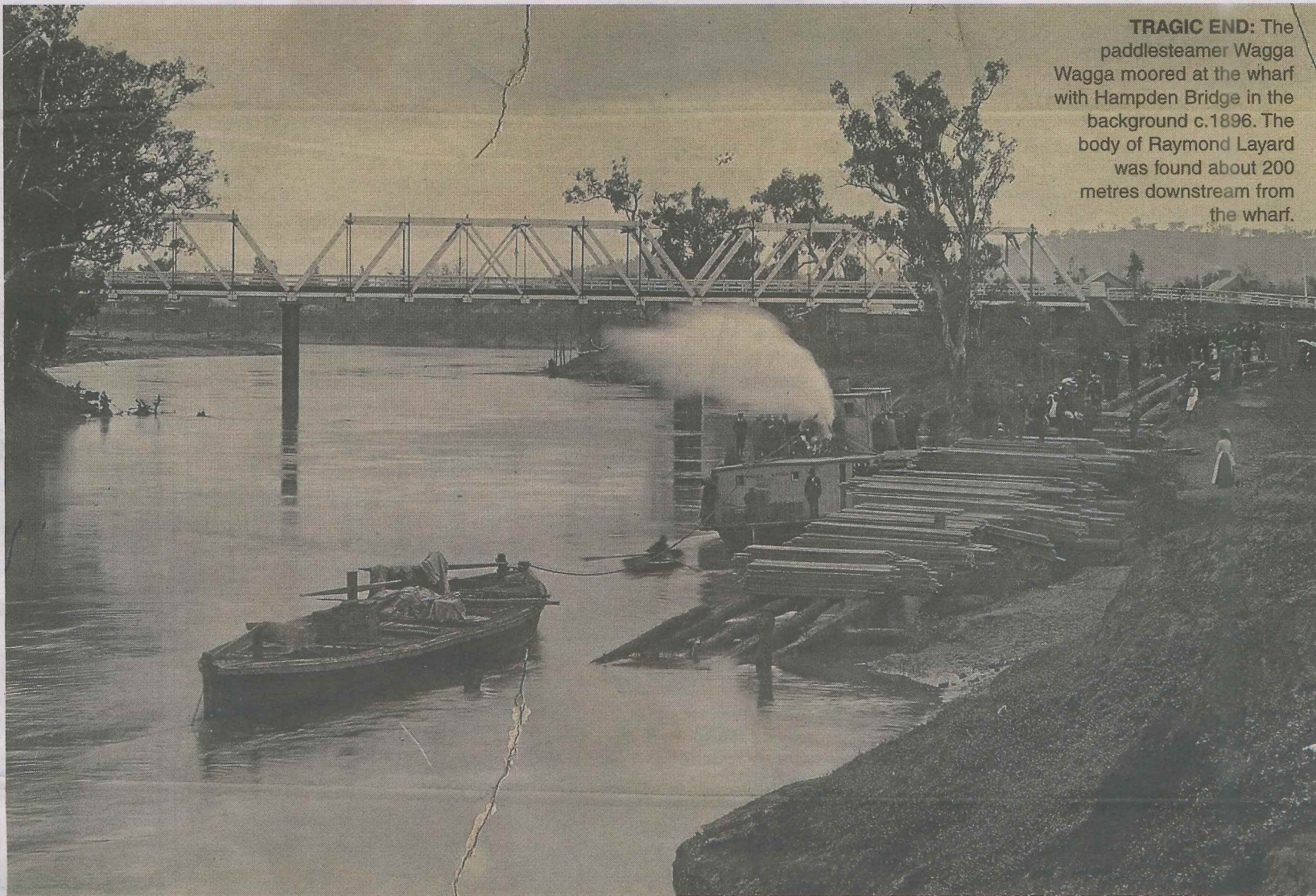
The CSU Regional Archives is extending its opening hours to include the first Saturday of the month. This initiative has been put in place to cater for those researchers who are unable to visit the archives on weekdays during normal business hours. The next Saturday opening will be on August 2 from 10am to 3pm.

## INFO

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 inquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straight-forward inquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour including copying and postage. For further information, phone 6925 3666, email [archive@csu.edu.au](mailto:archive@csu.edu.au), or visit our website at [www.csu.edu.au/research/archives](http://www.csu.edu.au/research/archives) for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.

Compiled by Paul O'Donnell

References: *Wagga Wagga Advertiser* 5/10/1878, 11/1/1879, 22/1/1879, 9/4/1879; *Wagga Wagga Express* 23/6/1875, 1/6/1878, 15/1/1879, 30/8/1879; CSU Regional Archives RW3016/1/2.



**TRAGIC END:** The paddlesteamer Wagga moored at the wharf with Hampden Bridge in the background c.1896. The body of Raymond Layard was found about 200 metres downstream from the wharf.

## Murders on the Bidgee

### Part 1

THE Murrumbidgee River has always been of great importance to the communities that have lived around it.

For thousands of years, it provided a rich source of sustenance for the people of the Wiradjuri nation.

Early European settlement followed the river frontage since an assured water supply was essential for their continued survival. Over the years, the river and its banks have been used as a means of transport, a source of drinking water for both humans and their livestock and a location for various leisure pursuits including swimming, fishing, boating and picnicking.

However, during the late 1870s, the river gained notoriety due to its association with a series of brutal murders carried out in the Wagga area.

Between 1875 and 1879, four men were viciously attacked and their bodies disposed of in, or close to, the river.

*The Wagga Express* declared "The list is a terrible one for a comparatively small town – would be terrible for cities like Melbourne and Sydney, or, indeed, London. It is the City of Crows and, in truth, there has been human carrion in abundance."

On Saturday, June 19, 1875, John Planer, a local cooper, discovered the body of a young man about 30 years of age snagged in the branches of an oak tree some 200 yards below the Wagga wharf.

A subsequent examination of the remains revealed the skull had been fractured – apparently by a blunt instrument. Personal papers found in his pockets indicated the deceased name was Raymond Layard.

Apparently, he had been lodging at Mr Tibeaud's Star Hotel, located on the corner of Gurwood and Beckwith streets, since April 23,

when he had travelled from Urana seeking employment.

At the inquest, John Martin, an acquaintance of Layard's, testified that Layard had been of low spirits lately as a consequence of being romantically rejected by Elizabeth King, a workmate of Martin's. However, the medical examiner, Dr William Large, discounted suicide due to the arrangement of the deceased's head wounds. The jury returned a finding of murder by person or persons unknown.

Three years later, Martin was arrested on a charge of robbery and made a statement before the Narrandera Bench implicating a shepherd named Hector Gillies in the murder. Gillies was arrested at Hay on April 18, 1878 and tried on October 2 of that year.

The Crown's case was based almost entirely on Martin's testimony. He stated that he, Layard, Gillies and a prostitute known as Long Mary Anne had been drinking on the banks of the river.

Layard had told him to wait near, and then proceeded further up stream with the other two.

After a time, Martin heard raised voices and a scuffle and Gillies returned saying that Layard was with the woman and was "all right". Gillies suggested they head to the Bridge Hotel for a drink, but Martin objected, stating Layard had asked him to wait. Gillies supposedly replied: "I thought he had money, but he had none."

Later on, when they had returned to the hotel, Gillies said, in reply to another question about Layard, "A dead cock never crowed".

Martin understood that to mean that a murder had been committed, but kept his silence.

The jury could not agree on a verdict and was discharged from its duties. Local rumour had it all the jury members believed Martin had been an accomplice to the crime and should be charged as

well. Supposedly, the five jurors who sought to acquit Gillies gave as their reasoning that they could not reconcile it to their consciences to hang Gillies and see Martin go scot free.

Gillies was once again tried for the murder of Raymond Layard in April 1879. The trial occupied the court until night, a crowd of people manifesting the strongest interest in the proceedings.

The jury returned a verdict of "not guilty". *The Express* reported: "The announcement was received with an extraordinary exhibition of feeling. There was a large concourse of people outside for a quarter-of-an-hour afterwards, and the town rang with loud cheering."

### Ganmain mystery

ANOTHER grisly murder with many similarities to that of the Layard slaying was perpetrated in early 1879. On January 10, the body of a male person, with extensive wounds to the head, was found floating in the Murrumbidgee River a short distance from Devlin's Ganmain Station, which was located about 28 miles from Wagga on the Narrandera Road.

At the inquest, medical evidence provided by Dr Erasmus Wren, indicated that "the injuries were sufficient to cause immediate death and that the body had been thrown into the river before it was cold. It had been in the water at least 10 days and, due to swelling and the advanced state of decomposition, could not, at that time, be identified."

A week after the initial inquest, the body was exhumed and re-examined. The swelling had entirely subsided and three separate witnesses deposed that the deceased was a "Chinaman" although none were able to identify him.

Despite the offer of a £100 reward by the government, the case was never solved.