

On the record:

2013 Sir Rupert Hamer Award case studies



"UNUSED ROADS AND WATER				
WATER FRONTAGE. (TO BE DESCRIBED.)	NAME AND ADDRESS OF THE OCCUPIER OR OCCUPIERS AND OWNER OR OWNERS OF ALL PRIVATE LAND ABUTTING ON EACH FRONTAGE SO SPECIFIED AND WHICH IS NOT FENCED OFF FROM SUCH FRONTAGE.			
	OCCUPIER.		OWNER.	
	Name.	Address.	Name.	Address.
<i>Weeks Wentworth</i>	<i>Samuel James J.</i>	<i>J.C. Weeks (S) Carlisle Court</i>	<i>Janiebeth East "Berside" Caucy Island East Aylmer</i>	<i>25 years 21 years</i>

Community soldiers on with recordkeeping

Collaboration between Loddon Shire Council and a local historical society has ensured the records of soldiers who served in World War I will be around for many years to come. Working together, the two organisations have been able to preserve vital records. As such, a Sir Rupert Hamer Recordkeeping Award was received for their efforts.

The Category: Places of Deposit (Community Archives)

About the Loddon Shire

The Loddon Shire covers an area of approximately 6,700 square kilometres making it the seventh largest municipality (in area) in Victoria. The municipality is characterised by the number of small towns dispersed throughout the area. The Shire's population is approximately 8,600.

The Challenge:

Following the development and implementation of the Loddon Shire Council Records Management Improvement Plan, the council identified a number of challenges around storage and preservation of valuable records. A number of historic records were identified as being of high risk, as they were stored on open shelving within shipping containers located at a council depot and others in a storage room at the Serpentine office. Among these records were the East Loddon Soldiers Medals and Memorial Register for the period of 1915 to 1920. A survey of the records of the old East Loddon Shire identified this volume was unique to the collection. It was the only volume of its type and provided information about the young men from the region who served in World War I. At the same time, an old volume was discovered which contained details of medals awarded to each soldier – an alphabetical listing of surname, first name, date, and place of residence. In terms of the memorials; surname, first name, name of next of kin, address, age, rank, unit, date of death, and place of death were also included. Additionally among the records was one surviving signed return for Clive Atkinson, dated 1 January 1920, which is the completed pro forma sent out by the Shire of East Loddon to gather information on returning

soldiers.

The Solution:

As part of the records and archives program at Loddon Shire Council, and the commencement of a records transfer and disposal program in late 2007, the East Loddon Soldiers Medals and Memorial Registers were relocated to compactus shelving in a more secure location. The digitisation of the East Loddon Soldiers Medals and Memorial Register is one component of an ongoing records preservation and accessibility program at Loddon Shire Council. A special budget for this purpose was approved by Council at its meeting on 17 December 2007.

Approach:

A conservation assessment of the historic volumes in the custody of Loddon Shire Council was undertaken by a professional conservator in 2008. This was followed in 2009 by the conservation treatment, microfilming and digitisation of rate books and minutes books for the Shire of East Loddon, Gordon and Korong. The original volume is in excellent condition given its age and required no conservation treatment. The Soldiers' Medals and Memorials Register was digitised as part of council's program aimed at having readily available access to permanent/historical records before they are transferred to the Public Record Office Victoria.

Traditionally, there has been limited collaboration between historical societies within the Loddon region and the Loddon Shire Council. This was the first time a historical society within the Shire gained such a degree of access to Council records and resulted in close collaboration between the Historical Society and the Shire over the last few years – a valued relationship which has been building since the establishment of a formal archives and records program in 2007.

The Result:

The East Loddon and District Historical Society now has a digital image of the volume created by Australian Microfilm Services (AMS) as a result of their 3-year research project into the soldiers named on the East Loddon and districts First World War Honour Boards. Digital copies of the relevant council minutes and indices for the period have also been provided as an aid for further research.

The records are of significance to the local community as they are one of the few local government records that shed light on the activities of Council at the time of the Great War and during its immediate aftermath. It also provides extra information that is of value to the East Loddon and District Historical Society in its research into the lives and histories of the local young men who fought during the war. It provides an overall view of the numbers of young men in each community who died during the conflict and the devastating impact of their deaths.

Key Discoveries:

- Digitisation of records provides an ideal platform for collaboration with community groups, particularly historical societies.
- Preserving significant records and making them accessible to the community is essential to building engaged and resilient communities.

Benefits of Entering

Initially Loddon did not know whether the project would be suitable for the Sir Rupert Hamer Awards, so they were pleased to know Public Record Office Victoria considered it significant. The structure of the documentation needed to enter the awards made Loddon's record manager deeply consider the scope and the significance of the project, focusing on the wider community rather than just Loddon Shire and the East Loddon Historical Society.

The award was detailed in the staff newsletter and in the Mayoral column - which was published in all the local newspapers. It was also mentioned as a highlight in their Annual Report. The East Loddon Historical Society also publicised it in their newsletter. This acknowledgement allowed attention to be focussed on the records and archives program at Loddon Shire and brought in a number of external research queries. It also resulted in staff from various parts of the organisation donating records including photographs and maps, such as the Limbless Soldiers Concert Party photograph (1923) and a Shire Engineer hand drawn Culverts Map (1885). And yes, they would definitely enter again.