

Overview of Historic Berrima

Berrima was established in the 1830s during a time of great exploration and expansion in the colony of New South Wales.

In 1829, the Surveyor General, Major Thomas Mitchell camped at the site of the present bridge over the Wingecarribee River while surveying the route for the Great South Road. He recommended the site as ideal for a township and in 1831, a plan for establishing the village of Berrima was approved..

By 1840, Berrima had a Courthouse and a Gaol and became the administrative centre for the Southern Districts.

Settlers arrived in the area, many with assigned convicts to open up the grazing lands for sheep and cattle. In Berrima, inns and coach houses were opened to cater for the drays, coaches and other travellers on their way to and from Sydney.

Through the 1840s to the 1860s the township flourished and reached a population of 400.

The Berrima Courthouse has played a significant role in Australia's judicial history. Quarter sessions were held at the Courthouse from its completion in 1838 under a Police Magistrate. The first trial by jury in the colony was held there in 1841. Other cases held there included disputes over land ownership, cattle stealing, bush ranging and robbery as well as several notorious murder cases.

The township declined after the 1870s when the Courthouse was closed. The railway by-passed Berrima as it was extended from Sydney through Mittagong to Moss Vale. Other areas established their own judicial systems in the townships of Bowral, Mittagong, Moss Vale and Goulburn which were fast developing as prosperous townships

During World War I (1914-1918), the Courthouse and the Gaol were used as accommodation for German prisoners of war. After this it was used as a social centre by the community until by the 1920s, it had fallen into a state of bad disrepair.

Restoration of the Courthouse began in the 1970 to bring back the grand appearance that is seen today. It is now the major historical structure in the township, an imposing sandstone building standing on a hill overlooking the township of Berrima.

Visitors now flock to Historic Berrima to see this and the many of the other historic sites which remain as a living testament to Australia's early colonial and convict history.

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GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS

BERRIMA COURTHOUSE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The material offered for this program includes:

School Kit

- a) Courthouse Fact Sheet
- b) Summary of Information on the Audio/Visual presentation
- c) Berrima Timeline
- d) Worksheets for student use - Did You See That?
Match the Columns and Fill in the Spaces
- e) Information Sheet on Harper's Mansion
- f) Information Sheet on the Berrima District Museum
- g) Supplementary fact sheet on Aboriginal occupation before settlement

When planning your excursion, reference to the CD sent to your school will assist you in deciding how much time you may wish to spend in Berrima. Besides presenting features of historical interest it gives a general overview of the village and its attractions.

Courthouse Fact Sheet

This covers a brief history of the Courthouse and has been prepared as a *handout for students* prior to their visit.

Summary of Information on the Audio/Visual Presentation

This has been included for *teacher information* again selecting relevant material that covers Berrima's history from early exploration, settlement by early colonists, the role of convicts and the judicial system as it was established in the early days of New South Wales. You may wish to prepare students on certain aspects of this so they can recognize what is being presented to them.

Berrima Timeline

This is intended to be a *student handout*. It has been prepared to give students a contextual view of the importance of Berrima in Australia's early history.

Student Worksheets

- Did You See That?
- Match the Columns

After the excursion visit, these should be useful for later class discussion and have been designed to promote

- awareness of historical events
- attention to primary source material on display
- recall of information

Teachers may wish to provide students with the “Did You See That” sheet prior to the visit so that they may focus attention on relevant items if interest.

The Information Sheets provided by Harper’s Mansion and the Berrima Museum are included should you wish to access these venues. However, they are only open to the public at weekends and by arrangement at other times for schools via the Berrima Courthouse

SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The tour through the Courthouse should take approximately 40 minutes.

Bus parking is available outside the Courthouse.

Park areas in the village are suitable for either morning tea or lunch breaks.

Toilets are available in the park opposite the Berrima District Museum and the Berrima Courthouse. Should you require an interactive Q & A session on the site we can provide this service by letting us know at least one week prior to your visit.

Further assistance in planning your excursion may be obtained from Mr Colin Gelling, Manager on 02-4877 1505.