

Supplied by Christine Ellis, Braidwood and Districts Heavy Horse Association.

'The Braidwood and District Heavy Horse Association was established in 2024 and is responsible for organising an annual Show which celebrates and promotes heavy horses. The Show is held at the Braidwood Showgrounds in May of each year. So far, we have had two with the third to be on 9 May 2026. The 2025 Show was a success with over forty horses on ground and around six hundred visitors from around the region and beyond.

My involvement in the Association led me to become attached to another Clydesdale in our District - one born over 170 years ago.

We were keen to find an historical connection to the Braidwood District for our show to give a name to the major prize. By chance I found a reference in Peter Smith's book, *The Clarke Gang*, to a Clydesdale named Alma, owned by the Hon Hugh Wallace of Nithsdale who our main street is named after.

To provide certainty I conducted detailed research on the history of draught horses in the district to see if Alma was an outstanding candidate for the naming of the Trophy for the Braidwood and District Heavy Horse Grand Champion. However, my research revealed the much deeper significance which Alma represents in terms of the early development and growth of the Braidwood district and, indeed, the wider colony. A significance that I believe warrants suitable place name recognition.

While the Council may have other naming options available to them that I am unaware of, fortuitously an ideal site is available near Nithsdale where Alma was stabled. This site is the Ballalaba Bridge which the Braidwood and District Heavy Horse Association is proposing be renamed the Alma Bridge. We have the support of Tim and Janey Lenehan who own Nithsdale, along with the Braidwood and District Historical Society.

A copy of the talk I gave to the Braidwood and District Historical Society Annual Dinner on my research into Alma is available for further information. Some of the key points in the talk are listed below:

Points for discussion:

- Alma won 'best entire colt for agricultural purposes' at the Carlisle Show in 1855. Contemporary newspapers mention "the agricultural colt was sold the same day for a handsome sum, to go to Australia, and since he arrived there the owner has refused 500 guineas for him - a sizeable amount. " Alma was recognised in the United Kingdom and Australia as being a valuable and important horse.
- Alma's arrival was heralded in an article from the SMH 11 Feb 1856: "The colony has during the last week received a considerable and highly valuable addition to its stock. By the Catherine Adamson there arrived a splendid brown cart stallion, aged 3 years, and named Alma. He was, as we learn, the winner of a prize at the Agricultural Show open to all England, when it was held at Carlisle. He was purchased by Hugh Wallace, Esq., of Braidwood, and his arrival will doubtless be hailed as a great boon by all breeders." (page 8).
- The real significance of the language used here is that Alma was not simply "one of many" horses imported to the NSW colony. This article mentions a particular horse arriving as the potential sire to a colony desperately in need of the horsepower needed to pull the carts and the ploughs for the colony to sustain its growth.

- Alma retains this title — he continues to be distinguished from other horses in articles and books long after he is deceased, by the honorific of 'Imported' . He is the Alma who came to Australia. Even in a notice in 1900 — 47 years after he was foaled — he is still referred to as 'Imported Alma'.
- While his 'fame' today has generally focused on his minor role in the Clarke Gang saga, I believe this focus has obscured his more significant historical role in our community and colony's development.
- We all know the name of Archer - and his connection with the region which is commemorated in the Archer Park in Braidwood. In fact Alma and Archer both stood in the district around the same time: Archer at Exeter Farm and Alma at Nithsdale.
- Alma deserves the same kind of recognition as Archer. Certainly, in terms of the Braidwood District, there is a strong case for arguing that, as a farming district, there should be a commemoration to Alma. It would be a great pity if these 'workers' in the establishment of our rural communities, towns and cities were allowed to remain backdrops to the more profitable racehorse.
- While there were many draughts in the Braidwood district, Alma continued to stand at stud longer than other horses in the District and beyond. His genetic footprint on the breed in Australia extends far beyond Braidwood and the District. Alma was responsible for a veritable dynasty of Clydesdales in the region — there are nearly 30 immediate descendants who went on to create their own dynasties and nearly all mentions of them refer back to our Alma.
- After his time at Nithsdale, Alma stood at Wallace's other properties at Bega and Wagga. He was then sold at various places (Camperdown, Gunnedah, Armidale) and the last mention of him 'standing' is in 1869 at Gunnedah (owner Robert Turner) when he was 16 years old. The last mention of him alive is May 1878 when he was sold along with the entire contents of the Boorolong Draught Horse Stud in Armidale. After his passing the fame of his name continued with his progeny being famous even beyond NSW, notably in Queensland.'