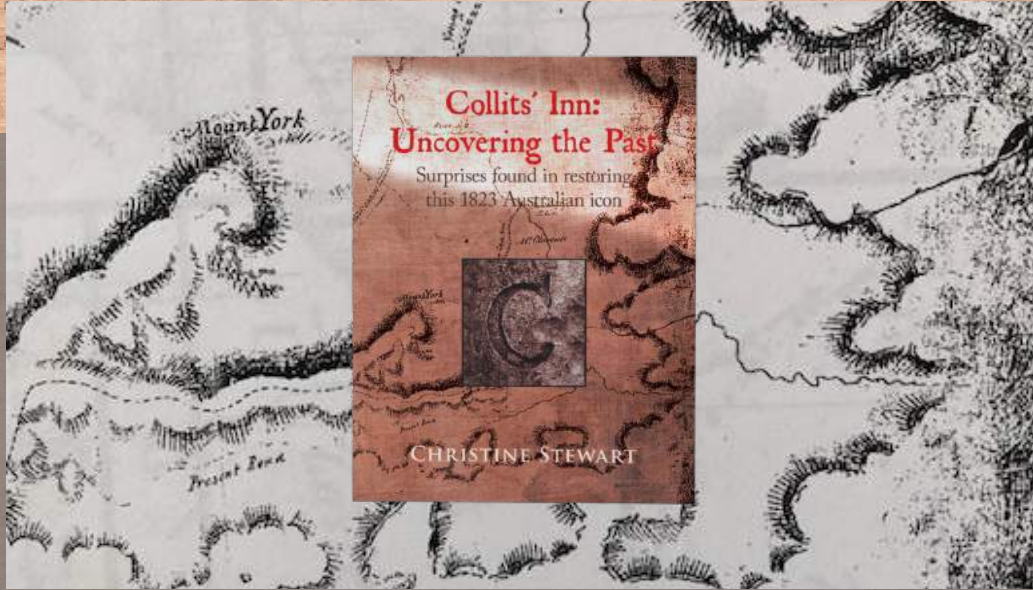


Collits' Inn: Uncovering the Past

SURPRISES FOUND IN RESTORING THIS 1823 AUSTRALIAN ICON

BY CHRISTINE STEWART



HARDCOVER - PAPERBACK - EBOOK

UNCOVERING THE PAST: SURPRISES FOUND IN RESTORING THIS 1823 AUSTRALIAN ICON

Collits' Inn sits at the foot of Mount York, in Hartley Vale, just on the other side of the Blue Mountains.

The Inn was built in 1823 by Pierce Collits, an ex-convict.

This book is my personal story of restoring one of Australia's earliest Inns. All travellers crossing the Blue Mountains in 1823 had to come down the notoriously dangerous Cox's Pass past the Inn on their way to the settlement of Bathurst and other lands to the west.

There were many surprises: the Collits' Inn Operetta, the Cemetery, the murder, the many beautiful linoleums, two strange mediaeval customs, and more.

When we acquired the Inn in 1998 it was derelict. By 2002, several awards had been received for the restoration and many more came later for the restaurant.

The project was often challenging, sometimes frustrating, but ultimately rewarding, and so has been the process of putting this story together. Many people have encouraged and assisted me with the telling of our story and I am most grateful for their help.

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CHRISTINE STEWART

I was trained as an artist, not a writer. In 1998 my husband and I took on the project of restoring the derelict but historic Collits' Inn, built by an ex-convict in 1823 to welcome travellers who had descended the Blue Mountains on their way to Bathurst and the West.

The training I have done in my life proved to be very useful for this project. I have an Arts degree and so am used to writing and research, I have done a four year course in colour and design so enjoyed working on the interiors with the Interiors Architect, I am a keen gardener so enjoyed working with the landscaper and I have restored other old houses so am used to working with architects and builders - and always loved doing so.

Thirteen years after we sold the Inn in 2007 the urge to write the history both of the inn and of the restoration had grown so strong, as it was such a fascinating project, that I gave up my painting studio in February 2020 in order to do so, And then COVID 19 came along and gave me the space in my life to do so.

Author Q&A



WHAT WAS THE MOST SURPRISING PIECE OF HISTORY THAT YOU DISCOVERED WHILE RESTORING COLLITS' INN?

The greatest surprise was to find that two ancient European customs had been used by the convict builders at the Inn - one of hiding a child's shoe under floor boards and the other of walling a cat up beside a chimney - to keep evil spirits away. It was extraordinary that traditions at least 500 years old were still being used in sleepy Hartley Vale. I have devoted a chapter to this in the book.

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVOURITE PART IN DOCUMENTING THE RESTORATION?

What I enjoyed the most was how much I was learning - about the process of restoring a heritage building, about the early maps, journal entries, articles, surveyors reports, convict records, that I was discovering in the State Archives and the State Library of NSW and about the many artists and writers who had documented this old place. It was very satisfying and motivating to feel we were contributing to this history.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE READERS LEARN FROM YOUR BOOK ABOUT 'COLLITS' INN'?

This book covers many topics including the process to be followed in restoring a heritage building, the story of Pierce and Mary Collits and their many children, the story of how he came to Australia as a convict but became a prosperous innkeeper and landholder, how and why he built the Inn, what artists had documented the Inn, what other Inns the Collits' family owned, the details of the murder on Victoria Pass, the large collection of early linoleums used at the Inn and the story of the Collits' Inn Operetta. There is also much local history such as the many surveyors using the Inn as their measure, the history of the many interesting roads being built at that time, the Mt York cemetery, the early stockades in the area, the story of the shale mines at Hartley Vale, and the discovery of their son William's house of which very few know. I would hope that this book would contribute to their knowledge of those subjects.