



Romance and rural issues

By **ROBYN MURRAY**

Friends of Gulgong's Colin Seis might not think of him as an inspiration for romantic fiction.

So local readers of author Rachael Treasure's latest book, *The Farmer's Wife*, could be surprised to find it is dedicated to the local advocate of regenerative land management techniques.

But as the audience at the Mudgee Town Hall Theatre on Saturday discovered, the dedication should come as not surprise from an author who is as passionate about the future of Australian agriculture as she is about creating best-selling books.

Ms Treasure's first book, *Jillaroo*, is credited with creating a new genre and she has been described as "the queen of rural romance."

But she said her books were just as much about issues facing rural Australians, such as the need to keep farms sustainable while producing more food for a growing world population.

Although Ms Treasure's recent books include her "naughty novel", *Fifty Bales of Hay* (a rural take on the raunchy bestseller *Fifty Shades of Grey*), Mudgee fans found that she was as knowledgeable on soil science as she was in penning

sexy stories.

She admitted that she sometimes needs to be reminded that her books are not soil manuals.

Ms Treasure drew on her own childhood in rural Tasmania, her "rambunctious" agriculture college days in Orange, and experience as a jillaroo and rural journalist in her books, and implementing natural soil regeneration practices on her own property.

"I wanted to be a megaphone for rural Australians and to show that we are massively intelligent, dynamic and imaginative.

"We need to get agricultural education back as a priority and show that it should not be seen as a declining industry.

"My gentle way was to write *Jillaroo* – and in time it opened up a new genre of rural romance."

The Farmer's Wife picks up the story of characters introduced in *Jillaroo* and finds the heroine Rebecca Saunders, some years down the track from "happily ever after", struggling with motherhood and a crumbling marriage, and questioning conventional farming methods.

"This book has a subplot that there is a pathway forward," Ms Treasure said. "There is raunchy stuff in there, but there's also a plot

and humanity."

Ms Treasure warned that there's a shock in store for fans of the party boy hero of *Jillaroo*, Charlie Lewis.

"He was the Bundy swilling, ag college lad who everybody falls in love with," she said.

"Much to the horror of readers, I've made Charlie fat and bald."

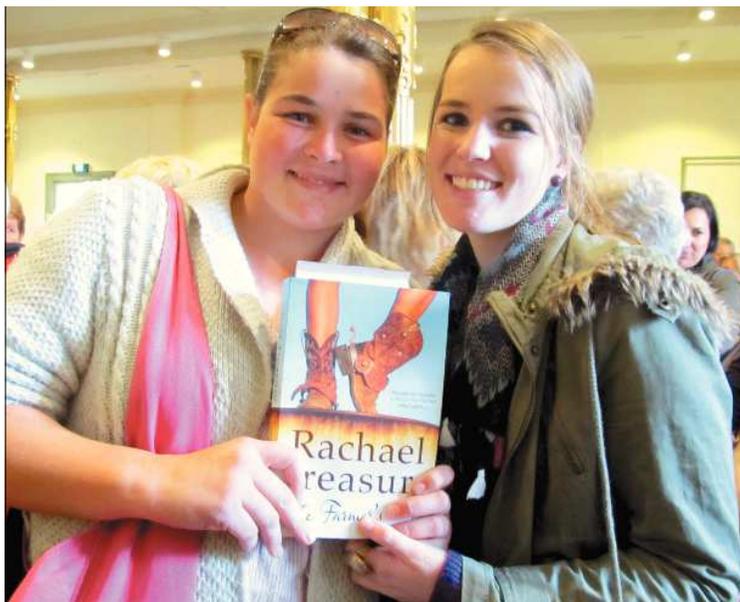
However, with another book on Rebecca a possibility, Ms Treasure hinted that there is still hope for Charlie.

"I'd love for readers to use Charlie as an example of how men can find their way," she said.

In the meantime, she is considering new projects including "cleaning my house", songwriting with Tasmanian band The Wolfe Brothers, and working with "Restart", a project to rescue and re-educate former racehorses.

She's also hoping that her book can make it to number one of the bestseller lists: Not so that she can "be a fabulous published author and eat macarons", but so she can re-fence her property and improve the water.

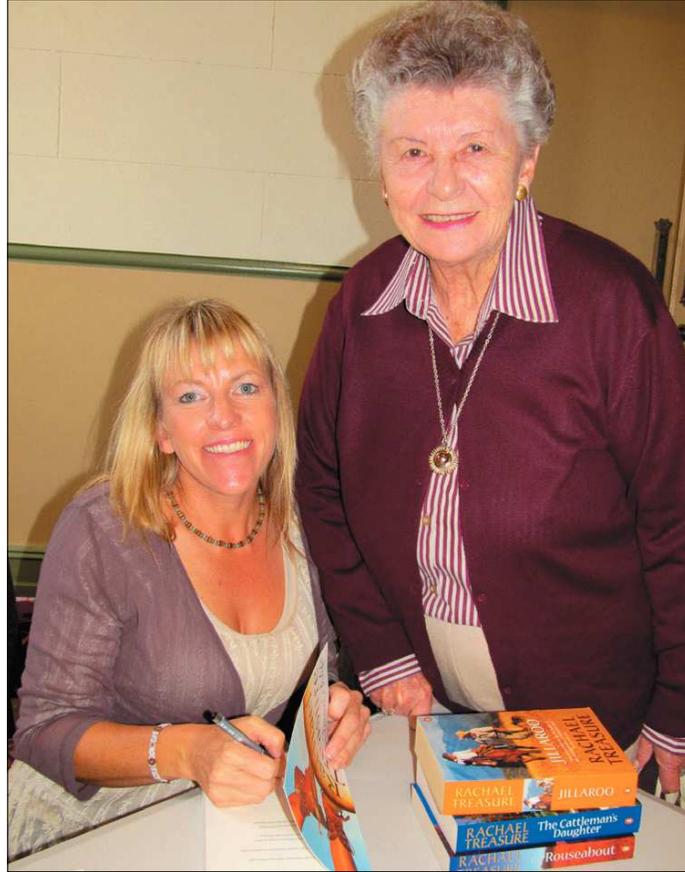
Ms Treasure's talk was the first Mudgee Library event to be held since the re-opening of the Town Hall. It was sponsored by Books in Mudgee.



"Massive fans" Stacey Lobley and Alice Clapham joined the long queue to have books autographed by Rachael Treasure.

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Marion Bell brought along her favour Rachael Treasure books to be signed by the author. 210413/RMTREASURE/054