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South Coast History Society Inc.

RecollectionS
Issue 39

The Bumper Batemans Bay and District Issue!

South Coast History Society Inc.

RecollectionS FREE
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Our intriguing local history...EXPOSED !

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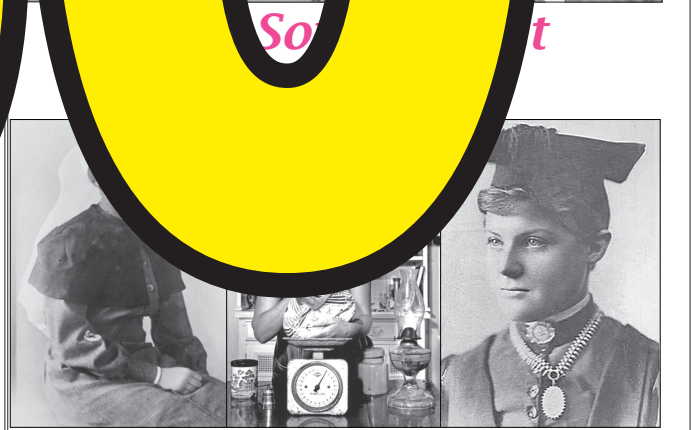Issue 46
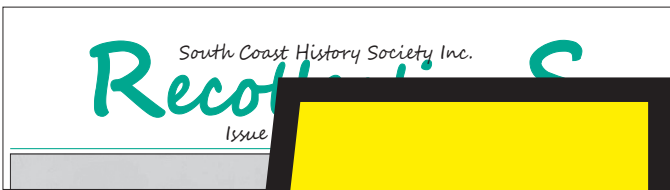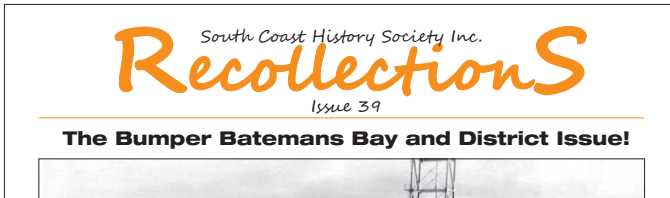
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The road to the South Coast—actually the Brown Mountain Road from Nimmitybelle to Bega, c. 1925.
Photo courtesy Bega Valley Historical Society

CHECK OUT OUR FABULOUS NEW WEBSITE
southcoasthistory.org.au

It's Our 50th Issue...and We're Celebrating

*R*ecollections has had an **enormous** impact on the NSW South Coast, highlighting many aspects of the fascinating history of this area.

We know from the feedback we constantly receive that thousands of people thoroughly enjoy regularly receiving and reading *Recollections* – and we can honestly say we're absolutely thrilled to have been able to serve our community in such a positive way, over such a long period.

And, now we've made it to our 50th Issue!

Woohoo!!

We never dreamed, back in February 2017 when we put together the first issue of *Recollections* and established the South Coast History Society, how outstandingly successful *Recollections* would become and how much incredible support we would receive from our community. And for that, we are exceedingly grateful. So, thank you all.

South Coast History Society has, in the past 8 years, been exceptionally active and innovative. Certainly more so than any of the other 'historical societies' along the coast – with South Coast History Society hosting numerous successful South Coast History Day seminars, having given talks to 100+ community groups, having a significant presence at community markets and local shows, executing the incredibly successful *Bega Shire's Hidden Heritage* project, co-publishing the *Fascinating Bega* and *Carp Street Bega* books with Bega Valley Historical Society, running bus tours of Bega and walking tours along Carp Street and, more recently, producing the EXTRAORDINARILY successful *Extraordinary Histories* book…all on top of regularly producing *Recollections*.

To coincide with our 50th issue celebrations, we've launched a fabulous new website – please check it out at www.southcoasthistory.org.au

And it seemed appropriate to us, when considering how to celebrate this, our 50th Issue, that we should highlight 50 memorable moments from the South Coast's history – simply because the South Coast's amazing history is our entire focus.

So, here they are – some historically important events, some just 'quirky' happenings. Please enjoy the read whilst we quietly enjoy a glass of celebratory something!

50 Memorable Moments in South Coast History

1: Gulaga, 100 million years ago

The geology of the South Coast has had a significant (arguably the most significant) impact on the area's history. And rising above it all was Gulaga, a massive volcano whose cone once stood three kilometres high and which had a radius of at least 20km – so probable extending as far as Tuross Head – that formed about 100 million years ago, about the time that the South Coast's landscape developed.

Erosion in the millennia since has removed most of the lavas and ash deposits from the volcano, leaving granitic rocks from the core of the Gulaga (Mt Dromedary) volcano and at nearby Najanuka (Little Mt Dromedary) and on half of Barunguba (Montague Island).

Gulaga is, to the local Aboriginal Yuin people, mother mountain. Aboriginal legend has it that she gave birth to all the Yuin, and so is a sacred women's teaching place with few areas that men can visit. (Biamanga, north of Bega, is the equivalent men's mountain.)

Captain James Cook sighted Gulaga on 21st April 1770 as he sailed north along the South Coast and he named it Mt Dromedary. He misrecognised Montague Island as being part of a cape extending out to sea from Najanuka.

Between 1878 and 1920 approximately 600 kilograms of gold was mined from the slopes of Mt Dromedary. For about three years from 1880 significant quantities of alluvial gold that has been washed down from the slopes of Mt Dromedary were also recovered from Montreal Goldfield, north of Bermagui. ℝ

Gulaga with Barunguba in the foreground

2: The foundations of a South Coast whaling industry, the 1790s

The First Fleet arrived in New South Wales in 1788 just as the international whaling industry was rapidly expanding to meet the increasing demand for whale oil, the primary machine lubricant and preferred lamp oil in Europe and North America.

It's probable that whalers were the first visitors to the area in the years before settlement of Sydney.

Transporting convicts and supplies to the newly established colony in Sydney provided ship owners with a profitable cargo for their outward voyage. Whale oil and seal oil were to become an equally profitable cargo for the return voyage.

In early 1791 the Third Fleet set sail for Sydney. Eleven ships transported 1,716 convicts. Once their human cargo had been delivered, the *William and Ann*, *Mary Ann*, *Matilda*, *Salamander* and *Britannia* went whaling. Their success heralded the start of the Australian whaling industry.

Whaling went on to become the colony's first viable industry at the turn of the 19th century. Into the early part of the 19th century whaling was as financially important to New South Wales as pastoralism and, for example, accounted for 52 per cent of the colony's exports in 1832.

The peak of Australian whaling activity was between 1820 and 1855, with up to 1,300 men working in the industry each year. After 1851 with the discovery of gold in Australia, however, sailors deserted their ships en masse to travel to the goldfields. Then, petroleum increasingly replaced whale oil throughout the 1850s, and the whaling industry went into decline. ®

Whaling in Twofold Bay, early 20th century

3: The first European overlanders, 1797

The first Europeans to traverse the South Coast on foot were not doing so by choice. They had been on board a trading vessel called the *Sydney Cove* that was shipwrecked on a small island in Bass Strait that was to become known as Preservation Island. Then their ship's small longboat was wrecked on Ninety Mile Beach in Gippsland as it was sailing from Preservation Island to Sydney to solicit help. So, they (a party of 17 men) had no option but to walk overland to Sydney – up the entire length of the NSW South Coast.

The men were totally ill-equipped for the journey, had no idea of the geography of the area they had to cross, and had no idea what to expect from the 'barbarous hordes' (Aboriginals) that they might encounter on their trek. And just finding food to sustain them on their journey became a major challenge.

This was to be the first contact these seafarers had with Australian Aboriginals and the first contact South Coast Aboriginals had with Europeans. The seafarers at first were not impressed: 'Their hair is long and straight, but they are wholly inattentive to it, either as to cleanliness or in any other respect. It serves them in lieu of a towel to wipe their hands as often as they are daubed with blubber or shark oil, which is their principal article of food. This frequent application of rancid grease to their heads and bodies renders their approach exceedingly offensive. Their ornaments consist chiefly of fish bones or kangaroo-teeth, fastened with gum or glue to the hair of the temples and on the forehead. A piece of reed or bone is also wore through the septum, or cartilage, of the nose, which is pierced for the admission of this ornament. Upon the whole, they present the most hideous and disgusting figures that savage life can possibly afford.'

In general, the local Aboriginals provided assistance to the seafarers. There were incidents of hostility (perhaps the most frightening being at Wreck Bay near Sussex Inlet: 'A hundred more natives approached us, shouting and hollowing in a most hideous manner, at which we were all exceedingly alarmed. In a short time a few of them began throwing their spears, upon which we made signs to them to desist…No sooner had we turned our backs on this savage mob than they renewed hostilities and wounded three of us...This pursuit induced us all to suppose they intended to murder us…(The next day) our disagreeable and treacherous companions continued with us on our journey until about 9 a.m., when they betook themselves to the woods, leaving us extremely happy at their departure.'), but not infrequently the 'natives' helped them cross rivers, provided them with food and even, on one occasion, showed them a short cut, enabling them to avoid several high points.

The 17 men left Ninety Mile Beach on 27th February, 1797. 63 days later, just three men had survived the trek when they were rescued by a small fishing boat at Wottamolla, now in the Royal National Park and 40 kilometres south of Sydney.

Their epic journey caused a minor sensation in Sydney and the information they were able to provide prompted George Bass to undertake his 1,900 km voyage from Sydney to Western Port between December 1797 and February 1798. R

4: First permanent European settlers, 1822-1839

The South Coast started to be settled permanently by Europeans from around 1822. Some of the early settlers (their details readily available online) included:

Alexander Berry and his business partner Edward Wollstonecraft settled in the Shoalhaven district in 1822;

Rev. Thomas Kendall settled north of Ulladulla in 1828;

W.D. Tarlinton settled near Cobargo in 1828;

John Hawdon settled near Tuross Head in 1832;

The Imlay Bros (Drs Alexander, George and Peter) settled near Twofold Bay in 1832, and in 1835 became pioneer settlers in the Bega area;

Francis Hunt settled near Wagonga in 1839. R

5: Berry's Canal, 1822

Berry's Canal, which links the Shoalhaven and Crookhaven Rivers to the east of Nowra, is just one of two man-made canals in NSW (the other is the Alexandra Canal in Sydney). It is also the only canal in NSW to have been dug by hand.

It was dug to provide access for larger vessels to the Shoalhaven River. The mouth of the Shoalhaven River is often blocked by sand and silt, and early landowner Alexander Berry (he who now has Berry township named after him) wanted vessels to be able to navigate up the Shoalhaven River and Broughton Creek to current-day Berry, which was then his private town and part of his Coolangatta Estate.

So, he organised for a team of convicts to hand excavate the canal. The supervisor of the convicts was Hamilton Hume (he, who, a couple of years later, undertook the famous overland journey to Port Phillip with William Hovell – the two of them having been brought together by Berry). The construction of the canal formed Comerong Island.

This was initially claimed by the Crown, but was then subdivided into farms and sold to settlers. The pastures on the Island were considered to be some of the finest in the district and, from 1889, the Island supported its own butter factory/creamery.

Berry's Canal has since been widened considerably by the flow of water down the Shoalhaven River. Today, a small car ferry crosses Berry's Canal from the southern end of Seven Mile Beach. R

6: The visionary Benjamin Boyd, 1842–1849

To suggest that Benjamin Boyd was 'a colourful character' is an understatement. And, arguably, he was more responsible for the early development of the NSW South Coast than was any other settler, because he had a vision for developing the whole area when other settlers were only interested in establishing their own businesses or farms in the area.

Boyd had been a successful London stockbroker and was regarded as something of a financial wizard. Whilst in London he contacted the Colonial Secretary with plans to establish a large steamship operation linking Australia settlements, and he asked for the right to buy land adjacent to five or six harbours in the colony. He was promised every assistance, and the NSW Governor was instructed accordingly.

In December 1841, Boyd set sail for Sydney aboard his luxury yacht, the *Wanderer*. Also on board was a chest containing £200,000 worth of gold (today's equivalent $40 million), provided to Boyd by investors so he could establish a Royal Bank of Australia.

Three other steamships owned by Boyd arrived in Sydney before the *Wanderer* arrived. His staff aboard them ensured that the *Wanderer* received a colourful welcome, the Sydney Herald reporting 'on coming to anchor in the cove, the *Velocity* schooner owned by Mr Boyd fired a salute and the neighbouring heights were crowded with spectators to witness the arrival. The *Wanderer* is armed to the teeth and is fitted up in a most splendid manner.'

Pastoral lands were to provide the backbone to Boyd's

BOYDS TOWER TWOFOLD BAY.

'empire', and Boyd's interest in this area could not have been better timed. Vast areas of crown land were being thrown open to pastoralists and, with a recession looming at that time, Boyd was able to 'acquire an immense fortune for very little outlay': on a stopover in Melbourne on his way to Sydney, Boyd purchased a pastoral station near Colac; by 1845 he had an interest in two million acres in the Riverina; and two years later he purchased another 380,000 acres on which he paid an annual licence fee of just £80.

By the time Boyd arrived in Australia most of the profitable local coastal shipping business had already been secured by the General Steam Navigation Company and, realistically, only routes south from Sydney remained to be developed. This led to his interest in the South Coast.

By 1843 Boyd had set up a whaling station in Twofold Bay and then purchased 640 acres there at an auction, at which he was the only bidder, for £1 per acre. Over the next couple of years, he erected the Seahorse hotel, several stores, a wool store, a boiling down works, a church, and a 400-foot long wharf at 'Boydtown', together with 45 miles of roads leading into the port.

Then everything collapsed: his Boydtown and whaling operations were mismanaged; general economic conditions at the time were in decline; his shipping plans were thwarted by well-established competition; whale numbers were decreasing; the Government introduced measures to limit the size of pastoral properties; convict transportation to NSW ceased which resulted in difficulties finding labour for his enterprises; and his Royal Bank of Australia collapsed.

Boyd left Sydney in October 1849 in an attempt to revive his fortunes on the Californian goldfields. He left behind debts of over £400,000.

On 15th October 1851, Boyd was shot dead by natives on Guadalcanal Island in the Solomons. His body was never recovered. The *Wanderer* then headed back to Australia but was wrecked in a gale off Port Macquarie on 12th November. Ⓡ

7: Araluen Valley Gold, 1851–c.1930s

Alluvial gold was discovered in September 1851 in the Araluen Valley by two Moruya men, Alexander Waddell and Harry Hicken, after they noticed that the local terrain was similar to the rich gold-bearing area around Ophir, near Bathurst.

Almost overnight, thousands of prospectors moved to the area. Most arrived by ship at Broulee and then walked overland to the goldfields.

Many were richly rewarded. One history suggests that in Majors Creek in the early days prospectors were recovering an average of one ounce of gold per man per day.

Within a year an estimated 100,000 ozs of gold had been recovered, earning the area a reputation of being one of the richest goldfields in Australia.

At its peak in the 1860s and 1870s, 30,000 men (including around 700 Chinese) were working the area. There were around 26 hotels, 20 butchers, and numerous general stores, bakers, shoemakers, blacksmiths, churches and banks catering to their needs.

The wealth of the area inevitably attracted bushrangers. On 13th March 1865, Ben Hall, Johnny Gilbert and Tom Clarke unsuccessfully attempted to hold up a gold coach headed to Braidwood, but were outflanked and forced to flee. One policeman was wounded in the encounter.

In 1865 reef mining (where gold was extracted by large stamping batteries from seams running through quartz rock) commenced. By 1871 five battery crushers were in operation, extracting in excess of 100 oz of gold per week.

Then, hydraulic sluicing (using high-pressure water cannons) was introduced from 1870. This made recovery of gold very much easier because overburden above the gold-bearing strata was often up to 12 metres in depth.

In 1899 yet another major change occurred in the way gold was extracted in the Araluen Valley. Dredging was introduced. This must have been a profitable enterprise, because eventually 11 dredges were working in the area.

By the late 1930s dredging has stopped and the valley basically then returned to becoming a grazing and farming area. Ⓡ

Gold Dredging, Araluen

8: Four mutineers arrive in Merimbula, 1858

On Thursday 14th January 1858, four men 'dressed as common sailors' sailed into Merimbula in an open whale boat. They told the locals that they were simply a group of Americans, travelling from Melbourne to Sydney, and had put into Merimbula to replenish their water supplies.

The locals suspected they may have been smugglers. But, in fact, they were mutineers from an America whaling ship, the *Junior*.

The origins of the mutiny can be traced back to a flogging given to the *Junior*'s ship's carpenter, Cyrus Plummer, after he had been involved in a fight with one of the ship's officers. Plummer's revenge was brutal:

'*On Christmas night, five of the crew, one of whom was the carpenter, went down into the cabin with loaded muskets and pistols; here the captain and officers were all sleeping… and all fired simultaneously on the officers, killing the captain and third mate, and wounding severely the other officers. This outrage was no sooner committed than they continued in their bloody deeds, by chopping off the captain's head with an axe and stabbing the 3rd officer until he breathed no more. The following morning they hove the two bodies overboard… the chief officer stowed himself away in the hold of the Junior, but having discovered him, after starving for five days, the mutineers promised to spare his life if he would conduct the ship where they could land easily with the whale boats...about 20 miles from Twofold Bay, the villains lowered two boats and fully equipped them with a good supply of provisions, arms and ammunition, left the vessel, informing those on board that if they attempted to watch their movements, the mutineers would return and murder every soul on board.*'

One of the boats was landed on Ninety Mile Beach, now part of Gippsland, Victoria. The other proceeded to Merimbula.

The arrival of the men in Merimbula 'much alarmed' the locals, who sought police assistance from Eden. Before help arrived, two Constables from Pambula Police, Adam Ballantine and John Martin, joined forces with local residents and secured the whaleboat and handcuffed

Four of the *Junior* mutineers outside the Eden lockup

the four suspects. They were taken to Eden where, soon thereafter, they were released on the condition that they returned to the lock up every night – which, somewhat surprisingly, they did. During the day, they lived it up in Eden.

But then news of the mutiny and the murders reached Eden. The four men fled into surrounding bush, but were soon apprehended and were taken to Sydney. Four other mutineers, who had landed on Ninety Mile Beach, were also captured and taken to Sydney.

The mutineers were tried in Sydney and were then extradited to the United States. The *Junior* was fitted out as a floating gaol for the journey. In America, all eight were found guilty of mutiny and murder and, with the exception of Plummer, all were given life terms. Plummer was sentenced to be hanged, but this was later commuted to life imprisonment, before he eventually received a pardon from President Ulysses S. Grant.

Constable Adam Ballantine's role in the capture of the mutineers did not go unnoticed. A public appeal was launched in Eden and, for his 'courage and proficiency', he was presented with an ambrotype (an early form of photograph) of the four mutineers, who he had helped capture in Merimbula, sitting outside the lockup in Eden. That ambrotype has survived and is now on display at the Old School Museum in Merimbula. ℝ

9: LOUTTIT'S GRANITE QUARRY, 1858–1880

Moruya prides itself, and promotes itself, for being the town that supplied the granite for the pylons of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the 1920s and early 1930s. That stone came from the Moruya (or Government) Quarry on the north side of the Moruya River.

But granite was cut from the Moruya area long before that.

In 1858, brothers John and Joseph Louttit opened a quarry on the southern side of the Moruya River, about 2.6km upstream from the river mouth. Initially the quarry provided stone for breakwaters and to line the banks of the Moruya River to prevent erosion.

In 1868 the quarry was leased to a Sydney building contractor, John Young. It became the source of granite used in a number of prominent Sydney buildings: for pillars inside St Mary's Cathedral, for the columns on the exterior of the Customs House at Circular Quay, for the facade of the Bank of NSW building in Martin Place, and for the base and pedestal of the Queen Victoria statue that is now in Queen's Square.

The largest block of stone from the Louttit Quarry, however, became the pedestal of the Captain Cook statue, located just down from the State Library of NSW in the Botanic Gardens in Sydney. It was a 14' x 12' x 10' block that weighed 28 tons, which after shaping still weighed in excess of 15 tons.

The block was too heavy for a tramway linking the quarry with a wharf on the river, so it was rolled end-over-end to the wharf. There it was loaded onto a (very small) 80-ton schooner, the *Settlers Friend*. It's a wonder the block of granite ever reached Sydney because the *Settlers Friend* subsequently collided with a 400-ton barque, the *Golden Age*, off Jervis Bay.

The Captain Cook statue had to be designed to suit the enormous granite pedestal, rather than the more-usual practice of fashioning the pedestal to suit the statue. '*The great size of the pedestal makes it necessary that the statue be of an unusual height – about 13 feet, including the bronze platform on which it should stand. Were it smaller than this, the statue – which is an important part of the monument – would appear insignificant and would be dwarfed by the ponderous stone below.*'

The foundation stone for the statue was laid in March 1869 by Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh and the second son of Queen Victoria. The statue was unveiled in 1879, the centenary of the death of Captain Cook, by the NSW Governor, Sir Hercules Robinson.

The Louttit Quarry operated until 1880. ℝ

10: THE ILLAWARRA AND SOUTH COAST STEAM NAVIGATION COMPANY, 1858–1955

In just under a century, the Illawarra and South Coast Steam Navigation Company (ISCSN Co) lost 15 of its vessels. They either sank or were wrecked somewhere along the NSW South Coast.

Yet throughout that period, the ISCSN Co provided the major transport link and, in its early days, the only communications link between the South Coast and the rest of the world. Its service also enabled profitable businesses – mostly major primary industries – to develop on the South Coast.

The company was founded as a result of the amalgamation of three smaller shipping companies – the Kiama Steam Navigation Company, the Shoalhaven Steam Navigation Company, and the General Steam Navigation Company (which itself was an amalgamation of the Illawarra Steam Packet Company and the Brisbane Water Steam Passenger Company) – that had each been servicing parts of the NSW South Coast but were all suffering from what had become a too-competitive marketplace.

The ISCSN Co became so large, so successful, that it eventually held a virtual monopoly on shipping to the

South Coast and it simply bought out any companies that were set up to compete with it – for example, the Moruya Steam Navigation Company, established in 1891 because of local dissatisfaction with the ISCSN Co, was acquired by the ISCSN Co in 1905.

The ISCSN Co's vessels visited every significant port between Sydney and the Victorian border, most on a regular, timetabled basis. The company's primary focus was the transport of goods; it was said its ships would wait for an hour for a pig, but not one minute for a passenger…and it became known as The 'Pig and Whistle Line'! In fact, after the loss of the Merimbula (the biggest of the Company's fleet, which had provided accommodation for 106 passengers) in 1928, the Company decided to thenceforth direct its entire focus to providing cargo services to the South Coast.

The ISCSN Co seemed to be faced with two major challenges throughout its operating life: having suitable berthing facilities on the South Coast (only Jervis Bay and, perhaps, Twofold Bay were really safe havens), and a regular loss of vessels due to their sinking or running aground. (See separate story of the wreck of the ISCSN Co's *Merimbula*.)

The Company's demise in the 1950s was primarily due to increasing competition from road transport that was able to offer reliable door-to-door services, once adequate roads and bridges had been constructed along the South Coast and motor vehicles had become mechanically reliable. Ⓡ

The '*Merimbula*' at Tathra Wharf. Photograph: State Library of NSW FL1698203

11: The Clarke Gang, 1866

The South Coast's best-known bushrangers were the Jingera Mob, otherwise known as the Clarke Gang. And their most-remembered raid was at Nerrigundah (west of Bodalla) on 9th April 1866.

Actually, the episode started the day before when the Clarke Gang (led by brothers Thomas and John Clarke) visited the Bega Races relieving punters and bookmakers of their money, helping themselves to a couple of fast horses, and recruiting a Bega local, William Fletcher.

They then headed to Nerrigundah. On the way they held-up travellers on a steep mountain road leading into town. Their takings included 25 oz of gold dust and a gold watch. Six shots were fired and a traveller on his way to Moruya was wounded in the leg.

In Nerrigundah, some of the gang held up Mrs Groves' London Tavern whilst the remainder headed to Pollock's Store where there was reputedly a hoard of gold.

The story that has since been recorded is that Mrs Pollock refused to hand over the key to the gold safe, threw it out the window, and a clever young lad either stood on it in the street or moved it away by clasping it between his toes. In the fading light of day, the gang was unable to locate the key and were thereby unable to access the gold in the store.

Two policemen were in town that day – Constable Patrick Smyth, who had arrived in Nerrigundah just four days earlier, and Constable Miles O'Grady who was in bed suffering from typhoid. On hearing the hotel and its patrons were being robbed, both policemen headed for the hotel. A gun-fight ensued and two people were killed – William Fletcher (whose bushranging activities thus lasted barely one day!) and Constable O'Grady.

The gang, whist retrieving their horses then came across two Chinamen. One was badly beaten, the other escaping to rouse the Chinese camp. 'Ten minutes later, when a screaming mob of Chinese poured down the road wielding torches and sticks, the bushrangers fled.'

Another policeman, learning of the gang's presence, then raised a posse of 10 men. They ambushed the retreating bushrangers south-west of Nerrigundah, but again the

Thomas (left) and John Clarke in Braidwood Gaol in 1867. Note that John's coat is draped over his wounded left shoulder. The pair were hanged two months later.

Clarke Gang escaped.

Constable O'Grady became an instant national hero and an obelisk was erected in Nerrigundah by the government. (It is still there today).

Thomas and John Clarke were eventually captured in April 1867 and were hung at Darlinghurst Gaol in Sydney on 25th June 1867. ℝ

12: THE CAPE ST GEORGE LIGHTHOUSE, 1860–1899

As coastal shipping increased - servicing the needs of the numerous small communities that had been established all up and down the coast – and increasing numbers of ships were being wrecked along the coast, it became apparent that numerous lighthouses should be built to provide 'a highway of light' as an aid to navigation.

In 1847 the entrepreneur Ben Boyd constructed a light tower on Twofold Bay's southern headland. It was built from Pyrmont sandstone that he had brought down to the Bay by steamer. The government, however, considered it unsuitable for use as a lighthouse, so it was only ever used for whale spotting by Twofold Bay's Davidson whaling family.

The Cape St George Lighthouse, on the southern headland to Jervis Bay, was the first lighthouse erected by the government on the NSW South Coast. It was designed by the Colonial Architect, Alexander Dawson, and was built in 1860.

The only problem was that it was erected four kilometres north of where it was meant to be built, and in a position where its light could not be seen by ships approaching from the north and was barely visible to ships that were travelling up the coast.

It was built in the wrong place simply because it was four kilometres closer to the quarry from which its builder was extracting his sandstone!!

Between 1864 and 1893 (so, basically in the period that Cape St George Lighthouse was in service), 23 ships were wrecked in the vicinity of Jervis Bay.

Eventually, in 1899, this obviously-ineffective Cape St George Lighthouse was replaced by one at Point Perpendicular on the northern headland to Jervis Bay.

After the new light at Point Perpendicular became operational, having two towers in close proximity to one another proved to be confusing during daylight hours to navigators. So, the Cape St George tower had to go - and, from 1917 to 1922, it was used for target practice by the Royal Australian Navy. It's now just a heap of (historically significant) rubble. ℝ

The remains of Cape St George Lighthouse

13: The wreck of the Walter Hood, 1870

When it was launched in 1852, the clipper ship *Walter Hood* was the largest vessel that had ever been built in Aberdeen, and perhaps Scotland. It was renowned for its excellent speed and sailing qualities.

It departed London on 22 January 1870, heading for Sydney, carrying 35 passengers and crew and a mixed cargo. Whilst sailing up the east coast of Australia it encountered a gale that stripped the vessel of its sails and swept one seaman overboard.

When land was finally sighted several days later (on Tuesday 26th April), the vessel was close inshore. It then did not have enough sail to beat out to sea, and was driven by the fierce wind onto a reef north of Bendalong where it began to break up. The captain, Captain Latto, was injured and the next morning was washed from his cabin and drowned. (It has since been suggested that, after being swept from his cabin, Captain Latto was attempting to reboard the wreck when one of the crew used an axe to sever Latto's arm, effectively murdering him. This action was the result of the crew angrily holding him responsible him for the disaster. Visit: https://www.canberratimes.com.au/video/crime/x8p3ozy/the-chilling-murder-of-the-walter-hood-shipwreck/)

Fearing certain death on the collapsing stern, several of those on board attempted to swim to shore. Most were dashed against the wreckage and drowned, but ten did make
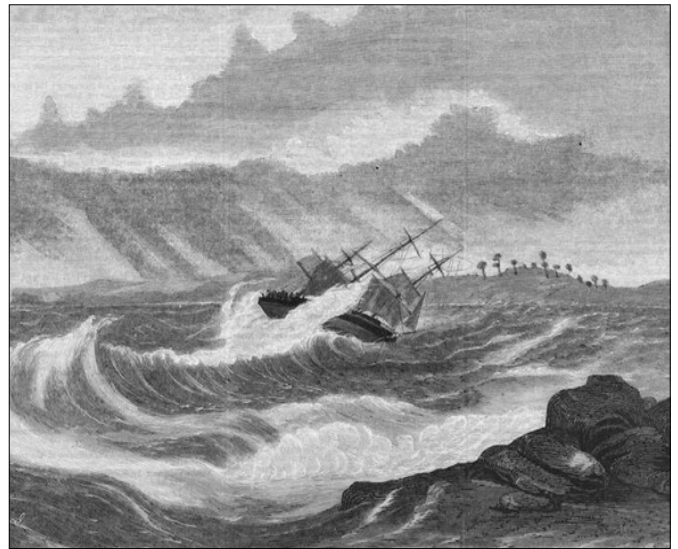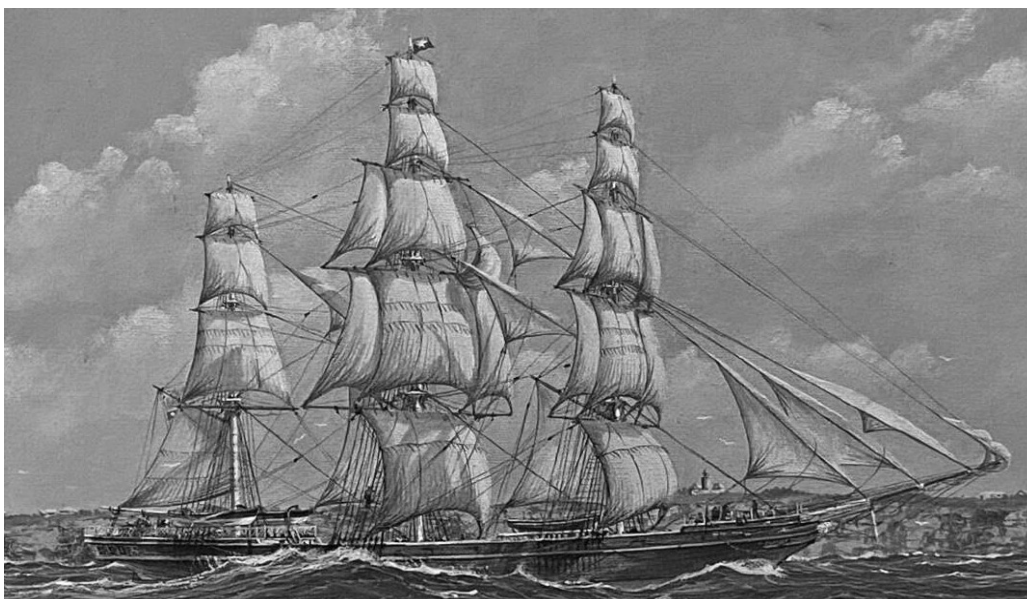

The wreck of the Walter Hood. Engraving by Samuel Calvert (1828-1913) from Sydney Illustrated News.

it to shore.

Thirteen others clung to the upturned stern for four horrendous nights, eventually killing the captain's small dog to eat its raw flesh and drink its blood. They were finally rescued by a passing steamer, the *Illalong*.

Meanwhile, a large crowd of spectators gathered on the beach and actively plundered the cargo strewn along the beach.

Today, the site of the tragedy is marked by a memorial and grave site in bush north of Bendalong.

[There are hundreds of stories of shipwrecks along the NSW South Coast that could have been included in this 50 South Coast Memorable Moments. In fact, we could have easily just documented interesting shipwrecks when assembling our list of 50 'memorable moments' (now, there's an idea for a future *Recollections*!). Four or five, however, had to be included, because shipping losses have had such an enormous impact on the South Coast's history.] Ⓡ

The Walter Hood in better times

14: The Kiama-Bombo basalt quarries, 1871–1954

Roads, railways and tramways in New South Wales — all being extended over long distances in the second half of the 18th century— required blue metal. Enormous quantities of it.

Basalt in the Bombo-Kiama area was abundant, could easily be quarried and crushed into blue metal, and could then be shipped with relative ease to major centres such as Sydney. So, from the 1880s, Bombo-Kiama became the

state's primary source of its supply.

In 1871 the first commercial load of crushed stone was delivered to Sydney on the Tim Whiffler – which in 1876 became the first ship to enter the newly-constructed Kiama Harbour. It was probably quarried from Pikes Hill (where the Kiama Leisure Centre is today) and shipped from Black Beach.

Other quarries were soon opened. Initially the rock was transported in drays along Terralong Street (the main street of Kiama), but in 1881 construction began on a tramway.

However, it didn't prove to be efficient and was soon abandoned.

In 1911 the New South Wales Government bought one of the local quarries, the Kiama Road Metal Company, and revived the tramway idea. Construction of this tramway was completed in 1914. That tramway was used until 1941.

Two locomotives were used to transport the blue metal to hoppers at the harbour where it was loaded onto ships. The system became so successful that ships could arrive in Kiama harbour around midnight, be loaded, and be on their way to Sydney before daybreak.

These were mostly small ships, and many (at least 20) came to grief on the 55-mile voyage to or from Sydney.

By 1883 the Kiama basalt quarries were supplying 400 tons of blue metal a day. And, at its peak, 300 men were employed in the quarries. This prompted the Government to build houses to accommodate the workers and their families (examples

are the terrace houses along Collins Street), and the town began to prosper.

In 1882, a jetty was built at Bombo and steam powered crushing machines were installed there. Although Bombo was not as reliable a port as Kiama, because of its exposed position, considerable quantities of blue metal were taken from there in the 1880s and 1890s.

In the early 1890s the NSW railways took over the Bombo quarry and extended the railway in 1887 from Port Kembla to Bombo (North Kiama). From that time on, the Bombo jetty was rarely used. (The railway was extended from North Kiama into Kiama township in 1893; and trivia: Bombo was originally Bumbo, the Aboriginal word for thunder. An o replaced the u when until a clergyman objected that the name given to the area was too rude!)

Blue metal continued to be shipped to Sydney until World War II. After that, until quarrying ceased completely in 1954, the basalt from Kiama-Bombo was transported by railway. R

Locomotive with a load of blue metal in Terralong Street, Kiama
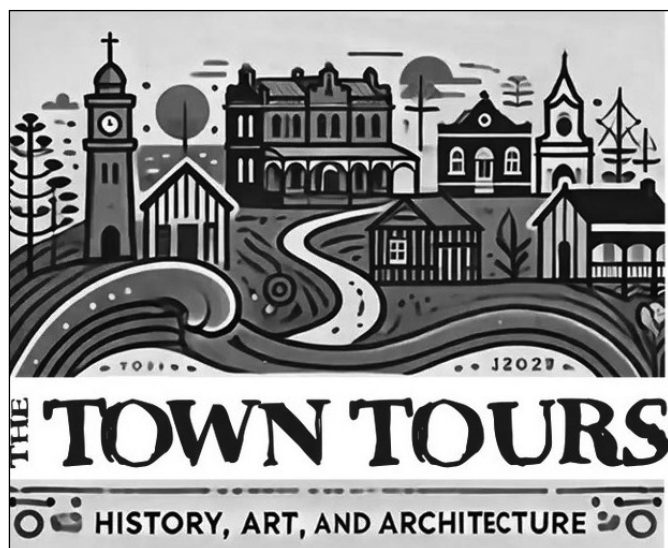
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15: The Promise of a Railway, 1884

The pub at Wolumla is the 'Railway Junction Hotel' – perhaps a strange name for a hotel that's nowhere near a railway line, let alone a railway junction.

But, there is historic reason for it: when the pub was built there was talk of constructing a railway line linking Bega to a port facility in Twofold Bay, and there was talk of extending the railway line that then serviced Bombala (the Canberra-Cooma-Bombala section of that line has since been closed for many years!) to join the Bega to Eden line at Wolumla.

In 1884 the NSW government decided to build a Bega to Eden railway and included provision for the cost of its construction in a loan bill. And, the next year, a route for it was being surveyed.

But that's as far as the railway ever got. Thereafter there was a lot of talk about it (including a speech by Sir Henry Parkes in Bega in 1888 in which he promised a railway service to the area), and a lot of local lobbying for building the railway – but construction never progressed.

Numerous things ultimately killed the idea: the Sydney to Kiama railway, opened in 1887 and extended to Bomaderry in 1893, was proving to be far less profitable than had been envisaged; there was uncertainty where Australia's capital would be sited (Bombala was one real possibility, which might have justified a rail link to the coast – either to Wolumla [however, the Bega to Eden railway was being planned as a narrow gauge railway] or direct to Twofold Bay; there was a proposal to build a tramway from Bega to Tathra which would have made the railway a less attractive proposition; and, finally, the acquisition of land by the new Federal Government at Jervis Bay in 1911 ended all remaining hopes that the Bega-Wolumla-Eden railway would ever be built.

The money promised for the Bega to Eden Railway was finally re-promised to build a lunatic asylum at The Springs (now Springvale), just across the river from Bega, to provide employment opportunities to the area. Like the railway, that asylum was never built! ℝ

16: Gerringong Boat Harbour Wharf, 1884–1893

When exports from the Gerringong area transitioned in the 1860's from being timber-based to perishable agricultural products, the need for a regular shipping service to the area became clear. And, to facilitate loading and unloading of cargoes from ships, it was obvious a jetty needed to be built into Gerringong's 'harbour' (which, in reality, was/is a shallow and exposed cove).

From the 1860's, the NSW Government was being urged to fund the construction of a jetty. The need for this jetty became more acute once the Illawarra Steamship Company's vessel, the *Dairymaid*, started a twice-weekly service to Gerringong in 1876.

Ten years earlier, in 1866, the Engineer-in-Chief for Harbours in NSW, Mr E.O. Moriarty, had recommended against the construction of a wharf at Gerringong, suggesting instead that Government spend its money on improving the road from Gerringong to the port at Kiama.

However, in 1880 the Gerringong Council received a grant from the Government for construction of a jetty. This was rapidly completed. A storage shed was also built, and a track for a trolley along the wharf was installed.

But the *Dairymaid* was unable to use the wharf. At low tide, the harbour was too shallow for the vessel, and at high tide it was too dangerous to secure the vessel to the jetty because, in even a moderate sea swell, it was likely that movement of the moored ship would simply pull the whole structure apart.

So, in 1883 Council received another Government grant to extend the jetty by several hundred feet. By June 1884, the jetty projected 500 feet into the harbour.

But the wharf then had a short life. By 1891 heavy seas had severely damaged the wharf and, in 1893, the railway line south of Kiama was extended to Bomaderry, providing a more efficient form of transport from Gerringong to Sydney, and effectively ending the need for Gerringong to have a shipping service.

So, Moriarty was right – the government's funding would have been better utilised improving local roads than building, then extending, the wharf. ℝ

50 ISSUES OF RECOLLECTIONS

50 MEMORABLE MOMENTS

17: The Temperance Movement, c.1870s–c.1920s

The Temperance Movement (promoting abstinance from or moderation in the consumption of alcohol) was a powerful and influential force in the second half of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century.

It had adherents in many South Coast towns and it influenced the nature of and development of many of these towns. For example, the Good Templars temperance movement was active in Moruya; what is now the Masonic Temple in Collins Street, Kiama was built in 1876 as the 'Temperance Hall for the Sons and Daughters of Temperance' and operated as such until 1899; Cobargo and Central Tilba both has Temperance Halls; and Mary Jamieson Williams, who was President
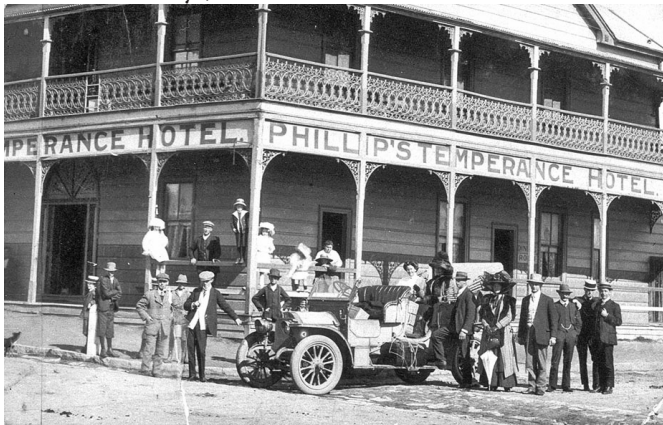
Phillip's Temperance Hotel, Bega

of the Nowra Temperance Movement from 1917 to 1921 became a long-serving office bearer in the Australasian Women's Christian Temperance Movement.

The Temperance Movement's influence on the South Coast was, however, probably most noticeable in Bega.

In the 1880s a Bega Temperance Hall Company–a conventional company with about 400 local shareholders–erected a Temperance Hall in Carp Street. It was originally intended to be a 30-foot by 60-foot hall, but during the planning stage its size was increased to 95-foot by 30 foot, capable of seating around 800 people. That's a mighty big hall for a town with a population of around 2,000 at the time. (In 1885, the Hall became the Lyceum Theatre. Council then tried to buy it in December 1908 but their application to borrow the money to do so was not approved. It was then purchased by Whyman & Brooks, a firm of coachbuilders, who on-sold it to Balmain & Heyde, wich later became Balmain Brothers Bega (see Memorable Moment 22). They used it as a motor garage and showroom for more than 75 years. The distinctive building still stands at the western end of Carp Street).

The temperance movement probably had its greatest successes from around 1905 to 1916. In 1905, the Liquor Act was amended to allow local communities to vote on reducing the number of liquor licences in their area. In Bega, the community voted to reduce the number of hotels in the town from nine to five – and one of the hotels that lost its licence was the Occidental Hotel, opposite the Lyceum Theatre and where the Grand Hotel now stands.

It then became Phillip's Temperance Hotel – a hotel with no beer!

In 1916 a referendum was held which led to the introduction of six o'clock closing of hotels. This was intended to be a temporary measure, partly as an attempt to improve public morality and partly as a war austerity measure. In 1923 the NSW government extended the measure…which was then not repealed until 1954. ℝ

18: The Ly-ee-moon disaster, 1886

In 1883 an (impressive) lighthouse was built at Green Cape, south-east of Eden, as a navigation aid to shipping and to help prevent vessels running into that section of the coast.

Two years later, on 30th May 1886 at 9.30pm, the *Ly-ee-moon* ran into rocks at the very base of the lighthouse. Within 10 minutes the ship had split in two. 15 of those on board survived, but at least 71 others lost their lives.

The *Ly-ee-moon* was a fast, luxurious steamer operating between Brisbane and Melbourne. When she ran aground, she was steaming at the comparatively high speed of 11.5 knots enroute from Melbourne to Sydney. One of the passengers who lost her life was Flora MacKillop, the mother of Mary MacKillop, now Saint Mary MacKillop. Flora was on her way to Sydney to help Sister Mary at a fundraising event for Mary's Order of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Flora's body was recovered from the sea several days later. 23 other bodies were eventually retrieved. Mary, writing to her brother observed that '*Hers* [Flora's] *was the only body picked up by the pilot boat, and the only body found anywhere without being injured by either the rocks or the sharks. The scapular* [a religious necklace] *she had so loved was on her neck. How it remained on seems miraculous.*' Her body was taken to Eden and was then cared for by a group of women until it could be transported to Sydney for burial.

Mary was so touched and appreciative of the kindness shown by the Eden community that she promised to establish a Convent and school in the town. In August 1891, three Josephite nuns arrived, beginning what would ultimately be more than a century of Catholic education in the town.

So why was the *Ly-ee-moon* steered into the rocks at Green Cape? Simply because she was travelling too fast and was too close to shore, perhaps to avoid most of the strength of the powerful East Australian Current that runs southward along the entire NSW coast. The night was clear and calm, so the weather was not a factor – unlike the circumstances that led to many other South Coast maritime disasters. The Third Officer, who was responsible for the ship at the time, had been asked by Captain Webber to call him from his cabin (there were suggestions that Webber may have been drinking and/or was 'being entertained' by a lady passenger in his cabin) before the ship approached Green Cape but failed to do so, and Webber appeared on deck just a minute or two before the vessel hit the rocks, so was unable to steer the ship to safety.

The loss of the *Ly-ee-moon* at Green Cape is still one of the least explainable tragedies in Australia's entire maritime history. ℝ

19: The Bicycle Club of Corunna, 1892–1915

World War I killed a cycling craze that had emerged in the late 19th century.

Hundreds of thousands of fit young men joined the Australian Army and left the country to fight; those who remained at home, understandably, did not want to signal that they were fit for army service by continuing to conspicuously ride their bicycles, particularly in organised competitions.

The surge in cycling's popularity resulted from the invention of the pneumatic-tyre safety bicycle by John Boyd Dunlop in Ireland in 1888. His innovation made bicycles faster, more comfortable and cheaper. And, the bicycle gave many who could not afford a horse or a car, their own personal means of transportation. Bicycle touring clubs were formed and cycle racing became extremely popular.

The safety bicycle, with its smaller wheels both the same size, also made cycling feasible for and popular among women — with the cycling boom at the turn of the 20th century providing one of the early examples of equality for women in sport.

For some, the new safety bicycle was simply a convenient, efficient form of transport. For example, for shearers who were regularly moving from one shearing shed to another, the bicycle replaced the horse as the preferred mode of transport. The bike was cheaper, did not require feeding, and could be leaned against a wall and left there without care while the sheep were being shorn. Then, when it was time to move on, the bicycle would be loaded up with the shearer's possessions in a hessian or jute sack, draped over the bars, frame or rear rack.

Just south of Narooma, at Corunna Point, a recreation ground was built by the Bicycle Club of Corunna around 1892 on land that was donated to it. A 158-metre-long cycling track (which would now be called a velodrome) was constructed by hand, a pavilion, dressing sheds and toilets were installed, and a maypole and swings were erected. The site became a popular venue for family picnics, athletics meetings and cycling competitions, with some events attracting thousands of visitors.

The cycle races held there attracted contestants from distant parts – cyclists would ride down from Cooma and even from Sydney to compete. But the War effectively shut these meetings down, with the last being held in 1915.

That cycling track is still there, in a spectacular location overlooking the ocean. It's also on the Register of the National Estate – a reminder of the impact that cycling had on Australians in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries, and a testament to the enthusiasm then shown by the local community for cycling. ℝ

The Bicycle Club of Corunna, c 1895. Image: nla.obj-140324474

20: The Bega Labour Settlement, 1893

Just to the west of Bega township is an area of immense State significance – with an important history that very few locals know anything about.

A major economic depression occurred in Australia in the early 1890s. Typically, depressions lead to increased unemployment and governments look for new ways to address the challenges that result.

In 1893, the NSW Government launched an innovative resettlement scheme where, as long as they were willing to 'bend their backs', the unemployed or underemployed were offered land on which they were able to establish a permanent home for their families and (hopefully) then enjoy a secure lifestyle. It was intended that hundreds of these resettlement sites would be established throughout the state.

One of these sites was just across the river from Bega, in present-day Springvale. It became one of only three labour settlement sites that was ever established.

In July 1893, 26 families from Newtown in Sydney left Sydney by boat and (to quote the *Cootamundra Herald* later) '*after the unfortunate cooperatives* [cooperatives in the sense that they were to work cooperatively in establishing the new settlement] *were got onto the boat, an official request was wired to Bega – at a day's notice – to make arrangements for the reception of the intruders…There was rather an uncertainty at the time where the families were to be dumped* [but other reports at the time indicated '*the Bega settlers take tents and provisions with them. It is intended the tents shall be returned when the men have erected huts*' on what was then the Bega Common]…*the Begaites were rather indignant that a portion of their Common being confiscated for this purpose and there was a great row over the affair.*'

The government provided land on which the settlers could erect a house, farming tools, some seed, some fruit trees, and loans of £20 to every married man or £25 if they also had children.

The Bega Labour Settlement was reasonably successful, but the other two Labour Settlements were not. So the settlement idea was abandoned by the governmant and, in 1907, the 12 original settlers who then remained, plus 17 newcomers, were each offered 30-acre blocks of land that they could purchase.

The blocks then needed to be surveyed before the settlers could purchase them. This created challenges (each block of land then had to include the settler's home) because the original settlers had simply erected their homes wherever they chose on the Common land – which accounts for the numerous very odd shaped parcels of land that are now a feature of this State-significant Springvale area. R

21: Joseph Check, early photographer and picture show man, c1901–1915

In the early 1900s, South Coast communities were small and isolated. So, they were often unable to support full-time solicitors, surveyors, dentists, priests and even photographers, so travelling professionals would regularly and temporarily bring their skills to a town for a few days before moving on to the next settlement.

Joseph Check was one of these itinerant workers. His expertise was photography…but he also became an entertainer.

He seems to have been the only significant photographer/cinematographer/entertainer who regularly visited the South Coast at that time, doing so apparently between 1901 and 1915.

He started as a travelling photographer and oil painter, utilising a four-wheel covered wagon which acted as both his photographic darkroom and his home. He rapidly added 'entertainer' to his portfolio, bringing a cinema, phonograph and singers with him…along with (after his wife had died of a heart attack on a Sydney tram in 1900) his five daughters aged 13 (Eva), 10 (Jessie), 8 (Helen), 6 (Violet) and 3 (Ivy), until he was able to find foster care for them. The girls earned their keep by putting up posters and selling tickets. No doubt their charm helped promote Joseph's business as well!

An advertisement in the *Cobargo Chronicle* (26th September 1902) outlines what he offered: '*J. CHECK, Photographer, Limelight and Cinematograph and Polyphone Entertainer. Photography in all its highest branches. This is a genuine chance to secure a good photo…J. Check's entertainments are famous…The Cinematograph of the Passion Play must be seen to be appreciated; it is the most realistic combination of scenes ever witnessed in the district… Mr. J. Check, the high-class cinematographe entertainer, concluded a successful run of three nights at Bega on Monday night. The show is by far the best of this kind we have seen anywhere, and so pleased the audience that some of them attended every night.*'

Joseph Check's legacy is having left the community with a portfolio of significant photographs from that era. His photograph, below, of A.M. Cansdell's Albion Stores in Church Street, Bega is typical: it was deliberately posed to publicise Check's services, so featured all of the firm's employees (plus, probably, one of his little girls on the left), and would have then been hung in the Store to entice people who wanted their portrait taken to seek him out.

(More details about Joseph Check will be included in the next issue of 'Recollections'.)

22: Balmain Brothers (Bega) embrace the age of the motor vehicle, 1910–1995

Motor vehicles started appearing in areas of the NSW South Coast from the first years of the 20th century. And from 1910, Balmain Brothers (Bega) became a dominant player in all of the many aspects of the South Coast's road transport industry.

The company started as a 'truly modern and improved edition of Cobb and Co.' transporting passengers and mail in service cars (the precursor of buses) to the coast from rail centres such as Cooma, Bombala and Nimmitabel. Eventually it embraced everything automotive: it retailed vehicles (Fiats, Fords and, later, astutely acquiring a General Motors dealership), serviced vehicles, retailed fuel and oil, provided local NRMA roadside assistance, became a major motor vehicle finance provider in the area, imaginatively promoted local tourism (preferably utilising Balman Bros' hire car services!) to the South Coast and the Snowy Mountains, and even initiated the building of a tourists' accommodation house in Narooma…ran regular passenger services (at first in service cars and later in buses), mail delivery services (including several Roadside Mail Delivery routes), and other general delivery services.

Its Managing Director, Billy Balmain, was passionate about promoting and improving local roads to the extent that he would routinely quiz his drivers about the condition of local roads and then pressure the local roads authorities to repair and upgrade sections of road that he considered to be in poor condition.

Balmain Brothers purchased what had originally been the Lyceum Hall in Carp Street, erected by the local Temperance Movement so that it could hold rallies promoting abstinance from or moderation in the consumption of alcohol, converting it into a showroom, workshop and garage.

In 1935, as business expanded, Balmain Brothers erected a major Art Deco-style vehicle workshop in Auckland Street that backed on to the Carp Street building, and the Carp Street premises were then converted into a new car sales showroom and a NRMA Travel Centre.

One of Balmain Bros' long-serving mail bus drivers is commemorated in the Fred Piper Memorial Lookout, beside the road on the Snowy Mountains Highway at Brown Mountain. Fred had driven the bus between Cooma and Bega for 28 years, never having had an accident, but died of a heart attack while digging a path for his bus through a snow drift in the winter of 1948. R
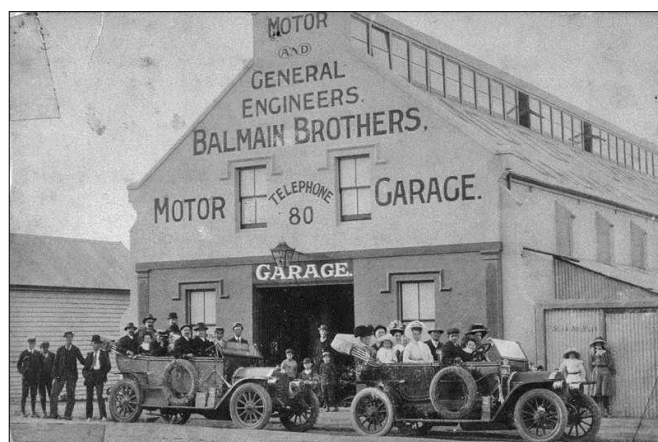
The Balmain Bros Motor Garage and service cars in Carp Street, Bega. Image: State Library of NSW FL1718839

23: Can the rabbits!, 1911–1915

In the early 1900s, rabbits had become an uncontrollable pest. Poison was not working and farmers were worried about having to leave their farms if the rabbits could not be controlled.

One solution (which had been proven to be viable interstate) was to trap the rabbits and then can them for human consumption. So it was proposed to erect and equip a cannery in Wyndham.

To finance the venture it was planned to sell 3,000 shares at £1 each. It took 18 months to do so, and then took another three months to build the factory.

The factory was officially opened on Wednesday 5th July 1911. Hundreds of people turned up. The *Bega Budget* recorded the scene:

A number of tins from the first batch were opened and placed on the dinner table. Everyone was anxious to taste it, and asked for 'just a little please,' but in many cases the order was repeated minus the 'little please.' There is not the slightest doubt that the article has a very presentable appearance and is extremely palatable…It is far superior to much of the preserved beef sold in this district…

On the day of the opening a lot of rabbits were brought in and one cart-load from Rocky Hall way was said to contain 750 pairs. Of course there are very few professional trappers in the district yet, and most of the bunnies are caught by amateurs. One young fellow with 60 traps has averaged 10s 6d a night since the factory opened.

The rabbits are cleaned by trappers, (and) are received by an expert who carefully looks over the bunnies and rejects any doubtful ones.

Delivering rabbits to the South Coast Rabbit and Meat Canning Company in Wyndham

The ears and feet are chopped off and bagged for shipment to Melbourne where they are converted into glue…The skinner, who had a reputation of being able to do 400 an hour, then gets to work. Many ridiculed the idea of such a record, but once he started it was soon seen that it could easily be accomplished…Five hits of the chopper is all that is required, and bunny falls in pieces into a huge tub of brine…The article is tinned before being cooked, only a pin-hole being left in the tin…This is soldered while the contents are hot, and the cooling process causes the vacuum so well known to people in the trade. With the addition of an attractive label the article is ready for market.

Unfortunately, in spite of the initial optimism, the enterprise was not a commercial success. The South Coast Rabbit and Meat Canning Company survived only until 1915 and the factory building was destroyed in a bushfire in 1926. Ⓡ

24: The Candelo Knitting Class, 1916-1918

There have been many interesting community groups that have sprung up from time-to-time on the NSW South Coast – but none more so that the Candelo Knitting Class.

It was one of hundreds, maybe even thousands, of community-based groups in Australia that were formed during World War I and were devoted to the welfare of local soldiers fighting on the Western Front.

It appears to have been founded, informally, by women in Candelo in July 1916 in response to urgent appeals from soldiers in the trenches of France and Belgium for clean, dry socks.

But it became much more than that. It assembled and posted 'comfort' parcels to local soldiers; it became an acclaimed local entertainment troupe; it was the 'go to' when supper or refreshments were needed at parties, at functions in Candelo's School of Arts Hall, on polling days, at the local agricultural show, when local soldiers were farewelled, when soldiers were welcomed home (each also then being presented with a pair of hand-knitted socks by the Candelo Knitting Class!); it provided free accommodation to visiting fundraising entertainers; it organised many of the town's principal social events; it even fundraised for Bega District Hospital.

It gradually transformed into a formal community-based organisation, electing a President, Secretary and Treasurer and opening bank accounts.

The local community respected the Candelo Knitting Class. It was given rent-free use of the Candelo School of Arts Hall for its weekly meetings, and even had the Candelo Show Society raising funds for it.

At the height of its success, in 1918, the fool Federal Government suddenly prohibited the raising of funds by organisations working exclusively for 'local' soldiers, directing that all local fundraising must be channelled to the Red Cross. So, the Candelo Knitting Class had no option but to disband: 'A well-attended meeting of the local Knitting Class was held on Saturday last to 'wind up the wool' after a long period of persistent patriotic support. The

Secretary was instructed to pay accounts and publish the financial statement, and pay over the credit balance to the local Repatriation fund. It was also decided that the Tobacco Fund be handed over to the Repatriation fund, subject to the approval of subscribers. Scraps of wool are to be knitted into socks and each returned soldier to be presented with a pair until the supply is exhausted.'

£18.15.9 was handed to the Candelo Repatriation Fund – to benefit 'local' returned soldiers. Not a penny went to the government-preferred Red Cross! The final score: the local Candelo Knitting Class 10, the incredibly out-of-touch Australian Government 0. Ⓡ

25: The Wolf sinks the Cumberland, and truth becomes a casualty, 1917

In World War I, the only place in Australia where enemy action was recorded was on the NSW South Coast. And that action resulted in the sinking of a merchant vessel, the SS *Cumberland* off Gabo Island.

This story begins on 30th November 1916 when the SMS *Wolf*, a merchant ship refitted as a naval auxillary cruiser, left Kiel in Germany on a remarkable 451-day around-the-world voyage. Her mission was to harrass Allied shipping. By the time she returned to Germany, the *Wolf* had sunk 35 trading vessels, 2 warships and was carrying 467 prisoners of war along with substantial quantities of rubber, copper, zinc, brass, silk, copra, cocoa and other essential materials to assist the German war effort.

During the voyage she sailed through Australian waters
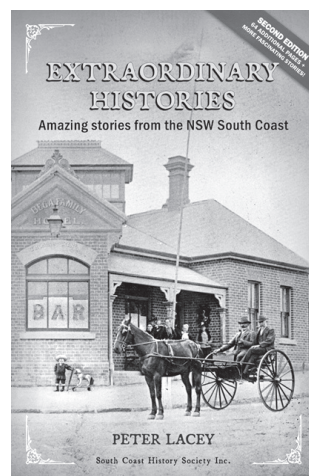
and, off the South Coast of NSW, laid 30 mines in early July 1917.

A merchant vessel, the SS *Cumberland*, which was bound for England with a cargo of frozen meat, wool, lead and copper, struck one of these mines on the morning of 6th July 1917. Although seriously damaged, it was able to be beached on nearby Gabo Island.

The *Cumberland* was refloated and efforts were made to move it to Twofold Bay were it could be repaired. However it sank whilst under tow.

And so started a deliberate government campaign of misinformation. Despite it being clearly obvious that the *Cumberland* had been holed by a mine, it was declared that an 'explosion' had occurred aboard the vessel and this had been the work of traitors who had loaded the ship in Townsville, Bowen or Sydney, the ports where the *Cumberland* had taken on its cargo. This story suited Prime Minister Billy Hughes who was then waging a campaign againsts left-wing organisations such as the Australian branch of the International Workers of the World, and so he accused waterside worker supporters of this or similar organisations of having placed explosives aboard the ship.

This government campaign of misinformation has been described a '*a cautionary glimpse of how easily the press and the public can be manipulated towards xenophobic hatred when governments wield* [as they did in World War I] *enormous powers of censorship and propaganda.*' Ⓡ
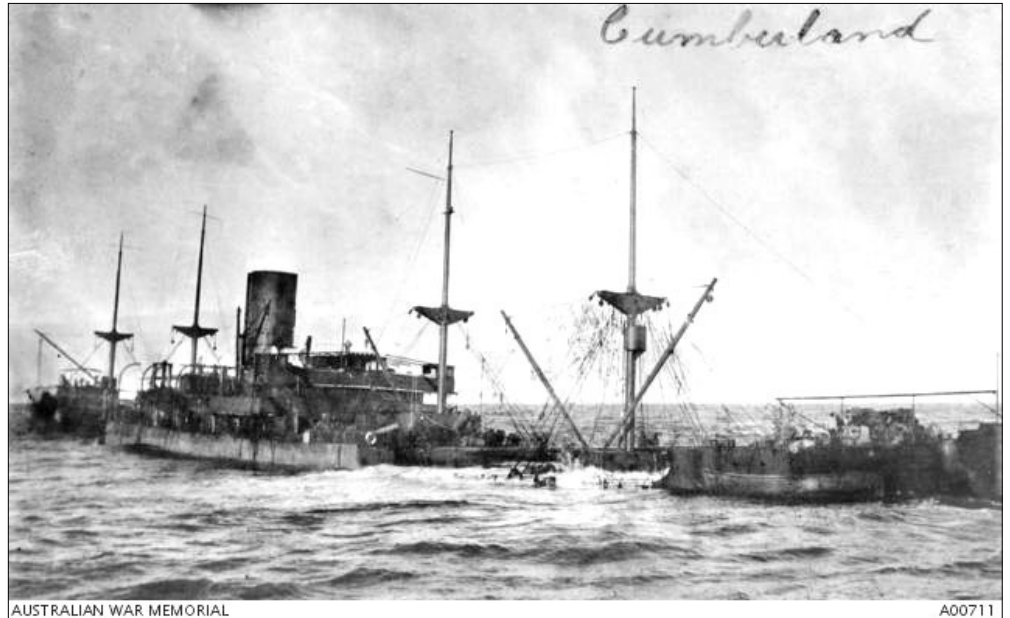
S.S. Cumberland on Gabo Island, 7th July 1917. Image: AWM A00711

26: Nurse Pearl Corkhill awarded the Military Medal, 1918

2,861 women served overseas in the Australian Army Nursing Service during World War I.

Just seven of these Australian nurses were awarded the Military Medal (the highest award that could be bestowed on a female – their equivalent of being awarded a Victoria Cross) for 'bravery and devotion under fire'. One of this elite group was Nurse Pearl Corkhill from Tilba Tilba.

Pearl had just completed her nursing training in Sydney when she joined the Australian Army Nursing Service as a staff nurse. She first served in Egypt from July 1915 to April 1916, nursing sick and injured troops who had returned from the Gallipoli campaign.

She was then posted to France, initially serving at the Second British General Hospital at Le Havre, one of the largest British wartime general hospitals in France that was located near the port of Le Havre so that wounded men could be easily evacuated for longer-term treatment in Britain.

From June to August 1918, Pearl was working at the 38th British Casualty Clearing Station, near Abbeville. This was not far from the war's dangerous front line. One night in July, the CCS was subject to an air raid, during which Pearl 'continued to attend to the wounded without any regard for her own safety'. For her 'courage and devotion' she was awarded the Military Medal.

Her only reaction was that she would then have to face 'old George and Mary [King George V and Queen Mary] to get the medal' and that it would cost her a new mess dress as her old one was worn out. But this was not to be – the war ended and she returned to Australia in March 1919.

In Tilba Tilba, returned soldiers formed a guard of honour as she proceeded to a decorated rotunda in the local showground where an array of speakers praised her contribution to the war effort.

Many of the nurses who returned to Australian after the war did not return to nursing work (many would have married and, therefore, would have been unable to continue working). But Pearl did, initially running a private hospital in Mosman, Sydney, with a fellow Army nurse Flora May Ewington, and later serving as Senior Sister at the Bega District Hospital.

Pearl was highly respected throughout the Tilba district and was often asked to preside at local occasions. A skilful horsewoman, she led the parade for the centenary of the Cooma Show in 1975. She died in Dalmeny (just north of Narooma) in 1985 at the age of 98. Ⓡ
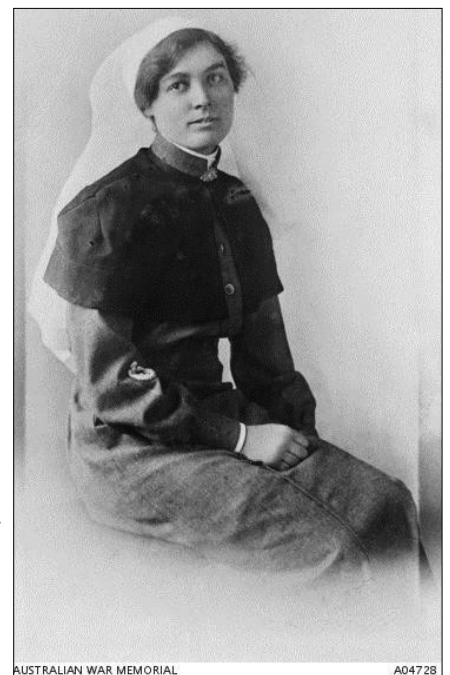
Sister Pearl Corkhill. Image AWM A04728

27: War memorials, 1919 onwards

World War I had an enormous impact on South Coast communities – very much more than we can comprehend today. Many men (and a few women) volunteered to serve, and local communities were immensely proud that they had chosen to do so.

During the War, Rolls of Honor were compiled in every town, by many community organisations, and by many companies. These acknowledged those who had elected to 'serve King and country' and, in communities where everyone then knew everyone, effectively also publicly identified those who had not, for whatever reason, enlisted.

But local communities believed those who enlisted and, in particular, those who were killed or wounded in the conflicts, deserved much more permanent, much greater public acknowledgment. So attention moved to erecting substantial Soldiers' Memorials (note: not war memorials).

The government prohibited the erection of permanent Memorials whilst the War was still being fought, and then imposed restrictions on the type of memorials that could be built and the positioning of these memorials. This is why, in NSW, relatively few war Memorials feature a statue of a soldier.

The Bega Soldiers' Memorial is probably the most impressive of the South Coast's World War I memorials. It is 'an arch over a public place' (permitted by the government) erected at the 'gateway to a public park' (also permitted by the government). It was designed and built by R W Thatcher, Bega's most prolific and acclaimed builder. It was modelled on the Arch of Constantine that stands adjacent to the Colosseum in Rome. It was funded by public donation, and was unveiled in 1924 by the mothers of locals who died in the War.

The Bega World War I Soldiers' Memorial, like so many others throughout Australia, later became the town's War Memorial with the names of locals who served in Australian armed forces in later conflicts being added. 990 names of local soldiers, sailors and airmen are now inscribed on that Memorial. ℝ

The unveiling of the Bega Soldiers' Memorial on 24th May 1924

28: The Influenza Pandemic, 1919

The South Coast (as was the case in the rest of Australia) was dealt a second round of distress and misery, just as it was beginning to feel some optimism and elation following the end of World War I. A very severe influenza pandemic hit the area.

It was known to be coming, as it had spread throughout the rest of the world in late 1918. Deaths were recorded in the millions (ultimately somewhere between 20-million and 100-million people are believed to have died worldwide; but only around 12,500 Australians died because, by the time the virus entered Australia, it had evolved and its lethality had diminished).

In the early months of 1919, local communities started to prepare for the possibility of a local outbreak. For example, in Bermagui in February, the community held a public meeting and decided to hire a nurse, make the School of Arts an emergency hospital, and to raise a levy on each household to help cover expected costs.

Other measures were introduced. State borders were closed in an effort to contain the pandemic and many local services were curtailed: '*Bega storekeepers are advising city houses to keep their travellers* [salesmen] *at home.*' Public meetings and entertainments were cancelled and communities rallied, just as they had done in World War I, to meet whatever needs the local community may have required.

Around the beginning of June, the pandemic suddenly hit. The 21st June edition of the *Cobargo Chronicle* reported that 89 cases had been recorded in Bega and that there was an outbreak in Bermagui. Two weeks later the *Cobargo Chronicle* was reporting two deaths from the pandemic in Bermagui.

Some families were very severley impacted. Again, the *Cobargo Chronicle* (12th July 1919): '*The Lloyd family, Cooma, was almost wiped out by the influenza epidemic last week. First a girl aged 18 died, then three boys of ages ranging from 19 to 23 succumbed. Only the parents and a little girl survive.*'

By the end of 1919 the influenza pandemic had run its course – becoming a short lived, and certainly unwelcome postscript to World War I. ℝ

'This House and Inmates Quarantined', 1919. Image courtesy Bega Valley Historical Society

29: The Prince's Highway is named, 1920

*T*he Prince's Highway – the road to Melbourne via the South Coast – was officially opened and named yesterday by the Minister for Local Government (Mr. T.D. Mutch). A picturesque spot, in the vicinity of the Bulli Pass Lookout, was chosen for the ceremony. The portion of the road selected for the function commands a splendid panoramic view of the ocean and several South Coast towns.

The visitors who travelled by train to Bulli and on to the lookout by car were not so fortunate as those who journeyed by car from Sydney. A couple of the cars which attempted the steep climb – 1,100 feet – from Bulli to the Lookout broke down, and among those who had to walk were the Federal Minister for Works and Railways (Mr. Groom) who was accompanied by Mrs. Groom. But they appeared to enjoy the experience.

Soon after the naming ceremony steady rain commenced to fall, and it was decided to abandon the toast list at the luncheon, which was held in the open. The ladies sought shelter of the cars, while the other visitors gathered under a spacious tree and listened to several informal speeches by the Ministers and others interested in the good roads movement.

The suggestion that the old 'top road' on the South Coast should be named the Prince's Highway was made by the National Roads Association. The Bulli Council, which was communicated with, endorsed the proposal. No alteration or improvements have so far been made, but it is hoped to plant an avenue of trees along the highway right to the border. The Prince's Highway runs through Gippsland to Melbourne, and is regarded as the favourite road to the Victorian capital…

Mr. Groom said that the naming of the road the Prince's Highway was a pleasing tribute to his Royal Highness. The Prince of Wales [later King Edward VIII] had captured the hearts of Australian people. (Applause) Mr Mutch, in naming the road, said he had travelled over practically the whole of New South Wales by train, on foot, and by cycle, but he knew of no road more beautiful in the whole of his Australian travels than the Prince's Highway. (Applause) The Australian people did not realise what a magnificent asset they had in their coastal scenery. (Applause)…

New South Wales had got ahead of Vistoria in the naming of the highway, the Minister continued, but within a few weeks the Victorians would name their section. But he would remind the people of New South Wales that the Victorians were doing something practical. They were organising working bees. Something like that should be done by New South Wales. (Applause). If they could organise half the working population of the South Coast district to give one day towards improving the Prince's Highway, he would bring along a pick and shovel and do some work himself. (Applause) - Sydney Morning Herald, 20.10.1920. [The Prince's Highway was renamed the Princes Highway in 1941.] ℝ

30: The Currowan Starch Factory, 1921–1923

*B*urrawangs (Macrozamia communis) are abundant in the Nelligen-Batemans Bay area.

According to the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 23rd November 1920, '*years ago Mr Thompson, of Nelligen, discovered their* [the Burrawang seeds] *starchy nature. He noticed a cart had run over one of these bulbs, and when the sun had dried the pulp a starchy matter remained. He investigated further, with the result that he and his family have been manufacturing starch for local use, which analysts have declared to be of a high quality.*' This was probably little more than reporting of local folklore because much earlier, in 1871, a Nowra resident, Henry Moore, had documented a process he used to remove toxicity from the seeds of the Burrawang, and between 1913 and 1919 a factory producing starch from Burrawangs operated in Nowra.

In 1920, a syndicate of Sydney businessmen established the Austral Starch Company Limited to extract starch from the Burrawang plant. They acquired a ten-year lease over 31,000 acres of State Forest at Currowan (upstream from Nelligen) and a licence to 'exploit the Burrawang industry in the Nelligen district.'

They then erected a factory near the mouth of Currowan Creek, along with a tramway that ran along Mimosa Street, Currowan, that linked the factory to the town's wharf.

Production of Burrawang starch at Currowan began in January 1921. Initially it seems to have been very successful, with over 25 employees soon producing two tons of starch per week. This led to plans to expand the factory.

However, by April 1923, the company had gone into liquidation and it was finally wound up in November of that year. ℝ

31: The new Monaro State, 1922

*T*he arguments advanced by proponents for a separate South Coast state have always been clear. In 1922, for example, it was suggested '*Sydney will never allow Eden, Jervis Bay or Nowra to be developed. We want to be able to go on with hydro-electric schemes, the Shoalhaven and Snowy Rivers to begin with. We could run a railway cheaply from Tallong to the coast at Nowra with electric power; in fact, we could electrify the whole railway system throughout the area. We could carry out all these schemes at a cost of less than is proposed to be spent on the North Shore (Sydney Harbour) Bridge and City (Circle) Railway. That is the way to develop the country; that is the way to encourage immigration; that is the way to induce men to remain on the land…we want to see the whole area go ahead and, above all, to see Australia go ahead.*'

That proposal in the 1920s to establish a new Monaro State, as it was to be called, envisaged a state extending from Kiama in the north to Orbost in the south, and west to Yass and the Snowy Mountains. And it was seriously considered, with a Royal Commission in 1925 examining the proposal but concluding 'it was neither practicable nor desirable'.

In 1935, however, another Royal Commission concluded that areas in central, western and southern regions of New South Wales were suitable for self-government and recommended that referenda be held in these areas to gauge the level of public support for the establishment of new states. However, due to the Great Depression and then the

onset of the Second World War, those referenda were never held.

In 1949, when the Snowy Scheme was being considered, the idea of forming a new state was again canvassed. It was then suggested that a Riverina-Monaro State should be created and that it -rather than an Australian or NSW statutory body – would be a far more appropriate body to plan and construct the Snowy Scheme.

One can only speculate how different things might be now for the South Coast had one of those new state proposals have actually been implemented. Ⓡ
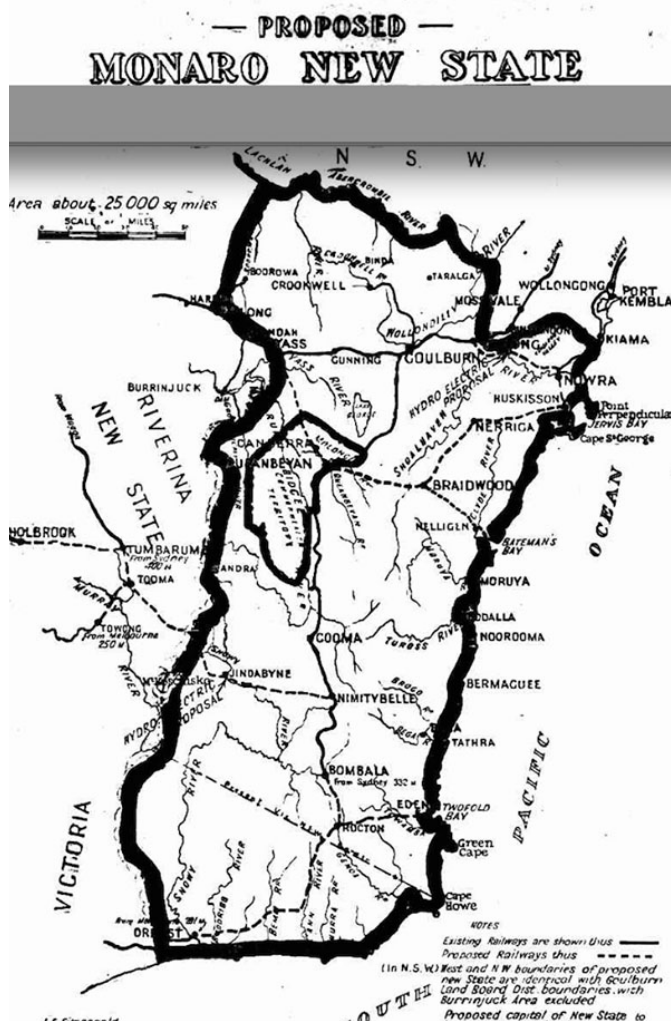
32: THE FLOOD THAT DEPOSITED A COASTAL STEAMER IN MORUYA'S SWIMMING POOL, 1925

Bushfires and floods are a recurring, regular feature on the South Coast. Every one is unique, every one impacts the area differently.

The 1925 flood of the Moruya River was one that broke all records. It overtopped the Moruya Bridge by two feet (0.7 metres), inundated the town and the flood plains north of the river, and swept the *Bermagui*, a 144-foot, 400-ton coastal steamer, over a retaining wall on the riverbank and into the town's swimming hole.

This is how that flood was reported:

'*Previous to the main flood, several minor floods occurred in a period of six weeks and during this period it rained almost every day, with the river somewhat swollen more or less all that time. In the late afternoon on the eve of the disaster the rain came in torrents and worsened through the night. By morning the upriver water started a rapid rise of 25 feet in one hour…late that afternoon a strong wind from the south sprang up, increasing during the night to a furious gale with almost continuous claps of thunder and rain, the like of which I had never seen before or since. In one burst I registered six inches in 40 minutes…*

By daylight the river had risen a further 35 feet, a total rise of 60 feet with the flats [to the north of Moruya township] *under an average of 39 feet. This volume of water about half a mile wide was roaring over the flats at terrific speed, causing great waves to break on the hillside like a rough sea on the beach...*
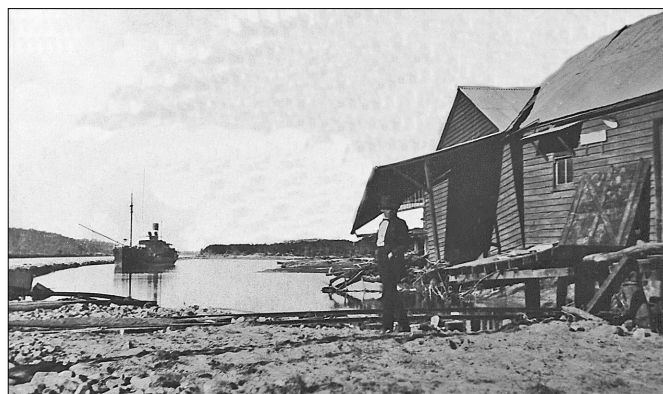

Above: The Bermagui in Moruya town's swimming hole, with the damaged ISCSN Co's office at right.
Below: The SS Bermagui steams out from the Moruya town swimming hole after the 1925 floods. Images courtesy Moruya and District Historical Society.

Take a stroll with me down to the Illawarra and South Coast Co.'s sheds and store-rooms. The first thing that meets the eye is north side of the shed canted over and apparently tearing away from the main building; further away is the steamer 'Bermagui' washed clean over the stone retaining wall into a billabong alongside, on even keel, and when I saw it [it was] *able to be moved about in the stillwater. How they will get her over again in the river is work for experts. The chances are very gloomy of ever shifting her once the flood waters subside and she rests on dry mud or sand…*

With the river rapidly rising, Captain Jackson, who was in charge of the SS 'Bermagui' which was moored at the town wharf, decided to anchor out in the stream for safety. The force of the flooded waters increasing caused the boat to drag her anchors and she was swept over the retaining stone wall many yards inside, into what is known as the swimming hole. This seems to have been an act of Providence, as otherwise she would have been swept down by the rushing stream and probably smashed to pieces'.

25 feet (7.5 metres) of the river's retaining wall had to be removed, and a channel had to be cut through sand in the river, to free the *Bermagui*. The steamer was undamaged. Ⓡ
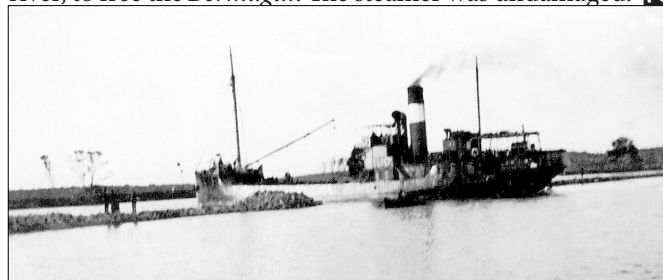
33: Jane Duren contacts the King, 1926

It's often be said, when you have a grievance, go straight to the top.

This is what Jane Duren, an Aboriginal Yuin woman from Moruya and a local pioneer campaigner for Aboriginal civil rights, did in 1926 – she made King George V aware of her concerns by writing to him.

There were two issues she addressed in her letter.

The first was efforts by the Batemans Bay Progress Association to have nine acres originally 'reserved for the use of Aborigines' in 1902 in Batemans Bay township revoked, because that reserve (by then the home to many Aboriginal families) was standing in the way of the town's expansion. The Progress Association's proposal was to move the Aboriginal community to another site several kilometers out of town – a move that, naturally, was strongly opposed by the local Aboriginal population.

Her other grievance was a push to exclude Aboriginal children from Batemans Bay Public School. Aboriginal children had been attending the school for 25 years, but there was a concern at the time about a possible influx of Aboriginal families from surrounding areas – which, it was argued, would lead to health problems. For the Aboriginals, however, the implications of such a move were much more severe: if Aboriginal children were not attending school they could be deemed neglected, under provisions of the Aborigines Protection Act, and then be placed in a training home or assigned out to a white employer (i.e. to become part of the 'stolen generation').

Jane and the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association, of which Jane as a leading member, was having no success in its appeals to the NSW Minister for Education, the Child Welfare Department, the Aborigines Priotection Board, or Members of Parliament, so Jane decided to write direct to the King 'on behalf of the Quadroon and Half-Caste Children of Batemans Bay.'

The King sent Jane Duren's letter back to the Australian Governor-General who, in turn, sent it to the NSW Aborigines Protection Board – the very body that Jane was primarily criticising! (She was then reported by the press as observing '*The Aborigines Protection Board was a nice name…but when this kind of thing occurred* [the proposed exclusion of Aboriginal children from Batemans Bay Public School] *where did the protection come in?*')

At that time, the Aborigines Protection Board made decisions behind closed doors, was secretive and exercised unquestioned executive powers, so Jane's direct approach to the King must have been, if nothing else, highly embarrassing. And, in 1927, the Child Welfare Department sent an Inspector to Batemans Bay who discovered that white parents had no personal objections to the schooling of Aboriginal children, so a compromise was reached: Aboriginal children had to pass a medical examination before attending the local school and were to be seated apart from the white students in their classes.

Jane's activism is partiicularly significant because it illustrates that Aboriginal women were heavily involved in the leadership and activities of groups such as the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association – an organisation, like so many others at that time, that could easily have functioned as an exclusively male-only, whites-only organisation. Ⓡ

34: The wreck of the Merimbula, 1928

'Twas a dark and stormy night', the evening SS *Merimbula* ran ashore at Currarong on the northern peninsula to Jervis Bay on 27th March, 1928. There was no loss of life, the ship became a total wreck – but the loss of the *Merimbula* is historically significant because it resulted in the Illawarra and South Coast Steam Navigation Company (ISCSN Co) deciding to end all passenger services to the South Coast and to concentrate only on the shipping of cargo.

The *Merimbula* was launched in Scotland in 1909. It had been built to replace the *Bega* which had 'turned turtle' the previous year north of Tathra, because it was overloaded and had not been properly balanced when it was being loaded at Tathra. The *Merimbula* was the pride of the ISCSN Co's fleet and included accommodation for 96 first class and 10 second class passengers. It ran between Sydney, Bermagui, Merimbula and Eden.

It left Sydney, headed for Eden on 25th March, 1928. It had 14 passengers and 21 crew on board. As it headed south, it ran into increasingly bad weather.

Just before 1am, travelling at 14 knots and 3 miles to the west of her set course, the passengers were woken by the grinding impact of the vessel driving onto the rocks near Currarong.

One woman later explained that '*The first half hour's alarm and excitement resembled a picnic more than a wreck. Immediately the captain gave the signal that there was no cause for worry, the passengers overcame their fears, and, after having a drink of coffee, played the piano and sang until morning when they were taken ashore and put in small huts, occasionally used by fishermen. In order to maintain the cheery atmosphere, Mrs Sparks, the steamer's relieving stewardess, played records on the gramophone until the cars arrived from Nowra*'.

Those rescue cars were arranged by the ship's captain, Captain O'Connor, who walked ten miles to Jervis Bay Lighthouse to secure assistance. Meanwhile, the crew returned to the ship and collected provisions to feed the passengers.

'*The topic of conversation among the passengers was that so large a ship was allowed to sail without a "wireless", as such would have enabled help to be secured within half an hour. As it was, the captain threw up rockets, which might have been crackers for all the help they secured. With "wireless", hours of anxiety might have been saved, as Jervis Bay lighthouse could have been notified, or some passing ship might have picked up a message and come to the rescue*'.

After the ship was abandoned '*large numbers of plunderers, like vultures round a carcass, removed a large quantity of moveable cargo, launches and motor vehicles being freely used to remove the goods…In the bush within a mile of the steamer were stacked piles of pilfered goods, rum, whisky, motor tyres,*
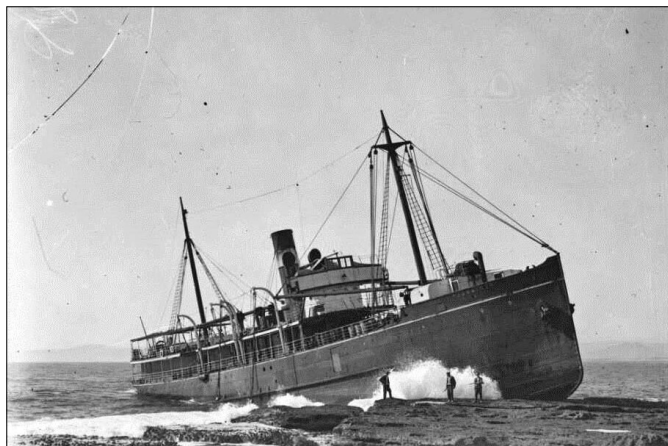
The SS *Merimbula's* last voyage.
Image: nla.obj-162636995

SS *Merimbula* aground off Beecroft Head in 1928.
Image: National Library of Australia nla.obj-163244894

sewing-machines, prams, tables – everything that was not screwed down. Car loads of stuff have been removed. Men and women crawled into the heart of the ship and carried away toys, fruit, books, brooms, and even casks of beer. There was no one to stop them.'

Within days it it was determined the vessel was not going to be salvagable, so a planned salvage operation was cancelled. Shortly therefter the battered vessel slipped backwards off the reef and settled into deep water. ℝ

35: Old Tom, 1860s?–1930

When 'Old Tom' died in 1930, his skeleton was preserved and a museum was erected in Eden to display his bones. That's not a bad memorial to a killer whale (actually not a whale at all, but an orca which is the largest species of dolphin) – the sort of honour that is not even accorded to humans!

Old Tom was the leader of a pod of orcas that helped the shore-based whalers in Twofold Bay by herding baleen whales into the Bay and close to shore, where whalers could then harvest them. The local Aboriginals had developed a mutually beneficial relationship with the orcas in Twofold Bay and, when European whalers set up shore-based whaling stations in the Bay, they employed Aboriginals (who were considered to be very good workers, and so were employed on the same terms as whites) thereby utilising and continuing the traditional Aboriginal practice of 'calling' whales into the Bay.

It's unknown when Old Tom was born, but three generations of the Davidson family, who began shore-based whaling in Twofold Bay in 1857 and ran what was to become the longest-running shore-based whaling station in Australia, claim to have worked with Old Tom.

Old Tom died in September 1930. Nobody is quite sure of the cause of his death – it may just have been of old age – but one story is that Old Tom may have starved to death after losing two teeth some years earlier during a struggle over a baleen whale carcass with a local man, John Logan. Logan is said to have been so wracked with guilt over his apparent role in Old Tom's demise that, after the orca's carcass drifted ashore, he paid for its bones to be cleaned and preserved, and then funded the construction of a museum to display Old Tom's skeleton.

Whatever the truth is, Old Tom is now the main exhibit at Eden's Killer Whale Museum, attracting around 50,000 visitors per year.

36: Pambula and its picture theatre, 1927–1939

During the 1920s and 1930s, Pambula had a permanent population of around 300. It was a typical small Australian country town and was not noted for being an 'early adopter' of innovation.

However, in 1927, William and Walter Godfrey, local garage proprietors, offered to supply the village with an electricity supply if the School of Arts Committee gave them the sole rights to exhibit moving pictures in the Hall every week. Their offer was immediately accepted and then received enthusiastic praise from the local newspaper, the *Pambula Voice.*

In October that year, the first 'moving pictures with the electric light' were screened to an overflowing audience at the Pambula School of Arts. And then, several days later, electricity lit up Pambula *'showing the vast number of tourists passing through that Pambula was not the 'dark spot' that it had been in the past'*. Within six months the Post Office, Church of England, hospital, all the town's businesses and many private homes in Pambula had been connected to the electricity network.

Fast forward a couple of years to 1929 when the local police sergeant refused to re-license the Hall until a costly projection box, built to rigid specifications included

under the government's newly-amended Public Halls Act (intended to reduce risks of fire from projection equipment), was installed.

The agreement that linked the cinema's use (by private individuals) of the School of Arts Hall (a public facility) to the provision of the town's power supply gave the School of Arts Committee little option but to spend money that had previously been earmarked for hall improvements on the new projection box.

The School of Arts Ladies Committee was particularly upset when the new screening box was placed in the middle of the hall's supper room, making it very difficult to adequately cater to community activities in the hall such as balls and weddings. So, the women withdrew their support and their fundraising activities for the community School of Arts.

It then took ten years for the situation to be resolved, with the School of Arts Committee ultimately being required to give a full explanation 'regarding the disposal of certain moneys raised years ago for improvements.'

[A drive-in cinema, with a 250-car capacity, operated at South Pambula between 1975 and 1990, thereby extending the local community's links with the screening of 'moving pictures'.] Ⓡ

37: WHEN SMITHY DROPPED IN, 1932

By 1932, Charles Kingsford Smith was a national hero. In 1927 he and co-pilot, Charles Ulm, had become the first to fly from the United States to Australia, and in 1930 he had been the first to make an east-west crossing of the Atlantic Ocean. In 1931 the Australian Post Office released a range of stamps bearing his image – the first time they had done so for a living person.

Also in 1931 Australian National Airlines, founded by Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm, went bankrupt after two of its aircraft crashed. And, March 1932, Kingsford Smith's famous *Southern Cross* crashed on landing after a night flight over Sydney to celebrate the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

So, for Smithy, it became necessary to return to almost where he had started, running joy-flights. As part of series of country tours that took in over 200 towns, Smithy and the *Southern Cross* (along with the *Southern Cross Midget*, captained by Pat Hall) visited Bombala and Bega on Sunday 23rd October 1932.

Flights were undertaken in Bombala from 10.30 am to 1 pm. It was estimated takings were over £150 – the price of a ticket on the *Southern Cross Midget* being 5/- for adults and 6d for children and, on the *Southern Cross*, 10/- for adults and 5/- for children. (At that time, the average male weekly wage was £5 and the average female wage was £2, so tickets were not cheap.)

Then it was on to Bega where Kingsford Smith and Hall arrived at 2.15 pm. The local paper reprted that '*long before the appointed time for their arrival, the roads from Bega and outlying towns were crowded with all kinds of traffic making for Mr B Gowing's paddock to witness the landing (and) close on 2,000 people*' turned up. Mr Gowing's paddock was at Jellat Jellat, about 7km east of Bega, and, as there was no windsock there, a fire had to be lit in the paddock to indicate the wind direction to the pilots.

The local newspaper reported that '*right up to 6 o'clock, both planes were kept hard at it to cope with the large number who wished to fly; it seemed everyone had gone air-minded and wanted to experience the thrill of riding in this famous plane with the gallant airman at the controls.*' The takings at Bega were reported to have been £200, establishing '*an Australian record in takings in one day…so that puts Bega and Bombala on the map.*' Ⓡ

The Southern Cross at Jellat Jellat. Photograph: State Library of NSW, FL1706302

38: Zane Grey puts Bermagui on the world map, 1936

Zane Grey was a very popular American author who became best known for his adventure novels and American Westerns. His greatest passion, though, was fishing and from around 1918 he began to popularise big-game fishing.

In 1932 a visitor from Yass, Roy Smith, landed a 262lb (119Kg) marlin whilst holidaying in Bermagui. This triggered huge interest in Australian big-game fishing. Then in February 1936 a Bermagui Big Game Anglers Club was formed and Zane Grey was invited to become the club's patron.

Grey had arrived in Bermagui the previous month. He brought his own boat with him, a huge array of rods and tackle, and his secretary. They set up a substantial camp on the Bermagui headland on the eastern side of Horseshoe Bay (now Dickinson Headland).

During the day Zane Grey would go fishing, after which he would prepare radio broadcasts and write articles for newspapers. These publicised his own big-game experiences

Zane Grey with Striped Marlin at Bermagui, February 1936

and also promoted Bermagui.

Grey stayed in Bermagui for six weeks. During that time he landed a cross section of game fish including marlin and yellowfin tuna. He also provided instruction to eager Australian anglers in how to catch big-game fish. ℝ

39: The Eden Fish Cannery, 1940–1999

Fish canneries operated in Eden between 1940 and 1999. At one time, almost every household in the town had some connection with the cannery or the associated fishing industry.

The first cannery was located on the north-west side of Lake Curalo (downhill from and north of Eden town) and processed salmon. However, when supplies of salmon diminished, the factory began trialling the canning of tuna ('tunny' as it was then known) caught by a CSIRO ship, the *Wareen*. In Australia at that time tunny was considered a sport fish, not a table fish, so initially attention was given to exporting it to the lucrative American market where tuna was considered to be a luxury fish.

The Lake Curalo cannery closed in 1944. It had experienced continuing challenges sourcing adequate supplies of local fish.

In 1945, a new public company, Australian Fishing Industries (AFI) Ltd, was formed to take over the cannery, along with ice making and boat building enterprises that were located at Cattle Bay (to the south-west of the town on Twofold Bay). The Lake Curalo plant was then relocated to Cattle Bay.

In 1949 Greens Products, which had been operating a fish cannery in Narooma since 1945, took over AFI's cannery, leading to a dramatic expansion of

the tuna catch…and the output from the factory. From this point, tuna fishing became a serious commercial industry in Australia.

In December 1949, 1,000 tons of southern bluefin were caught, overwhelming the capacities of both the Eden cannery and the Narooma cannery. So, help was enlisted to find emergency cool storage facilities in Sydney during the peak of the fishing season.

Greens sold the cannery to Kraft in 1961, who marketed the canned tuna under the 'Greenseas' brand. In turn, Heinz took over the cannery in 1973. 36 fishing boats were then operating and Heinz fitted each with a radio tuned to the radios of two spotter aircraft that they employed to provide information on the locations of large schools of fish.

But the boom times didn't last. By the late 1970s, tuna numbers had radically reduced and cheap overseas imports were severely impacting the local industry. Heinz Watties closed their once-successful Eden cannery in 1999. ℝ
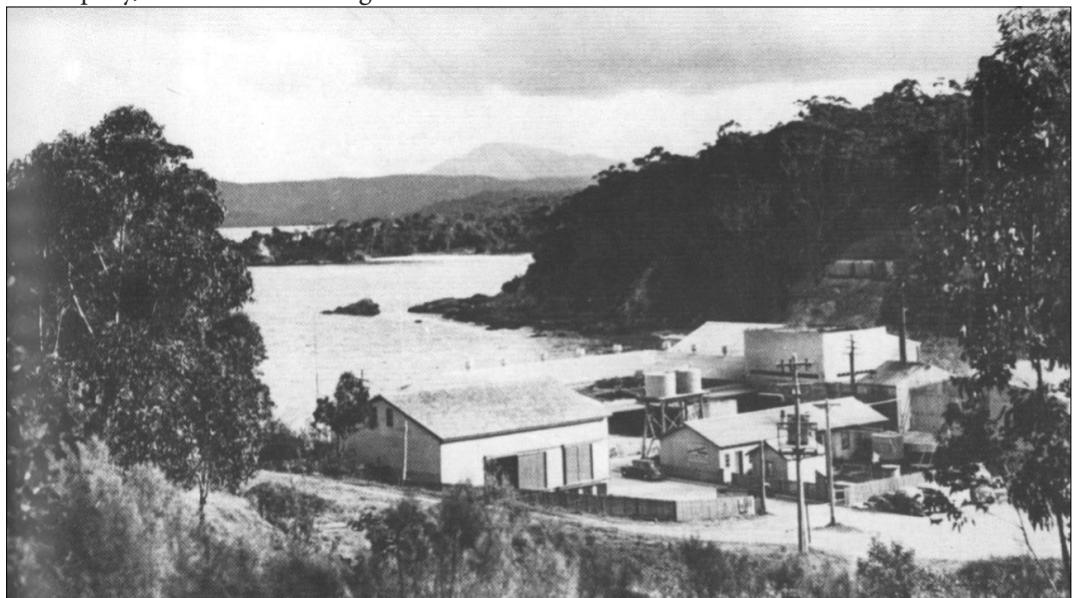
40: Preparing for an invasion, 1942

Between January 1942 and June 1943, there was genuine fear and it was widely believed there was a real possibility that NSW would be invaded by the Japanese. Because the industrial/urban concentration in Newcastle-Sydney-Port Kembla would be defended at all costs, it was felt unlikely that a direct invasion in that area could be successful. Which meant any invasion would be on the North and/or South Coasts and, if initially successful, the Japanese army would then work its way to Sydney.

So, very detailed plans were drawn up to move those living on the South Coast to the tablelands – women, children and invalids first, men following – and for the men to then impede the advance of the Japanese in whatever way was possible. A 'scorched earth' policy was to be implemented, leaving nothing behind that might assist the enemy.

On the Far South Coast there were five designated routes to the highlands. For example, Batemans Bay residents would move to Braidwood via the Clyde Mountain, Moruya residents would move to Braidwood via Araluen.

Businesses were given specific tasks. Butchers, for example, '(a) will keep in mild brine the equivalent of one or two weeks' sales of meat; (b) will plan to use his delivery carts for mobile supply in retreat, getting his meat from cattle to be destroyed.'

Volunteer Air Observers Corps (coastwatchers) were established to provide the RAAF at Mallacoota and Moruya with information about sightings of enemy aircraft, ships and submarines. (The VAOC at Tathra witnessed the torpedoing of the *William Dawes* on 22nd July 1942, reporting the incident to the Moruya airfield). And bunkers were built and air raid trenches were dug throughout the area to provide protection in the event of air attack.

Explosives were placed in vital structures such as wharves and bridges, and along roads, to destroy them in the event of invasion – the bend at Pooh Corner on the Clyde Mountain Road being one such location where explosives were placed.

Thankfully, no invasion occurred. There were, however, numerous reports of Japanese coming ashore on the South Coast from submarines to replenish food and water supplies – most of which, officially, were dismissed as nothing more than 'subversive rumour'. Ⓡ

41: HMAS Albatross, 1948–the present

HMAS *Albatross*, the Australian Navy's only air station, is located 6kms south-west of Nowra. Its primary task is to provide air support to the naval fleet.

The decision to build an airfield on the land that is now occupied by HMAS Albatross was taken soon after World War II was declared in 1939. The airfield started life as a Royal Australian Airforce base, but soon became a strategic base that was also utilised by the US Army Air Corps and the Royal Netherlands East Indies Air Force.

The threats that existed from the sea to both Sydney and Newcastle during World War II led to the base being manned and utilised by operational squadrons with torpedo strike capabilities. And the training of crews for torpedo attack became one of the base's primary roles. (The name of the road now leading to HMAS Albatross, BTU Road, reflects this – BTU being short for Base Torpedo Unit.)

In 1944 the British Admiralty deployed naval forces to the south-west Pacific area, necessitating the provision of shore-based support establishments for the Royal Navy and its Fleet Air Arm in Australia. The Nowra base was considered to be the ideal choice location for this, because of its proximity to Jervis Bay which was large enough to accommodate the entire British Pacific Fleet. So, the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm began operations at Nowra in late October 1944, and the base was renamed HMS Nabbington.

Ater the war, in March 1946, the base reverted to RAAF control. However, in July 1947 an Australian Fleet Air Arm was established, controlled and operated by the Royal Australian Navy. This led to the purchase of two aircraft carriers (HMAS Sydney and HMAS Melbourne), necessary aircraft, and the establishment of associated shore facilities at Nowra. So, the Navy's HMAS Albatross was commissioned in August 1948.

Sea Fury and Firefly aircraft, were brought from England to Australia by HMAS Sydney. In April 1955, Sea Venoms and Gannets arrived, as did Wessex helicopters with a dunking sonar capability in 1962. In 1965 American Douglas Skyhawks and Grumman Trackers were brought into service, and in the 1990s Seahawk helicopters joined the RAN's fleet. Examples of these and many other aircraft are on display today at the outstanding Australian Fleet Air Arm Museum at HMAS Albatross (admission is free). Ⓡ

A small part of the collection at the Australian Fleet Air Arm Museum at HMAS Albatross, Nowra

42: A foundation stone (or two) for St Patrick's Church, Bega, 1951–1953

This is the story of two stones. Not ordinary stones – but stone from Ireland, collected from the summit of Croagh Patrick, Ireland's holy mountain.

In 1951 major extensions were planned for St Patrick's Church in Bega. The local Priest, Fr. D.J. Griffin thought it would be appropriate to lay a foundation stone at this Church that included a piece of 'the rock of the mount [in Ireland] on which he [St Patrick] prayed'. So, he asked Dr Thomas Kiernan, Ireland's first Ambassador to Australia, to procure an appropriate stone 'from the very summit of Croagh Patrick.' This was an unusual request, but Kiernan felt it was 'worth the trouble to assist' the Priest because, he asserted, Bega was an 'old centre of Irish settlement'!

There was some delay in obtaining this stone.

Meanwhile, Father Griffin had arranged independently for a second stone 'from the very summit of Croagh Patrick' to be sourced. He had asked for assistance from another Priest, Father Tiernan who had brothers living near Croagh Patrick.

The Tiernan brothers' stone was smaller than the one (eventually) sent as a result of Ambassador Kiernan's request, but the Tiernan's stone arrived first – just in time for the ceremonial laying of the foundation stone by Ambassador Kiernan on 22nd July 1951. So it became the foundation

Croagh Patrick. Ireland

stone used on that occasion.

Kiernan's larger stone eventually arrived and, being more suited to being the foundation stone, was then laid above an inscription stone on the northern wall of St Patrick's Church. Tiernan's stone was moved to a wall inside the Church in 1953, 'under the feet of [a statue of] St Patrick…just in case he may feel a bit lonely'. (That statue has, unfortunately, since been moved from its original position and is now in the vestibule of the Church.)

So, St Patrick's Church Bega now has two stones from Croagh Patrick – giving the Church a somewhat unusual, perhaps unique, claim to fame among Australia's Christian churches. R

43: The opening of the Clyde River Bridge, 1956

In 1871 a ferry-punt was installed at Batemans Bay to provide a vehicular crossing of the Clyde River. This was later replaced by a steam ferry.

Before World War II it was obvious that this ferry crossing was inadequate and the Department of Main Roads started planning to build a bridge across the river to replace this only remaining ferry crossing between Sydney and the Victorian border. The war, and then post-war material

shortages, however, seriously delayed construction of the bridge.

Contracts for the supply of the steelwork for the bridge and for the construction of the bridge itself were awarded in late 1947 and early 1948. However, work progressed very slowly and it was not until late November 1956 that the Clyde River Bridge was finally opened. By that stage the vastly inadequate 28-vehicle ferry was transporting over 233,000 vehicles per year, with each crossing, including loading and unloading, taking about a quarter of an hour. This often resulted in peak time delays of many hours for motorists waiting to cross the river.

The opening of the Clyde River Bridge led to significant development in Batemans Bay and in towns and hamlets further down the coast.

For those travelling down the Kings Highway from Canberra and Queanbeyan, however, the opening of the Clyde River Bridge at Batemans Bay in 1956 only removed one delay. A ferry service at Nelligen, introduced in 1895, continued until a bridge was built across the upper reaches of the Clyde River and was opened in December 1964. By that time extensive traffic delays were often experienced at Nelligen. R
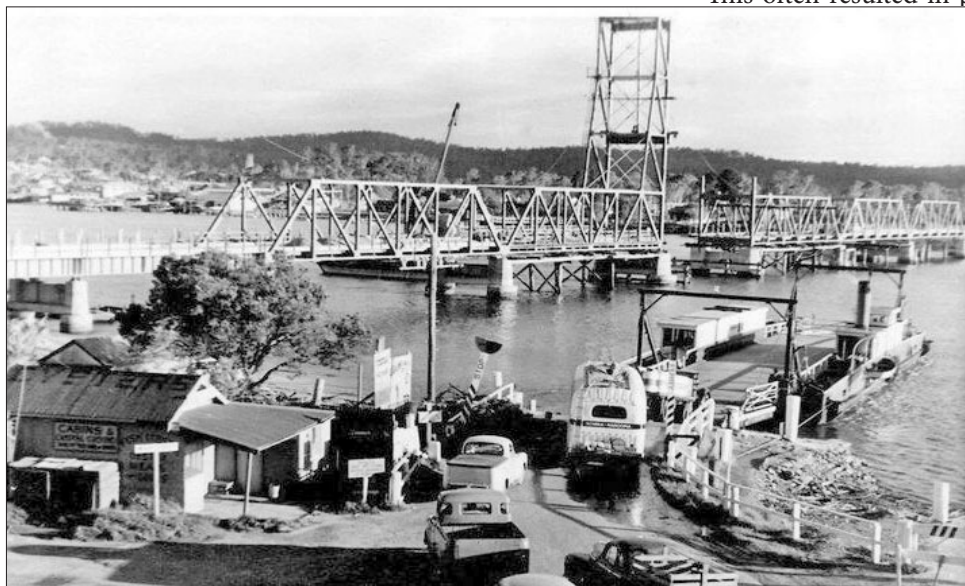
Construction of the Batemans Bay Bridge in 1956, with the first tower of the lift span almost complete - looking south with Batemans Bay township in the background.

44: The Voyager disaster, 1964

Australia's worst peacetime naval disaster occurred 19 miles south-west of Jervis Bay on 10th February 1964, when the 20,000 tons Aircraft Carrier HMAS *Melbourne* sliced the 3,600 tons Destroyer HMAS *Voyager* in two.

Both ships were involved in night flying training. The *Voyager* had been acting as 'plane guard', normally positioned behind and to the port (left) of the carrier to rescue the crew from any ditching or crashing aircraft. When *Melbourne* changed course to ensure departing or arriving aircraft were heading into the prevailing wind, the *Voyager* ended up ahead of and to the starboard (right) of the carrier, so was instructed to resume normal plane guard position. Instead of circling and passing behind the *Melbourne*, the *Voyager* inexplicably cut across the bow of *Melbourne*, and the collision resulted.

Most of those on the bridge of the *Voyager* were killed instantly. The bow section sank after 10 minutes, trapping most of the 82 men who were killed in the collision. The rest of the vessel sank about an hour later. 232 others on board the *Voyager* survived, and most were taken aboard the damaged *Melbourne* which then slowly returned to Sydney to undergo extensive repairs.

There were no casualties aboard the *Melbourne*.

Two Royal Commissions were held into the accident, one in 1964, the second in 1967. This has been the only time in Australian history that two Royal Commissions have been held to investigate the same incident.

[The *Melbourne* was later involved in a virtually identical collision on 3rd June 1969 in the South China Sea when it collided with the destroyer USS *Frank E. Evans* of the United States Navy, which was acting as a plane guard to *Melbourne* during anti-submarine exercises. The *Frank E. Evans* was cut in two and 74 of its crew were killed.] R

45: The George Bass Surfboat Marathon, 1975–present

Fifty years ago, the *Bega District News* Editor, W.B. 'Curly' Annabel, was concerned about a lack of promotion for the Far South Coast of NSW. So, he suggested that a 198-kilometre surfboat marathon be held from Batemans Bay to Eden as a means of publicising some of the towns and scenery in the area. The concept had an added historical aspect: the route would be retracing part of the pioneering journey along the South Coast that had been undertaken by George Bass in 1797.

In late 1797, George Bass (a British naval surgeon who arrived in Sydney in September 1795 and became one of the colony's earliest explorers) was given permission by Governor John Hunter to examine 'the coast southwards of [Sydney] as far as he could with safety and convenience go'. So, with six naval oarsmen and six week's provisions, he set out on 3rd December, 1797 in an 8.6 metre open whaleboat. The party was to travel as far as Western Port (almost to the entrance of Port Phillip) before returning to Sydney. Almost 1,800 km of coastline was mapped on that voyage (half of which had never previously been explored by Europeans), Bass found evidence that there was a strait between the New South Wales mainland and Van Diemen's Land (that strait is now named after him), and he 'discovered' the Kiama Blowhole, making notes about the geology surrounding it.

The first George Bass Surfboat Marathon was held in

1975 (so this year's Marathon celebrated the event's 50th anniversary). Only one entry had been received one week before the start of that first event…but then surfboats began rolling into Batemans Bay, and eventually eleven crews took part in the inaugural George Bass Surfboat Marathon.

The 1990 race attracted 38 crews.

From 1997, female crews have participated in the event, with 11 female crews participating in 2022. Paddlers on surf skis have also been able to participate from the late 1990s.

The George Bass Marathon is promoted as the world's

longest, toughest surfboat race. It is held over a seven-day period every two years. The first leg from Batemans Bay to Moruya is a 'leisurely 27km cruise'. The following day is a 'sprint' of 'a mere 19km'! The distances covered on the other days range from 20km to 'the big one', 35km. R

46: The Destruction of Hanging Rock, 1998

The area around Catalina-University of Wollongong Batemans Bay–Batemans Bay Library-the Hanging Rock Sports Complex is generally known as Hanging Rock.

That name derives from an ironstone pillar, about six metres in height, that once stood on the bank of Hanging Rock Creek. A sheoak tree grew out from around the rock (before it died, about 40 years ago), giving the rock the appearance that it grew out of the tree.

The area was a camping ground for Aboriginal people of the Walbunja tribe. Fresh water flowed down the stream and mud crabs and other food sources were readily available. So, it became a significant Aboriginal site.

Around 1997 or 1998, Hanging Rock was removed to make way for a road intersection and traffic lights. So, the rock itself has disappeared from the area (strangely, chunks of it have been installed in Korners Park on the northern side of Batemans Bay; a more appropriate location, surely, would have been Hanging Rock Recreational Reserve), but its name has survived. ℞

47: The Brogo Valley Rotolactor, 1982–1999

Guy Lucas was a dairy farmer. He also had a passion for the dairy industry and for educating the general public about where and how their milk was produced.

So, following a visit to the Rotolactor at Menangle in Sydney – once an extremely popular tourist attraction – he decided to instal a rotary dairy on his property in Brogo and to add an adjacent tourist/education facility.

His timing couldn't have been better. Busloads of Victorians were travelling to nearby NSW towns (including Merimbula) to 'try their luck' of an evening on poker machines, which were then banned in Victoria. And during the day, these visitors would be taken to some local tourist attractions which usually included a stop at the Bega Cheese Heritage Centre in Bega followed by an afternoon tea at the Brogo Valley Rotolactor.

Visitors could watch Guy's cows being milked on the rotary dairy 'merry-go-round', and Guy was able to share his thoughts with captive audiences about the importance of the South Coast dairy industry.

Guy's wife, Norma, would also bake 50 or 60 scones for each busload of visitors, and would serve these with jam and (naturally!) fresh cream. Tour operators paid for these visits in advance, so if a coach was running behind schedule and decided to skip the scheduled stop at the Brogo Valley Rotolactor, the farm workers and farm dogs suddenly received an unexpected, delicious, free feed.

When poker machines were introduced in Victoria, 'Pokie Tours' to NSW became a thing of the past and the economic lifeline to the Brogo Valley Rotolactor disappeared. Today, a fading sign alongside the old Princes Highway at the bottom of Mcleod Hill at Brogo is the only reminder of this once-successful local tourist attraction. ℞

48: The Black-Allan Line, 2006

The Black-Allen Line is probably the South Coast's best known, yet least known landmark.

It's that straight line border between Victoria and NSW running eastwards from the headwaters of the Murray River to Cape Howe that was surveyed in 1872 and was then forgotten about, before (oops!) it was realised it had never been proclaimed – a situation that was remedied in February 2006.

Being the legal boundary between Victoria and NSW, it's important. And it was defined (on paper, at least) in 1842 when the *New South Wales Constitution Act* was passed and in 1850 when the *Australian Constitutions Act* became law: '*the boundary of the district of Port Phillip on the north and north east shall be a straight line drawn from Cape How (sic) to the nearest source of the river Murray and thence the course of the river to the eastern boundary of the province of South Australia.*' It seems that Cape Howe was selected as the eastern-most end of the border simply because it had appeared on maps of NSW ever since it had been sighted and named by James Cook on 20th April 1770.

Some time before 1869, the Victorian Government Astronomer, Robert L.J. Ellery (assisted by surveyor William Turton), and the NSW Surveyor-General, P.F. Adams (assisted by surveyor Alexander Allen), met at Cape Howe and agreed on a spot (± 5 chains – about 100 metres) where the boundary line should end. They named this 'Conference Point'.

Then, between April 1870 and March 1872, three surveyors (Alexander Black, Alexander Allan and William Turton) actually surveyed the line. This has been described as one of the most '*difficult and arduous undertakings of colonial surveyors,*' not least because the terrain they were traversing was so rugged. The men would return to their homes once every six months and with '*no fixed hours for work…if it were necessary the work would be carried on from daylight to dark.*' They even worked on Christmas Days. In March 1872 they completed the task, striking the coast within 16.8 feet (5.1 metres) of Conference Point.

The line has since become known as the Black-Allen Line. Why it is not known as the Black-Allen-Turton Line remains a mystery.

In 2005 it was realised that the Black-Allen Line had never been officially proclaimed. Perhaps this was an oversight, perhaps it was because of some disagreement between NSW and Victoria over an 1854 draft proclamation. But the situation was remedied when the Governors of Victoria (the Hon. John Landy AC, MBE) and NSW (Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO) met at Delegate River on the NSW-Victorian border and proclaimed the Black-Allen Line to be the eastern part of the border between the two states.

A monument recognising the efforts of Black and Allen has been erected on the roadside where the Princes Highway crosses the states' border. ℞

49: Cobargo's Power Pole Art, 2022

Cobargo township was in need of a facelift and definitely needed something to cheer the community following the 2019/2020 Black Summer bushfires that had swept through the town and destroyed a large part of the business area. And, power poles that had originally been painted 20 years ago by local artists were certainly then showing their age.

So, a group of local artists and residents led by Cobargo Creators and The Lazy Lizard Gallery (two organisations with a main street presence in Cobargo) decided to repaint or paint artworks on 50 power poles along the main streets of the town.

First, they contacted artists who had decorated the poles twenty years earlier and either invited them to repaint their telegraph pole or asked them to allow another artist to redesign and paint over their original work.

Then more than 30 artists and community members from around the region contributed to the 2022 painted poles project. Local flora, fauna, landscapes, and subjects with particular meaning to the town are featured: one pole, for example, reflecting the fun, colour and vibrancy of the long-running Cobargo Folk Festival; another the whimsy of Cobargo's Gnome Alley; yet another, outside the local RSL Hall, paying respectful tribute to locals who served in World Wars I and II or the Vietnam War.

These colourful painted poles were probably the first tangible sign of the Cobargo community's determination and efforts to rebuild the town following the destruction that occurred in 2019/2020. ℞
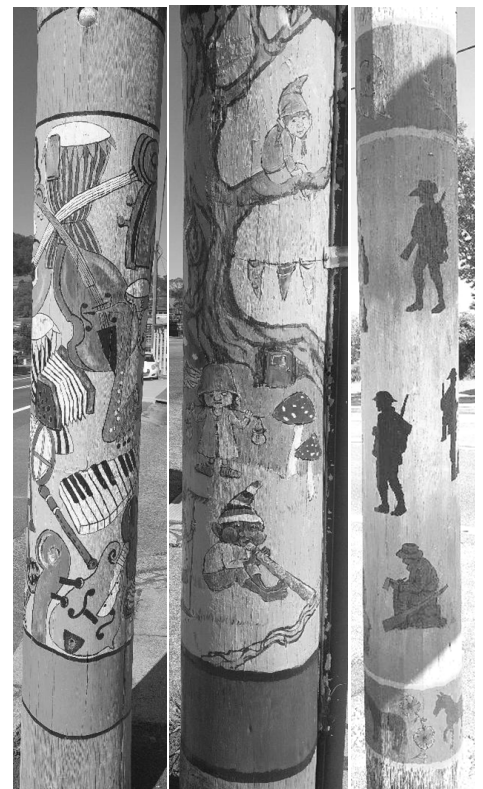
50: Formation of South Coast History Society, 2017

Perhaps a little self-indulgently (because, after all, we are celebrating this 50th issue of *Recollections!*), we have allocated South Coast Memorable Moment No. 50 to the formation of South Coast History Society in 2017.

As a result of the establishment of the Society, eight years ago, South Coast history now has a very much greater local presence and profile, and many more South Coast residents have been able to appreciate the 'hows, whens and whys' the area in which they live has developed the way that it has.

The Society was formed because it was very obvious that there was a community want for an organisation focused on promoting and sharing the area's history. We found that at least half the people living in the area are newcomers – so they hadn't had the benefit of learning about the area's history when at school – and we found that 'local history' had generally been viewed very narrowly by the 22 local 'historical societies' on the South Coast (in many cases, far too narrowly to have any possible wide community appeal) and that it was not being extensively, effectively, or enticingly presented to the general community.

So, our mission simply became to highlight as much of our interesting local history as possible. We don't run a museum – so (unlike most other local 'historical societies') we're not focused on objects or conservation. And we don't have a library or a significant research capacity: effectively we're just recyclers of (hopefully interesting!) existing histories, and we are promoters of that history.

Have we been successful? If the demand for what we do (like producing *Recollections*), if the incredible support we receive from the community, if the feedback we constantly receive from the community are any indications, then the answer must be a resounding YES. And, we (very proudly) can point to some extremely innovative, very successful projects that we've undertaken over the past eight years.

But, we've really just been scratching the surface. If we had more resources (as a volunteer-based, community-based organisation, those resources are inevitably in extremely short supply!) there are so many more other ways that we could be making our fascinating South Coast history more widely available to our community. So, we still have many dreams about what we might accomplish in the future. ®

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