

South Coast History Society Inc.

RecollectionS



February–March 2021

Issue 26

Our intriguing local history...EXPOSED !



'The Junction' (of the Brogo and Bega Rivers, at the northern end of Auckland Street, Bega) was once the town's popular swimming spot. Peter Rogers (now the President of the Bega Valley Historical Society) clearly remembers his high school years at Bega Intermediate School (where Bega Primary School is now located, and just a short walk up Auckland Street from The Junction) being taken there for sports lessons: *'When we arrived the roll was called once. Before we left, the roll was called three times – presumably to triple check that no one had drowned! I also remember the water there as always being extremely cold.'* Two piers, perhaps 50 yards apart, extended into the Brogo River providing a 'pool' area for competitive swimming. (Image courtesy Bega Pioneers' Museum)

It's Summer...Let's Go Swimming!

'We require better bathing accommodation than the primitive baths designed by nature, which are at present the only means our great unwashed have of indulging in an occasional ablution...The only convenient natural waterhole is that known as the "Junction," and prior to the advent of the N.S.W. Creamery Co. those in need of a little swimming exercise took advantage of the facilities it afforded; but now that its waters simply "reek" with slime and grease, as a result

of the above mentioned company utilising it as a repository for their overflow matter, votaries of the natatory art have been compelled to forego the pleasure, or to suffer in silent martyrdom the inhalation of its effluvia. So great is the quantity of slime and grease that one worthy facetiously asserts that it clung to him with such tenacity that he experienced the greatest difficulty in persuading his clothes to stay on – they manifesting a great desire to slip off.

Fantastic Reads

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As I am dilating upon swimming, I might as well relate a little tale I heard the other day.

Prompted by the excessive heat, several local amphibians made their way to a certain waterhole noted for its contiguity to the main road and a private habitation. Whilst enjoying their ablutions, one of the horses, which had been previously secured, was seen to be escaping, and its owner incontinently pursued it, regardless of the fact that he was clothed in nature's garb. The prad was recaptured and mounted; but on his way back to the party the garbless horseman had to pass the aforementioned habitation, and, as luck would have it, he was espied by the mistress of the establishment, who thought he was parading for her especial edification.

Her anger and indignation knew no bounds, and the luckless swimmer was threatened with all the dire penalties of the law that it is possible for a woman's mind to conjure.'

—The Cobargo Chronicle, 15.12.1899

'The first carnival of the Bega Swimming Club was held on the Bega River on Wednesday, and was a great success. A very large crowd was present, and the weather was perfect.

The fixture was a novelty in Bega, and great interest was shown by the people in the various events.'

—Australian Town and County Journal, 25.2.1903

'Last summer, bathing in what is known as 'The Junction' was prohibited by reason of the fact that a number of persons were fined for 'bathing in view of a public place.'

'The Junction' had hitherto been a regular bathing place, its waters were deep and clean, and the situation within easy reach of towns people. But the police were forced to take action in consequence of complaints that naked swimmers were in the habit of parading in full view of persons coming from or going to town by way of the crossing at the foot of Auckland Street. Public convenience was considered as far as possible, but decency had to be observed. And it was due to the hoodlums who had no sense of decency that The Junction was tabooed. Although the swimmers were decently clad in trunks or neck-to-knee costume, the Act was enforced and fines imposed.

Seeing that at the seaside mixed bathing was at the height of its popularity, and that the beaches on holidays or



MURRAY VIEWS No. 12. SWIMMING POOL, BEGA RIVER, BEGA, N.S.W.

Two swimmers can be seen on the upstream pier of the 'pool'. Image courtesy Bega Pioneers' Museum

Sundays were crowded with sightseers, it was absurd that the public gaze in Bega should be so outraged by the sight of a few boys and young men swimming at The Junction. But it was apparent that what could be legitimately done on Tathra beach was a breach of the law in Bega.

In Police Magistrate Roberts' term in Bega, he deplored that such a magnificent sheet of soft, fresh water could not be utilised for bathing purposes, because of an antiquated law. It is pointed out that under shire control, heavy penalties may be inflicted upon any bather who misconducts himself or herself, and who is not properly dressed.'

—Bega Budget, 3.10.1908

'At Monday's Court a number of youths were fined for swimming at the Junction without having on proper costumes.'

—The Twofold Bay Magnet, 18.4.1910

'The BUDGET has no sympathy with persons who outrage decency by bathing naked in water in view of a public place... This paper has nothing to say about those ultra-modest people who claim that the clinging bathing costume on a dripping manly or womanly form is still an offence against decency. The law requires that every bather in view of a public place shall wear a neck to knee costume...And as the law implies that persons so attired may be gazed at unblushingly by man or maiden from near or far, it is only a matter of gravitation to the time when the viewpoint is passed and the sexes swim together. Continental bathing has long since become popular at seaside resorts, and the sexes bathe together as they would



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A Whizz Through 170 Years of Bega's History in 90 Minutes

Don't miss the bus. It will be leaving Bega Pioneers' Museum at 9.30am on Saturday February 27, 2021 on a 90-minute tour of Bega township.

Discover how the Bega township has evolved, and hear the stories behind many of the fascinating, historic buildings and sites that now make Bega such an interesting town.

Obviously, seats on the bus are limited, so reserve yours today. The cost is just \$10 per seat, inclusive of morning tea at the end of the tour (and the unavoidable GST!). Phone Peter on **0448 160 852 to make your reservation.** When you call, have your debit or credit card details handy so we can charge your card.

This tour has been arranged jointly by Bega Valley Historical Society and South Coast History Society. It is part of a larger project currently being undertaken to update/document the history of the town and the buildings in the town.

(Photo: An open passenger bus to Cooma with luggage strapped to the running boards outside the Commercial Hotel, Bega. C.1920s. Image: State Library of NSW FL1670662)

dance together, with a proper regard for the dress of bath—or ball-room...

Not yet in the placid pools of fresh water has continental bathing been initiated. Bega people, who enjoy mixed bathing in the Tathra surf, do not affect the custom in the waters of the Junction, the town bathing place. But the Junction is popular with men and boys, and during the summer months crowds bathed in its cool waters free from apprehension since the Shire Council has removed the embargo placed upon it.

At one time in our history it was held under an antiquated law that a person might not bathe at the Junction — even though wearing every-day clothes — just because of the simple fact that it was in view of a public place. The act of bathing was apparently an offence under the circumstances...under the Local Govt. Act, however, Mumbulla Shire Council applied for and assumed control of the Junction as a bathing place, and swimmers were amenable to commonsense regulations.

The Budget sympathises with the young fellows who were fined on Monday...the boys bathed in trunks which did not comply with the regulations... It was shown in evidence, in the case of one youth who wore neck to knee costume, that he was a victim to circumstances. No usable shelter was provided for persons dressing or undressing, and he dressed in view from a public place... It was explained that the open dressing shed erected by the Shire Council had been put to uses which rendered it unfit for the specific purpose for which it was erected. No condemnation is too strong for persons whose

piggish habits have made the dressing shed an abomination which stinks in the nostrils of cleanly people.'

—*The Bega Budget*, 6.4.1910

'FORCIBLY RESCUED. A clergyman was swimming in the breakers at Tathra, when a number of workmen, employed on the construction of a building, took it into their heads that he was drowning.

They immediately rushed down the cliffs and, not waiting to take off any attire, splashed out to where the rev. gentleman was watching their approach with consternation, and, no doubt, wondering the cause of their extraordinary behaviour.

However, when he perceived the drift of things, he became a party to the comedy, and subjected himself to be rescued, while also leaving the rescuers open to an invitation to accept the Royal Humane Medal.'

—*The (Sydney) Sun*, 9.1.1911

'Many of the girls are learning to swim in the surf at Tathra.'

—*South Coast Times and Wollongong Argus*, 7.2.1913

In Eden

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The Evolution of a Park



The coastal section of Mimosa Rocks National Park – extending 20km north from Mogareeka (just north of Tathra)

Mimosa Rocks National Park is just 48 years old – very much younger than this writer and, I suspect, a few years younger than some of our readers! But, in those 48 years, its growth has been quite spectacular – from originally being a park of just 628 hectares, to one now covering an area of 5,804 hectares.

Twenty kilometres of coastline from Mogareeka (just

north of where the Bega River enters the ocean) to Wapengo Lake are included in Mimosa Rocks National Park, which then extends westwards to include the Dr George Mountain range (to the north-east of Bega). Its coastal scenery is spectacular and is readily accessible – perhaps the highlights being the Mimosa Rocks (named after the paddle steamer ‘Mimosa’ that ran aground in the area in 1863 – details are available at www.bit.ly/Recollections16) at Aragunnu, Bithry Inlet, and the Wajurda Point-Nelson Beach-Moon Bay area. It’s also an area with significant geological, Aboriginal, botanical and wildlife values...and it has an extremely interesting history.

From the earliest days of settlement in the area, the unique values of the area were recognized. In 1861 the area between Mogareeka and Nelson Lagoon was declared a ‘water reserve’, ensuring it could not be sold to settlers; in 1881 land on the southern side of Middle Lagoon was declared a recreation reserve; and in 1933 an area at Bunga Head was reserved for public recreation and the preservation of native flora.

In the late 1960s, members of a Far South Coast Conservation League, the National Parks Association, and the Coast and Mountain Walkers began campaigning for a coastal national park to be established between Tathra and Bermagui. Proposals to erect tourist cabins in an area of Crown land in the spectacular Nelson Beach-Wajurda Point-Moon Bay area and plans to site a quarry at Bunga Head galvanized their efforts which, in April 1973, resulted in the government gazetting an initial area of 628 hectares between Bunga Head and Picnic Point as Mimosa Rocks National Park. This was achieved by simply amalgamating six adjoining parcels of existing Crown Land.

Since then, twenty separate additions have been made to the Park.

Some of these have been other simple transfers of state-owned land – existing public reserves, vacant Crown Land, trig reserves, state forests, etc. – into the Park.

However, a significant boost was given to the Park, also in 1973, from an unexpected source. The owners of two substantial parcels of land on which they had each built holiday houses offered their properties to the government for inclusion in the new National Park. These were the 220-hectare ‘Penders’ property at Bithry Inlet with a 2km ocean frontage that was owned by Ken Myer (of retail fame) and architect Sir Roy Grounds (who designed the National Gallery of Victoria and the Academy of Sciences Building in Canberra), and the 30-hectare lakeside ‘Baronda’ property at Nelson Lagoon owned by David Yencken (details of which are outlined in Recollections 23). [Incidentally, the ‘Penders’ house is now available for rent as a holiday house through the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.]

Further additions to the park occurred after a proposed cabin development on Crown Land at Nelson Beach was abandoned and after a Bega-Tathra Conservation Society and other environmentalists successfully scuttled a plan to erect a high-rise resort to be known as ‘Tanja Nova’ on private land between Middle Lagoon and Gillards Beach. (If you can provide details of this proposal and/or of the protest action, we’d love to hear from you. *Ed.*)

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Middle Lagoon, Mimosa Rocks National Park

In 1977, as a result of continuing debate on woodchipping in local forest areas and an impending renewal of forestry licences in the area, the State Government established an Advisory Committee on South Coast Woodchipping. One of their recommendations was that massive 3,600-hectares within Tanja State Forest (basically the catchment areas to the Nelson and Middle Lagoons) be added to Mimosa Rocks National Park. This occurred in 1982 and has been the single biggest addition of area to the Park. The following year a further 326-hectares behind Aragunnu Beach were also added to the Park.

In 1973 the NSW Government established a Coastal Lands Protection Scheme that enabled significant, privately owned coastal lands to be purchased and transferred to public ownership. It has been funded with a budget of around \$3 million per year. In 1992 and 1994 three significant properties – the 34-hectare ‘Riverview’ property at Mogareeka Inlet, the 15-hectare ‘Araganui’ property behind Aragunnu Beach, and the 105-hectare ‘Hidden Valley’ property at Bunga Head – were acquired and incorporated into Mimosa Parks National Park using funding provided by this scheme. In 2001, funding from this scheme enabled a further 104-hectares of land (with 3km of coastline) to be acquired near Goalan Head.

In 1997 160-hectares of Mumbulla State Forest at Dr George Mountain were transferred to Mimosa Rocks National Park. And in 1999 three areas of Crown Land were added to the Park under the terms of the Eden Regional Forest Agreement between the Australian and NSW Governments that had been negotiated to ensure the sustainable management of forests in the area and the preservation of appropriate local conservation reserves.

Meanwhile, the history of private individuals donating

land to Mimosa Rocks National Park – a practice that started back in 1973 – has continued. Several parcels of land adjoining the park have been given by neighbours to the NPWS, with perhaps the most significant of these being a 37-hectare ‘Texas’ property at Tanja that was owned by the late Ken Myer being donated to the park in 1997.

Mimosa Rocks National Park, as we know it today is, therefore, an amalgamation of transfers of State lands, generous donations by altruistic individuals, ‘trade offs’ from other forestry activities in the area, planned purchases, and the fruits of pressure that was exerted by environmental activists and local conservation groups over a period that has now spanned almost five decades.

And what of the future? If the National Parks Association has its way, the Park will continue to grow significantly. In 2018, it was proposed – as one of 50 suggested additions to NSW National Parks – that 868-hectares of what is now part of the adjoining Tanja Flora Reserve be transferred to Mimosa Rocks National Park. **R**

Sources: Mimosa Rocks National Park Plan of Management, NPWS 2011; NSW Sea Kayaker, 24.3.1999; ‘50 Park Proposals’, NPA 31.1.2018

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The Allure of Gold

The enormous impact that the discovery of gold could have on a region was highlighted in a report by *The Committee on the Claims to Original Discovery of Gold in Australia*, printed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 28th March 1854:

'The discovery of the Victorian Goldfields has converted a remote dependency into a country of world-wide fame; it has attracted a population, extraordinary in number, with unprecedented rapidity; it has enhanced the value of property to an enormous extent; it has made this the richest country in the world; and, in less than three years, it has done for this colony the work of an age, and made its impulses felt in the most distant regions of the earth.'

Reports such as this encouraged exploration for gold throughout Australia. And exploration was always accompanied with a dream that a significant discovery would transform – and improve – surrounding communities. This was certainly the case on the NSW South Coast.

The South Coast is peppered with gold exploration and mining areas. Some of these (such as Araluen and Nerrigundah – see details at www.bit.ly/Recollections1 and www.bit.ly/Recollections15) proved to be substantial and profitable; some were the sites of significant, if short lived, 'rushes' (Montreal near Bermagui and Mogo, for example); but many delivered more heartbreak than financial rewards.

William McNeilley, the then Editor-publisher of the *Bega Standard*, was one person who was convinced that great riches lay in the area surrounding Bega and, particularly, in

the ranges near the mouth of and to the north of the Bega River (the Tanja-Nelson-Wapengo area).

He also strongly believed that local investment should be sought to enable mining to be undertaken, so that the profits from these ventures would benefit locals rather than some more-remotely located investment house. He therefore organized syndicates of local investors, suggested various schemes that would utilize available local labour, and applied for government assistance. (In 1878, Neilley's Bega Prospecting Association applied for a £100 grant. After inspecting diggings in the Tanja hills the Undersecretary for the Mines Department and the local Gold Commissioner recommended it be granted £275! This recommendation was accepted but there were 'too many strings attached', so the Bega Prospecting Association never received the money.)

[William Neilley appears to have been an unusually active supporter of local development. He was, for example, also a strong advocate for the construction of a Bombala-Wolumla and Bega-Eden railway lines in the 1870s and 1880s (see details at www.bitly/begahh94).]

Neilley's optimism was based on the presence of quartz reefs in the area and the discovery of small deposits and small nuggets of gold. The existence and discovery of a substantial motherlode was, he repeatedly suggested, inevitable and only required sustained exploration and development of a mine.

Interest in the area continued for decades. Some small



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deposits that returned 'wages' were worked, but no major ore body was discovered. And the lack of a stamper battery to crush any ore that was being mined also significantly restricted possible development in the area – the only alternative then being the costly transportation of ore to Wolumla or Port Kembla where facilities were available to process it.

In early 1917, the allure of riches from gold in the Tanja area received a boost when the mother of a local farm labourer fell off a log whilst returning from a visit to a nearby beach. She had stumbled on a gold-bearing rock that was simply lying on the ground. A neighbour, Charlie Atfield, rapidly pegged out a gold lease claim over 20 acres in the area.

Charlie started mining the area and, four months later, sent almost 5 tons of ore to Port Kembla. It yielded (a very promising) two ounces of gold per ton.

Twelve months later, however, the mine was unprofitable and Charlie was granted three months suspension of a requirement of his lease that he employ labour to continually work the mine.



Vimy Ridge gold mine opened after World War I. No longer worked but shafts still exist Vimy Ridge via Bega. Image: Bega Pioneers' Museum.

Charlie eventually lost the lease through non-fulfilment of these labour requirements – but not before he had named the mine the Vimy Ridge Mine after the Allies' (principally Canadian) first real success in breaching German World War I lines at the Battle of Vimy Ridge on 12th April 1917.

The mine then had several owners, one of which was Oliver Hinde who had been postmaster at Candelo, Clerk of the Court at Bega, Mumbulla Shire valuer and Eurobodalla Shire valuer. Oliver is described as 'a very shrewd man who took advantage of opportunities when they arose. For

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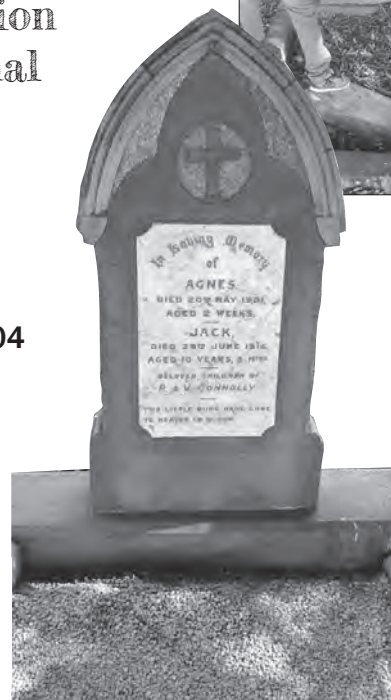
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a time Hinde had been a post master and he was therefore proficient in the use of Morse code. He had a habit of spending his lunchtime hanging around outside the Bega Post Office. There he was able to overhear and 'read' the Morse code messages coming in from the Sydney bookmakers to the Bega bookmakers. He took advantage of this information to frequently place last minute winning bets. For many years no one could understand his 'system' which never seemed to let him down. At one time he acquired a property on Dr George Mountain through a bad debt; he may have acquired the mine lease in similar circumstances.'

In early 1923 the Vimy Ridge Gold Mine was sold to a group of Sydney investors and shares were floated on the Sydney Stock Exchange. The Bega Southern Star reported at the time 'A battery is to be placed on the ground without delay...Tests made by Government and private experts go to show that the mine promises to be a good producer and dividend payer...the ore at grass (i.e. already extracted ore; 25 tons of it) is easily worth £1,000, and there are hundreds of tons of payable ore in sight, whilst the lode shows every sign of permanency.'

A small stamper battery was finally installed 10 months later. The 'ore at grass' delivered a return of just £392! Several key personnel left...then a violent assault was committed by one Vimy Ridge miner on another...crushing of ore had to cease because of a shortage of water resulting from insufficient rainfall...and the mine struggled to remain solvent.

By May 1925 the mine had ceased production. And 'it became apparent to all who had followed the mine's fortunes that it had not turned out to be the boon to the local economy that W.D. Neilley had so optimistically predicted.' Shortly thereafter a Directors' report suggested 'your Directors are of the opinion that your property is a valuable one, and should at no distant period become dividend paying'! Instead, much of the mine equipment, including the stamper battery, was sold off.

In July 1929 the mine was reopened by Carl and Les Schultz, a couple of dairy farmers from Double Creek, Brogo. They rapidly acquired machinery, including a battery stamper from the last mine that had operated on Mt Dromedary. Timing couldn't have been more fortunate because the mine provided work for up to 40 local men throughout the Great Depression. They were housed in bark huts near the lease. Simultaneously, the surrounding area witnessed an upsurge in gold fossicking as unemployed men



Mining Battery, Vimy Ridge.

sought to find an income from whatever possible source.

It seems the Schulz brothers had some success working the Vimy Ridge Mine. In 1931, for example, 155 oz. of gold was recorded as having been won. This compared to only 3 oz. recorded as having been recovered by fossickers in the Tanja area. (The actual amounts were almost certainly higher than these official figures suggest!)

In 1933 the lease to the mine was sold to an Adelaide-based speculative company, Bega Mines NL. It was a spectacular failure – the £60,000 capital it raised returning only £83.10.00 from the sale of gold bullion in 1933–1934.

Thereafter, the Vimy Ridge mine was only worked intermittently until 1960 by optimistic prospectors. **R**

Sources: *Tanja Gold* by Susan Jacques

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The Bunyip

This animal, once considered a creation of the blackfellow's terror, has of late years come out of the category of the fabulous, and is considered a reality. The lake on Mr. Whitely's property, at Jellat Jellat, near Bega, has long been famous, or infamous, for mysterious noises, the cause of which has not been explained.

Mr. Whitely informed the Standard on a recent visit there one day, about six or seven months since, he and his son were close to the lake, when they saw what they took to be the 'old bull' disporting himself in the water, but, as the boy said, if it was the bull, he had changed his shape and looked more like a horse.

The animal, on perceiving the approach of visitors, took a 'header,' and shortly after rose some distance

further away, and after taking a look round again, made sub-aquaen tracks, and was seen no more until a



fortnight ago, when one of Mr. Whitely's daughters observed a strange object in a creek close to the house.

The little girl was concealed from the animal's gaze by a tea-tree scrub which here lines the creek, and she describes the animal as like a 'small island coming to the top,' and that its head was like that of a horse with the addition of two tusks six inches long proceeding from the upper jaw and overlapping the lower. It

did not take her long to make this survey, when she left for home at a rapid pace, and her looks of terror and her description of the strange denizen of the water have proved an effectual stopper to her brothers bathing in the lake again.'

—Bega Standard,
4.3.1876



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Explore Cobargo - Bermagui - Tathra

101 fascinating objects have been selected to illustrate the Bega Shire's diverse and valuable heritage. Full details are at www.bit.ly/101objectsbooklet A "Bega Shire's Hidden Heritage" App, available FREE from the App store and from Google Play, also provides information about them. Here are some of them.



Gulaga by Cheryl Davison. 'Gulaga is the Mother Mountain. Pregnant, she lies on her side, her head to the south, her feet to the north, facing the sea ... She was here when the stars and the moon and everything else was created ... she has always been here.'



Gulaga (Mt Dromedary) is one of three particularly distinctive mountains in the area and, like Balawan (Mt Imlay) and Biamanga (Mumbulla Mountain) is of special significance to local Aboriginal clans. To the Yuin people, Gulaga is Mother Mountain, integral to women's ceremony, childbirth and storytelling. It was the first mountain in Australia named by Captain James Cook in 1770. Further details: bit.ly/begahh1

Bermagui Waterhole. (below) Until the 1920s, this was a popular camp site for the local Yuin people—a permanent source of fresh water, with plenty of fish and shellfish to be found nearby. It was originally encircled by trees that were cleared over time. Another nearby waterhole disappeared when the adjacent road was built. Further details: bit.ly/begahh6



Wallaga Lake Bridge. (right) What a spectacular northern entrance to the Bega Shire! Built in 1894, possibly at the request of Tilba cheese producers, it is historically significant because it connected Tilba to port facilities in Bermagui, thereby stimulating local commerce. It is a multi-span beam bridge (the simplest structural form of bridge). Its distinctive rise in the middle of the bridge was included to provide additional strength to the entire length of the bridge. Further details: bit.ly/begahh3



Camel Rock and the spectacular Murunna headland, immediately to its north, illustrate the complex geology of the local coast. Igneous rock from Gulaga's volcano alternates with ancient sedimentary formations such as Camel Rock – which is actually turbidite that was formed on the ocean floor about 450 million years ago and was then raised by tectonic movement. The big rock behind the camel is shaped like a woman's face – warning of the dangers of swimming at this place. Further details: bit.ly/begahh5



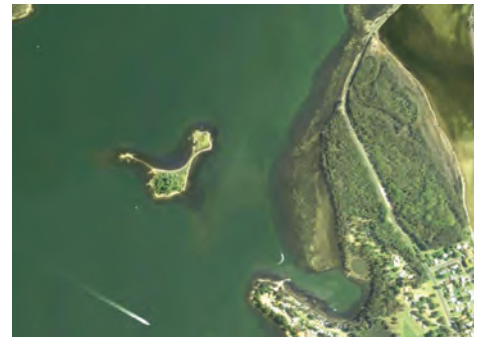
Wallaga Lake Community Carved Panels. This series of 14 detailed, hand-carved timber panels, now on display in the Bega Valley Commemorative Centre in Bega, provides an indigenous timeline of the Wallaga Lake community and depicts a Yuin/Merriman view of the world. Cultural elements including traditional food sources, traditional customs, and dreamtime stories are integrated with details of European settlement and reflections about changes that have occurred locally over time. Further details: bit.ly/begahh54 and see top preceding page. Image: *

Beach Shingle Gold at Montreal Goldfield. In 1880, gold was discovered on Haywards Beach. It triggered a gold rush and in a three-week period nearly 2,000 miners had taken up claims along the beach. The gold was 'shingle gold' –gold mixed with tiny pebbles and rocks washed down from Gulaga. The gold rush was short-lived, lasting only until 1883. Montreal Goldfield is unique, being the only Australian goldfield that extends into the sea. Further details: bit.ly/begahh4

Merriman Island, Wallaga Lake, (below) is shaped like a duck and is a token to the local Yuin people. King Merriman saw a black duck flapping its wings wildly and diving into the water, which alerted him to the approach of a tribe from Victoria. He journeyed to the island and directed the ensuing battle from there – which the Yuin people won. Merriman Island was, historically, the first Aboriginal Place to be gazetted in NSW. Further details: bit.ly/begahh2



The Blue Pool, Bermagui, (left) is one of three ocean baths in the Bega Valley Shire (Thompson's Point Baths and Aslings Beach Rock Pool near Eden being the other two). It was built in 1937-38 utilising a government grant and public donations. It is an excellent example of the community recreational tidal pools that were once popular & common along the NSW east coast. It is also a reminder of the birth & growth of the Australian beach culture, now a prominent feature of the Australian identity. Further details: bit.ly/begahh12



Sam Sinclair's Sulky. (right) Sam was a well-known Bermagui identity. He was a blacksmith and wheelwright, built a service station in Bermagui South (inviting motorists to 'Just toot and we're oot'), ran a general store, was weighmaster for the town's Big Game Angling Club, was an undertaker...and pulled teeth! He died in 1964. The sulky was originally bequeathed to Bega's Pioneers' Museum, but subsequently was restored by a Bermagui Historical Society member and was moved for permanent display at the Bermagui Information Centre. Further details: bit.ly/begahh9 . Image: ‡



Zane Grey's 'White Death'. Bermagui was once a centre of Big Game Angling. Internationally-renowned American author Zane Grey was a keen big game fisherman and was a regular visitor to Bermagui from 1936 to 1939. After his 1936 visit he produced the movie White Death about his fight with a 'killer shark' (Great White). This can be viewed by arrangement at the Bermagui Museum. More information: bit.ly/begahh7



Bamboo Tuna Pole. (left) With canned tuna becoming familiar to Australians in the 1950s, tuna fishing became a major industry on the Far South Coast supplying canneries in Narooma & Eden, and for a short time, a small cannery that operated on the Bermagui steamer wharf. When tuna were running, up to 50 pole boats operated out of Bermagui Harbour. A bamboo tuna pole now in the Bermagui Museum, is a valuable link to that significant part of Bermagui's history. More information: bit.ly/begahh8



Pearl Corkhill's Camera. Pearl Corkhill of Tilba joined the Australian Imperial Force as a staff nurse in July 1915 and became one of only eight WW1 Australian nurses to receive the Military Medal. She later became Senior Sister at Bega Hospital. Her father was famous Tilba photographer William Henry Corkhill. This camera, now in Bermagui Museum, was Pearl's personal camera. More information: bit.ly/begahh10. Image: ‡

Bermagui Map. (left) This map, in the Bermagui Museum, is a survey map from 1888 naming the villages of 'Bermagui' (at left) and 'Bermagui South' (at right). Before towns and villages were gazetted and plots of land sold, government surveys were carried out for topographic and cadastral (official registration of property boundaries) use. This is, therefore, an important historic record of the birth of Bermagui. More information: bit.ly/begahh11. Image: ||



Portable Shearing Plant. An early 20th century R.A. Lister and Company portable shearing device, known to have been used in the Cobargo area, and now in the Cobargo Museum. It would be taken and used anywhere on a property. One person would wind the arm to power the motor, a second person would use the shearing handpiece. More information: bit.ly/begahh14 Image: ‡



Wooden Cheese-Making Vat. This simple wooden cheese vat, now in the Cobargo Museum, is a historic reminder of the many small-scale dairy operations that were common in the area in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Believed to have been used on a dairy farm in the Cobargo area, this wooden vat enabled cheese to be produced from raw milk without the need for a starter culture - the wood surface providing the required microbial biofilms to transform milk curd into cheese. More details: bit.ly/begahh15. Image: ‡



Infant's Bassinet. A Baby Health Centre operated in Cobargo from 1948 (initially in what is now the Well Thumbed Books building). The Cobargo CWA assumed responsibility for its development and provided necessary items including this 'Reedtex' woven cane bassinet and a cotton pillow cover which is embroidered 'Cobargo Clinic'. All babies from the Cobargo area who attended the Baby Health Centre would have spent time in this bassinet being assessed and weighed. More details: bit.ly/begahh13. Image: ‡

Cobargo Showjumping Cup. Agricultural shows have been an integral part of Australian rural life since 1822. The first Cobargo Show was held on 27th & 28th March 1889 when the population of Cobargo was just 197. However, this show attracted 1,300 entries plus 1,000 attendees each day. This Cup, from that first Cobargo Show, was 1st Prize for Lady Rider, and was presented to Miss K McDonald, a local. More details: bit.ly/begahh16. Image: ‡

Four Winds. (bottom right) Four Winds is an internationally-acclaimed local community-based arts (principally music) organisation. Its Nature's Concert Hall venue at Barragga Bay is a natural amphitheatre that includes a stage and seating for 2,000 people. More intimate indoor performances are held in an adjacent Windsong Pavillion. It has become an Australian home for world-class music makers and other artists to create, perform, teach and study. More details: bit.ly/begahh17



Biamanga Protest Sites. (below) The Biamanga protest sites in Biamanga (Mumbulla Mountain) National Park are of monumental significance to Indigenous Australians. Biamanga is a 'dreaming place', a site where sacred and secret initiation ceremonies were held, and it epitomises the Aboriginal campaign for Australian land rights and self-determination. Protests against logging the area, led by Yuin elder Guboo 'Ted' Thomas, from the late 1970s focused attention on the significance of the area to Aboriginal people, resulting in the area being proclaimed an Aboriginal Place and later a National Park. More details: bit.ly/begahh18

View all
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Wapengo Lagoon. 29 of the State's estuaries (24 of which are ICOLLS – Intermittently Closed and Open Lakes and Lagoons) are to be found in the Bega Shire – the greatest density in any Council area in Australia. They exhibit a full range of estuary geomorphology: large coastal lakes barrier estuaries, riverine barrier estuaries, small saline coastal lagoons, small coastal creeks. Wapengo Lagoon is a wave dominated barrier estuary with an open entrance. It covers 3.7 square km, and supports eight commercial oyster farms that harvest about 80,000 dozen oysters annually. More details: bit.ly/begahh81 Image: *



Tathra Wharf & Cargo Shed. This is the sole remaining open sea wharf on the NSW coast (there were once 15 of them). The town of Tathra grew as a result of activity surrounding the wharf and the coastal shipping that used the wharf & its associated facilities. The wharf and shed fell into serious disrepair in the 1970s and 1980s and were saved from demolition only because of action taken by the National Trust and a local Tathra Wharf Action Movement. The Shed is now home to the interesting Tathra Wharf Museum. More details: bit.ly/begahh51 Image ‡



Paddy Doolan's Diving Suit. Patrick 'Paddy' Doolan was a local 'hard hat' diver who undertook wharf and bridge maintenance and construction along the NSW South Coast. His diving suit is now displayed in the Tathra Wharf Museum. In 1923 it was recorded that Doolan was 'an object of curiosity to visitors to Bermagui during Easter week. Kodaks were busy at every opportunity securing snaps of Pat's novelty suit!' More details: bit.ly/begahh53 Image ‡



Tathra Surf Boat. The Tathra Surf-Bathing and Life-Saving Club was established in 1911 – the Far South Coast's oldest surf lifesaving club and one of the oldest in NSW. This small canvas-skinned hardwood boat with an open well, probably paddled like a canoe by one or two men, was used as a rescue boat by members of the club in the 1910s. It was replaced by a larger, more useful boat in 1920. It is now displayed in the Tathra Wharf Museum. More details: bit.ly/begahh52 Image ‡

George Bass Surfboat Marathon Plaque. The George Bass Surfboat Marathon, held every two years, is 'the world's toughest and longest surfboat marathon'. It was the brainchild of Bega Newspaper Editor W.B. 'Curley' Annabel and was intended to highlight the Far South Coast and its many attractions. This plaque, now in the collection of Bega Pioneers' Museum, was presented to Curley Annabel in 1983 for his outstanding contribution to the race and its development. More details: bit.ly/begahh32



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Readers' Feedback: 'I'll leave it to you to decide'

Some articles in *Recollections* result in unexpected, but ultimately extremely gratifying – and sometimes extended! – ‘conversations’ with local historians. This is fabulous because there are so many interesting, dynamic aspects (‘twists and turns’ if you like) associated with the study of any local history.

The piece about Clement Wragge’s meteorological station in Merimbula in *Recollections* 24 (available at www.bit.ly/Recollections24) is one such example. It prompted Pambula historian Pat Raymond to contact us with significant additional information about the meteorological station and for her to bravely re-ignite a smouldering debate among local historians about whether Wragge’s Merimbula observatory was moved downhill in its later years from the grounds of ‘Courunga’ to what was described as a ‘cow paddock’ adjacent to Alice Street in Merimbula. (This was an issue that we had deftly sidestepped by suggesting ‘the Merimbula observatory was – at least at the start – in the grounds of Courunga’!) She, very diplomatically, concluded the information she provided on that particular subject by suggesting to us that ‘I’ll leave it to you to decide.’

Pat, however, did provide an extremely interesting letter sent by Clement Lindley Wragge to Armstrong L Munn. Pat indicated ‘In the early part of the second half of 1897 Clement Lindley Wragge approached Mr. W.H. Wood, the M.P. for Eden-Bombala, for assistance in finding someone in the Merimbula area who might be interested in assisting him with the setting up of a Meteorological Observatory which would complement the one already planned for Mt. Kosciusko...Mr. Wood approached leading businessman Mr. Armstrong Lockhart Munn who resided in the ‘Tower House’ – ‘Courunga’ in Merimbula, to see if he was willing to assist with the establishment of this station to which he agreed. The following letter, received by Munn from Wragge, was dated 20 September 1897:

Dear Sir, Mr. W.H. Wood has kindly informed me that you have been so very kind as to volunteer to take sea-level observations for us in connection with the experimental meteorological observatory which will shortly be established by me on the summit of Mt. Kosciusko and I beg to accept your offer with most grateful and sincere thanks. You will be performing a signal service for which you will receive the thanks of every meteorologist in the civilised world...Please let me hear from you, personally, if you are still willing to assist us. The eyes of the whole civilised scientific world will be turned to the undertaking, which will be watched with the keenest interest by such men and societies as Lord Kelvin; Professor Tait, Edinburgh; Dr. Buchan, the first meteorologist of the Empire; the Royal Society, Edinburgh; the Royal Society, London; the Royal Geographical Society, London; the Royal Meteorological Society, London; the Royal Scotch Geographical Society, Edinburgh; the Scottish Meteorological Society; the Deutsche Seewarte, Hamburg; the Chief Weather Bureau, Washington; etc. etc.’


Pat also indicated that the roles played by South Coast men at Wragge’s Kosciusko and Merimbula observatories

were much more significant than we had revealed:

‘It was Charles Kerry, the well-known photographer, who made the arrangements for the party of 14 men to set up the meteorological monitoring station on the summit of Mt. Kosciusko which was completed on 9 December 1897... Charles actually had a special link to Pambula as it was his father, Samuel Kerry, who was one of the original purchasers of a number of blocks of land in Pambula in the 1850s. His father was the first owner of the block of land in Toalla St. on which was later erected the house in which Governor General, Sir William McKell, was born in 1891. This still exists today... In October 1898 two of the observers at the Kosciusko observatory tendered their resignation. This led to the second in charge, Basil de Burgh Newth, being promoted to the position of chief observer. Basil was a member of the original team who set up the station at Kosciusko and was the 22 year-old son of the Rector of the Kameruka Parish, Rev. J.A. Newth, who served at this Parish between 1892 and 1904. As another observer was required to fill the second position, it would be reasonable to assume that Basil recommended Robert Leslie Burcher for this position. Leslie was the son of Arthur James Burcher, a farmer from Candelo who was closely associated with the Candelo Co-op Dairy Co. Ltd. ...In October 1899 Egerton Wragge [then the Second Observer at Kosciusko] met with a serious misadventure which necessitated his immediate resignation as it was imperative that he return to a milder climate. A month later, on 10 November, his brother Rupert handed in his resignation. For a month Newth had to maintain this station on his own without any support. He actually had previously sent in his resignation to take effect on 16 November 1899 but agreed to delay this so a successor could be trained to take over the duties. On 7 January 1900 at 6 am Newth left the Kosciusko observatory and walked to Jindabyne, arriving there at 8 pm. The following day he made his way to Cooma. It was reported that he had done an excellent job during the two years that he had served.’

And Pat also alerted us to a CD in the Bega Valley Genealogical Society’s library of Clement Wragge’s 1900 ‘*Australasian Almanac and Weather Guide for Land and Sea*’ that included an extensive and interesting article on the Kosciusko Weather Station. Evidently an article about both the Kosciusko and Merimbula Stations had been included in the previous year’s edition.

Another of our readers has alerted us to an excellent National Museum of Australia series that traces Cook’s 1770 voyage up the coast, and overlays this information with Aboriginal histories of the area. The local Gulaga/Biamanga/Wallaga page is at <https://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/endeavour-voyage/gulaga-mount-dromedary>

We are delighted to learn that ‘*Aftermath*’, reviewed in the last issue of ‘*Recollections*’ (see www.bit.ly/Recollections25) has now been issued in PDF format and is available free from <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/resources/aftermath-end-second-world-war>. 

BEYOND THE GRAVESTONE



‘Say What is Just and Kind’

I love the simple epitaph on Mary Theresa Alexander’s tombstone in Eden Cemetery:

*‘She was _____
Words are wanting to say what.
Say what is just and kind,
And she was that.’*

The family also obviously liked this epitaph because it was adapted to ‘he was’ and was included on the gravestone of her son, Robert (1840–1888), who is also buried in Eden Cemetery.

Mary and her husband, also Robert, were pioneer farmers and landowners in the Genoa/Pericoe area. He was born in Hampshire, England, was convicted in 1828 of highway robbery (a crime Robert always denied – one suggestion being that he was ‘framed’ by his employer at that time because he was paying too much attention to his employer’s daughter, and his employer sought to get Robert out of the way – permanently!), was eventually transported to New South Wales, was assigned to William Turney Morris who was a free settler with land at Mooramoorang (Murramarang) and later ‘Gunday’ north of Moruya, and received a Ticket of Leave in late 1836 at which time he sought permission to marry Mary Theresa McCarthy who was then living on the South Coast.

Mary’s early life is equally interesting. She was born in Ireland and, according to family legend, lived in a convent in Cork and had trained as a nursing sister. However, following some ‘trouble’ with one of the priests, she left the convent (evidently, thereafter, she often warned women in her family never to trust clergymen, and to ensure that they were never alone with them) and emigrated as a free settler to Australia under a Women’s Immigration Scheme to escape the appalling poverty that was rife in Ireland at the time.

Robert and Mary farmed and, in 1853, acquired land in

Genoa, Victoria (just south of the border with NSW). In 1863 he acquired two blocks in the Parish of Pericoe. They had, and successfully raised, seven children.


Robert died of cancer at Genoa on 25th January 1864. He was aged 56 years. His tombstone in Eden Cemetery also includes an interesting epitaph:

*‘My class is run, my days are spent.
My life is gone, it was but lent
and as I am, so must you be
therefore prepare to follow me.’*

This same inscription appears on his son, John’s (1837–1898), headstone in Eden Cemetery.

At the time of her death, Mary was living in a predominantly Catholic community in Kiah. She died on 31st August 1879, age 65 years, from bronchitis.

Because she had been married to a Protestant, Mary was denied burial in a cemetery in Kiah that had been consecrated for the burial of Roman Catholics only. Her family, therefore, requested that she be buried with Robert and the other members of her family in Eden Cemetery. The Catholic Priest, however, refused to bury her in the Protestant section – understandably, causing outrage within the family.

So, Mary is interred, alone, in the Catholic section of Eden cemetery, apart from the other members of her family. 

Source: ‘A Journey Through Time’ by Nola O’Connor and Kathy Jones.

We thank Kate McDonald of Springwood for suggesting we include details relating to this grave in ‘Recollections’. Your suggestions about other gravestones in local cemeteries that have interesting stories attached to them will be VERY welcome. Send your suggestions to southcoasthistory@yahoo.com or phone 0448 160 852

VD: The Australian Army's experience of sexually transmitted diseases during the twentieth century

by Ian Howie-Willis

This is probably not the ideal book to take to read on a packed summertime Australian beach because it deals with a topic that many view as embarrassing, indelicate or even taboo.

Howie-Willis, in his introduction to the book, asserts that 'a historian should not shy away from a subject because others regard it as 'unpleasant' but admits he at times 'wondered whether any good could come from writing in detail about a century of the Army's experiences with STDs.' He noted 'the story is not an edifying one and it has no heroes. Does anyone need to know about it? Why persist with it instead of allowing it to fade from memory' and – most surprisingly – 'a continuing difficulty as I researched and wrote the book was the thought that it might bring Australian soldiers into disrepute'!!!

Venereal Diseases, or Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) as they are now called, have always been a problem for, and presented enormous challenges to, the Australian Army.

Of most concern to the Army has been the resulting 'wastage' (the significant reduction in the availability of manpower) that has resulted in times of conflict from having to treat those who have acquired a STI. And that 'wastage' was enormous: for example, in World War I the equivalent of 20% of all soldiers were treated by the Army

for VD (that's 65,350 men, and many others concealed their infection, so the incidence of VD was actually much higher) and the average hospitalisation took soldiers away from their unit for at least 35 days; and the incidence among Australian troops serving in the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan after World War II was 29%, although the typical hospitalisation time by then had been reduced to 16 days largely because the then-recently discovered penicillin rapidly and effectively cured most forms of VD. (These rates of infection were typically two, three, four, five or more times higher among Australian troops than were experienced among other forces serving in the same conflicts.)

I found the book to be extremely interesting. It comprehensively reviews the challenges that STIs presented to the Army, how the Army reacted to these challenges, and how they dealt with them. It describes, often in surprising detail, the treatments provided to those who were infected, the efforts made by the Army to prevent its troops contracting STIs...right through to the influences external to the Army (political, community, religious, moralistic, available prophylactic resources, available treatment options) that ultimately determined what it could do and how effective its prevention and treatment protocols would be.

The changes that occurred in attitudes towards VD and in available prevention/treatment options over the century



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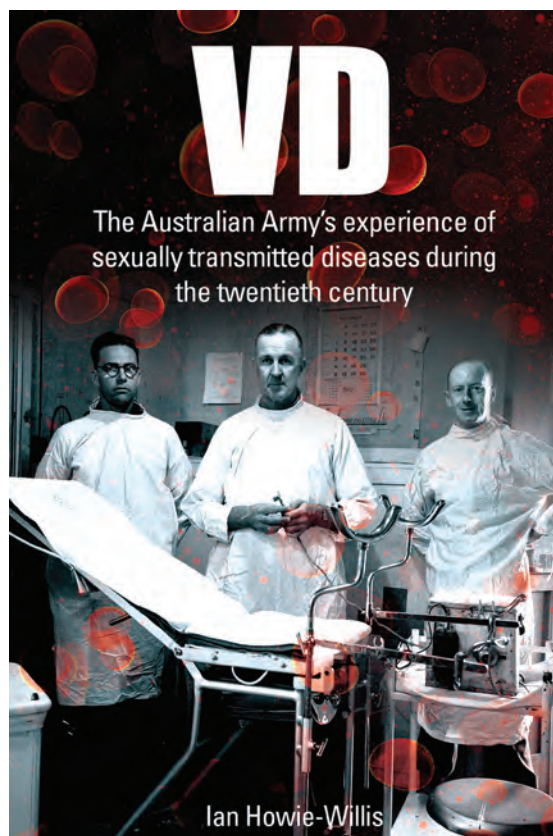
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were enormous. The examination of these changes is one of the most fascinating aspects of this book.

I'm something of a World War I 'tragic', and this book – unexpectedly, but much to my delight – filled in numerous 'blanks' for me. For example, I now understand, having learned exactly how VD was treated in World War I, why no female nurse was allowed to work in Australian Dermatological Hospitals (VD hospitals). Nor had I previously realised that, when the massive Australian Army camp was opened at Mena outside Cairo, absolutely no recreational facilities were provided in the camp – but that there was a tram line running direct from the camp to Cairo (where there was 'temptation' aplenty to young Australian soldiers with oodles of money to spend)!

There are also interesting 'surprises' in the book – for example, that the Australian 'Army took the radical action of sponsoring its own brothels' in the Middle East in World War II, but 'the public back in Australia never heard of this and so the Army-controlled brothels did not become the great national scandal they would otherwise have been... (and, as a result) the management of the 2nd AIF's epidemic in the Middle East eventually proved effective'...or that the highest rates of STIs among Australian members of the British Occupation Forces in Japan were recorded among Brigade Headquarters and Field Ambulance staff!

The basically serious nature of this history has been made very readable through the inclusion of numerous 'that'd be right!' instances that made me chuckle (for example, during World War I a New Zealander by the name of Ettie Rout took on a self-appointed task of controlling the spread of VD among overseas troops by distributing condoms and even establishing a 'safe' brothel in Paris. She was to receive a 'Medal of Gratitude' from the French government for 'exceptional humanitarian achievement'. But 'after Rout



publicized her methods in a newspaper in New Zealand, the government there imposed a ban on even the mention of her name in the press.' [Rout argued that 'the spread of venereal infection in the British Empire is due mainly to the following dangers: (1) Pious Prejudice, (2) Medical Claptrap, (3) Social Flapdoodle, (4) Official Delusions, (5) Political Interference.' After reading this fascinating book, I'd say her conclusions were, pretty much, spot-on]). The book also includes some wonderful anecdotes:



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'In one section of his report, Norris (the Assistant Director of Medical Services in World War II in the Middle East) related his dealings with 'Madame Olga', the proprietor of one of the Army-controlled brothels in Tripoli. He visited the brothel with the Deputy Assistant Provost Marshall to inspect it and to explain to Madame Olga that her girls must be examined and tested regularly by a gynaecologist, that only girls carrying an identity pass would be allowed to work in the brothel, that no alcohol could be brought on to the premises and that the price for using a prostitute would be fixed at one Syrian pound. All this seemed too onerous for Madame Olga, who attempted to haggle with the two Australian officers. Eventually 'Madame with alternate tears and smiles accepted the conditions,' Norris wrote, 'offering all sorts of concessions and exclusive personal attention to ADMS and DAPM'...All went well at the brothel for a week or two, until the local Lebanese police arrested Madame Olga and her girls, imprisoned them and closed the brothel. The reason for this action was that, with her brothel under Army control, Madame Olga had not continued paying the police their accustomed 'rake-off'. Fearing that with the brothel closed the troops would start using 'uncontrolled' prostitutes, Norris and the DAPM spent two hours persuading the police to allow the brothel to reopen.'

I'd image this book will most appeal to those interested in military history and those with some sort of medical-related background. But I'd also recommend it to anyone who is simply interested in reading about a fascinating aspect of Australian history...providing they don't consider the subject-matter to be too repugnant!

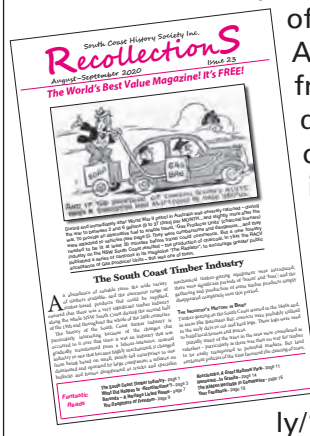
'VD' (the book) is available from around \$28.

—Peter Lacey

A VIRTUAL ENCYCLOPAEDIA!

The 26 issues of 'Recollections' that have been published so far along with the Bega Shire's Hidden Heritage compilation provide an encyclopaedic history of the NSW South Coast – everything from basic histories of the area, to details of noteworthy specific events, to profiles of historically important people. More than 200 articles have so far appeared in 'Recollections'.

Comprehensive details about 101 objects of historic or heritage significance are included in the Bega Shire's Hidden Heritage library. Together, these two resources provide an absolute 'mine of information' to anyone interested in the history of the NSW South Coast. And they are available free, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. An index of the articles in past issues of 'Recollections' is available at www.bit.ly/Recollectionsindex and an overview of the 101 Bega Shire's Hidden Heritage objects is at www.bit.ly/101objectsbooklet



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Ocean View House in High Street, Batemans Bay is an impressive two-storey, timber clad structure encircled by wide verandahs. It was built as a guest house in 1928–29 for Albert and Maud Ryan after they won £5,000 from backing the winner of the Rosehill Cup in 1926: *‘The investment [in backing a horse named Valamita] was the result of a dream, and every detail in Miss Ryan’s [Albert Ryan’s sister] sleeping vision was fulfilled.’*

Ocean View House is heritage listed because it is a good, intact example of simple interwar design and because of its historical associations with the interwar development of Batemans Bay as a tourist destination.

It has nine upstairs guest bedrooms, each of which open on to the wide verandah which affords extensive views of the Clyde River and Tasman Sea to the north and east, and of the surrounding mountain ranges to the west and south. The house’s first guests were welcomed in December 1929, even before the building was completely finished.

The Great Depression severely affected tourism to Batemans Bay, so for several years the only guests at Ocean View House were Priests from Chevalier College near Bowral who stayed there during their Christmas vacation.

During World War II, the house was used by the RAAF as a watch tower, with any suspicious maritime or air activity

HERITAGE LISTED HOUSE



Ocean View House

being reported to the nearby air base near Moruya.

For many years, because of its appearance, locals referred to Ocean View House as ‘The Ghost House’ and ‘The Elephant House’. It was a large grey building sitting starkly, alone, atop of the rise (known as ‘Snob Hill’) above what is now Albert Ryan Park.

Albert Ryan lived in the house until 1967, when it was purchased by Merv and Robin Innes (parents of the current Mayor of the Eurobodalla Shire, Liz Innes – who, along with her brothers, was raised in the house).

The house is still occasionally used as a guest house with, for example, crews participating in recent George Bass Surfboat Marathons staying there. **R**

Sources: *‘The Beagle’* 24.3.2018; State Heritage Inventory listing details; Information from Clyde River & Batemans Bay Historical Society and Robin Innes.

Fire at Sea

T.S.S. ‘Ormonde’ at Eden

INCIDENTS DURING THE BURNING LINER’S VISIT.

(By H. P. Wellings)

The forced visit to Twofold Bay of the Royal Mail liner ‘Ormonde’ provided much excitement, both ashore and afloat – probably in widely different channels so far as passengers and Eden residents were concerned.

The general outline of the unfortunate circumstance of the outbreak of fire on the ‘Ormonde’ has been extensively told through the columns of the metropolitan and district newspapers, but it may not be out of place to add something of possibly more human interest.

The ‘Ormonde’ was sighted approaching Twofold Bay not long before 4 p.m. on Wednesday last. A vessel of such proportions was a strange visitor to the Bay, though in naval strength the port has seen greater craft – the ‘Hood’, ‘Renown’, ‘Australia’, and others, yet a liner of nearly 15,000 tons was something to take particular note of.

Within an hour of sighting the vessel, Eden had awakened to the fact that something was happening. People began to examine the liner through a variety of glasses. Telescopes of various sizes and ages, field-glasses of different makes and designs, and keen eyes, followed the vessel as she steadily

neared the port.

Those of more earnest desire to follow the proceedings made their way to the headland whereon the lighthouse stands, and very shortly the cliffs were dotted with a few score of people, all watching, all discussing, and few really able to give a thoroughly correct explanation of the reason of the visit of the liner. Cars appeared as if by magic, and their human freights added to the gathering. But ere the crowd had gathered on the hill top, in fact before Eden had actually realised that this liner was coming into port, Billy and Ike Warren had been engaged by the Harbour Master, and, in their locally known and famous launch, the ‘Tin Hare’ (more sedately and properly named ‘Alaiheida’) were forging out of the Bay towards the ‘Ormonde’. The ‘Tin Hare’ flew the Pilot’s flag. Battling with a strong south-wester, the launch, made excellent time, and despite the spray and surging wave tops succeeded in bringing Capt. A L. May alongside without incident about two miles from the lighthouse.

Capt. May is not officially recognised as a Pilot at Twofold Bay, for the port is now without such an officer, but should the master of any incoming vessel desire the advantage of the local Harbour Master’s knowledge as to soundings, etc., that officer attends upon request. Such was the case with the ‘Ormonde’.

With 14 fathoms of water beneath her keel the liner was anchored at Capt. May's suggestion abreast of the lighthouse. It was possible, of course, to have brought her well within the inner bay, but Captain Thorne, the commander, did not at that time expect to remain more than a couple of hours at anchor.

The fire on board the vessel was more than serious. At one period it was a matter of seconds as to whether very drastic action would be necessary on the Master's part. The usual preliminary precaution of swinging out the life boats and calling all hands to their allotted stations was taken – some of the passengers failed to realise the actual extent of the possibilities which might become actualities, but happily for all concerned that danger was avoided.

As testimony to the seriousness of the outbreak, there is in the possession of one of the crew of a local launch at Eden a much-charred panel from the 'Ormonde's' interior woodwork. This was jettisoned from the liner. Great quantities of smouldering coir were thrown from the vessel's hold into the sea in the effort to quell the outbreak.

The 'Ormonde' anchored at 5.38 p.m. on the 23rd September, and from that moment until 3 p.m. on the 24th there was not a second of relief from anxiety on the part of the ship's officers. Messages were exchanged throughout the whole night between the steamer and the Sydney office of the Orient Company; the 'Tin Hare' made many trips from the Eden wharf to the stricken vessel, carrying officers ashore or aboard after they had been in telephonic conversation with Sydney. The south-wester blew strong that night and the trips were 'dirty'.

At 8.30 p.m. a detachment of the Sydney Fire Brigade left

for Eden, well equipped with special apparatus for fighting the fire. Along the 300-odd miles of coastal highway the motor vehicle sped, its siren warning all and sundry its mission was serious. The greatest distance the Metropolitan Brigade had ever travelled in answer to a call of fire!

At 8.30 a.m. the detachment was on board the 'Ormonde' and at work fighting the demon of fire. The finer details of their work and the ultimate subjection of the fire have been well told in the columns of the daily newspapers – there is no need for repetition here. It was indeed a gallant fight and will be regarded in future years with even more admiration than has been so far accorded those who played an active part.

Naturally, newspaper correspondents in the country areas are seldom able to catch highly important events such as a fire on an ocean liner. Those who act in such capacities at Eden are always on the alert though and, in this case, they proved themselves thoroughly competent to handle things.

One reporter connected with a Sydney daily and evening journal spent – according to his own statements – the greater part of Wednesday night in telephoning the office and getting items through which were available to him. His greatest problem was to get into actual touch with some person on the liner from whom something authentic might be gleaned. Every person he accosted at Eden wharf proved to be useless for his purposes. Not even when he actually interrogated one of the liner's officers, who came ashore on important business, was he successful.

Early morning however saw him successful in one direction. He had secured the co-operation of the owner of a motor launch. By such means he could at least proceed to



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the liner. But he was far from being the only person desirous of getting near enough to the liner to secure information. When the launch finally left its moorings alongside Eden wharf, no less than eight persons were aboard!

Not only were the eight persons on board, but there were several cameras and a box of freshly gathered garden flowers and an important letter. The south-wester still blew strongly; spray dampened clothing but not ardour! The launch carried three males, and five of the softer sex – one of these latter attended to the motive power of the craft. The short voyage was made with little incident other than the accumulation of dampened clothing.

Drawing alongside the liner a general request was made for a line to be passed from the steamer to the launch. In that request no refusal was made. A line was passed to the launch and made fast. From the point of view of the Quartermaster on the 'Ormonde', stationed at the ladder for the express purpose of preventing both persons and articles from leaving the vessel or from entering, the occupants

of the small launch concerned him but little so long as no attempt was made to board the liner. But this was exactly what was uppermost in one man's mind – he wanted badly to get on board the 'Ormonde' – in fact, he had special instructions from his Editor to do so.

The Quartermaster woke up to the fact and took steps to enforce his own authority according to instructions. He ordered the launch to be drawn away from the liner's side, pointing out that the vessel had not been cleared by the Customs.

It took quite a lot of persuasion and argument ere the Quartermaster permitted the box of precious flowers and the letter to the lady to be sent on board. But when he heard a general request from the launch that any films in the possession of passengers which would give pictures of the vessel, or particularly connected with the fire, might be passed down, it was time for more definite action.

To the dismay of those on the launch, the line was quickly cut and it was a case of 'adrift upon the ocean'. Some possible compensation was the length of ship's line which came into the launch owner's possession!

Sydney and Melbourne evening papers were determinedly telephoning for photographs, which were in urgent demand. The two photographers were in possession of saleable goods, worth much to those who could use them widely.

At near to 3 o'clock on the 24th September, after much further telephonic conversations, a locally owned motor car left Eden, Sydneywards, to meet another coming from Sydney. The local newspaper correspondent was on board the Eden car, and the other car was met near Bateman's Bay when there was a transfer of copy and photographic material. To such an extent does a daily paper go to secure material for its issues.

—The *Bombala Times*, 2.10.1936

This report in the '*Burnie Advocate*' on 24th September 1936 provides more details about the fire:

**FIRE ON R.M.S. ORMONDE.
Motor Tender on 300-Mile Dash
from Sydney to Assist.
LINER IS SHELTERING IN
TWOFOOLD BAY.**

Early to-day, a fire broke out amongst the cargo of coir matting in No. 4 hold of the Orient mail steamer Ormonde (15,000 tons).

Severe damage was done to the cargo by fire and water. It was

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reported from the ship to-night that the dining-room bulkhead was buckled, but that the fire was under control.

The Ormonde was steaming from Melbourne to Sydney.

There was no panic or alarm amongst the 320 passengers, but as the wind and sea were rising, Captain C. G. Thorne put into Twofold Bay late this afternoon.

The Orient Line stated this evening that Captain Thorne had advised that the fire was still under control, and that there was no reason for anxiety.

A motor tender with five firemen set out on a 300-mile dash from Sydney to Twofold Bay to-night. It is expected to arrive between 7 and 8 a.m. tomorrow. The latest equipment for fire fighting in a confined space is carried.

A request from the Orient Company for assistance was made at 4 p.m. It is expected that the Ormonde will leave Twofold Bay to-morrow, and reach Sydney to-morrow night.

It is believed the outbreak was caused by spontaneous combustion. All the mails are safe.

When the outbreak was discovered to-day, members of the crew, who numbered 200, attacked it with hoses. Captain Thorne sent a radio to the A.U.S.N. cargo steamer Murada, which was on its way from South Australia to Newcastle, to stand by and give assistance if needed.

The Murada overtook the mail steamer, but steamed on when told that assistance would not be required.

When the Ormonde put into Twofold Bay, the fire was




The RMS Ormonde in Sydney Harbour on 'Foundation (or Regatta) Day' (later renamed 'Australia Day') 1931. Image: Australian National Maritime Museum, object 00013681

still burning near No.4 hatchway. There was no danger of it spreading, as it had been confined to the hatch in which it was first noticed.

The Ormonde will terminate its voyage at Sydney, and not go on to Brisbane, as it will be necessary for repairs to be effected there.

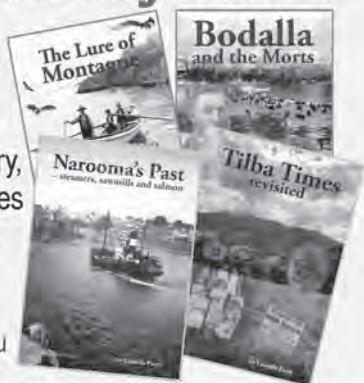
At 11.45 p.m., a message was received from Captain Thorne, stating that the fire was still smouldering, and he did not deem it prudent to come on to Sydney in a high wind until it had been put out. That was a precautionary measure, because of the large number of people on the liner.

There was no worry among the passengers, who were quite happy. 

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