

South Coast History Society Inc.

# Recollections

April–May 2021

Issue 27

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**Our intriguing local history...EXPOSED !**



The road crossing of the Bega River, 1900. Image: State Library of NSW, FL8855833

## The Anatomy of a Town, 1851 - 2021

The history of how Bega township developed is fascinating. And, throughout the town, there are many reminders of the town's interesting history. Detailed information about what can be seen, and where it can be found, is now also available (see details below) – so a special 'discovery trip' to better appreciate Bega's history-rich past is sure to be particularly rewarding.

### BEGINNINGS

From the early 19th century, squatters and settlers in New South Wales were looking to acquire land outside of the confines of Sydney. If land was to be made available to them, some orderly planning was necessary - if only to enable the boundaries of new rural properties to be defined. This meant that land first needed to be set aside for roads and associated infrastructure, such as travelling stock reserves...and the boundaries of towns needed to be defined.

Teams of surveyors, under the control of the colonial Surveyor General, were despatched to explore and map the land and they, in effect, determined where roads were to be built and towns were to be located.

These surveyors did not always make the best decisions. Bathurst, for example, was originally sited at what is now Kelso (on the other side of the Macquarie River, to the

east of Bathurst) and Goulburn was originally sited in an area that is now North Goulburn. Practical considerations resulted in these towns being subsequently moved to and developed on their present sites.

Bega, too, is no longer on its original site – which was on the northern side of the Bega River in the area now known as North Bega. That Bega township was surveyed by Assistant-Surveyor Parkinson in February 1851. On 30th December 1851, the N.S.W. *Government Gazette* included a notice reading: 'BEGA. Notice is hereby given that a site has been fixed upon for a township at the undermentioned place; and that a copy of the approved plan has been deposited for information at the Police Office, Eden, and at the Office of the Surveyor-General in Sydney, viz: BEGA on the Bega River in the County of Auckland'.

The site was chosen because it was near what appeared to

**Fantastic  
Reads**

**The Anatomy of a Town**– page 1  
**We're Worth a Dollar!**– page 3  
**3 Bega Gems**– page 9  
**3 Sadly-No-More Bega Gems**– page 11

**The Town Needs a Hospital**– page 14  
**Who Lived at Your Place?**– page 18  
**3 Not-to-be-Missed April Events**– page 19



The old and new bridges, looking east along the Bega River, in 1975. At the time of construction, the new 624-metre long reinforced and prestressed concrete bridge was the sixth longest road bridge in NSW.

be two permanent, gently flowing supplies of water and it was central to the few settlers in the vicinity (at Yarranung, over the hill to the north of the current Bega Cheese factory, and at Tarraganda to the east of the present town). Most of the surveyed land rapidly sold, but purchasers were reluctant to build on their land because of the danger of flooding. A raging flood in May 1851, in which 17 people were drowned, and another significant flood in 1857 revealed that much of the surveyed township was prone to be flooded...so the fledgling town was moved to more suitable, higher ground south of the river.

Thankfully, little construction had occurred north of the river – a Captain John Grant (the first man to sail up the Bega River and later the Postmaster at Tantawangalo) observing ‘there was not at that time a house in South Bega; about three in North Bega’ – so the move south was a relatively uncomplicated occurrence.

#### BEGA TOWNSHIP

The new township was surveyed by Assistant Surveyor Drake in February 1854 on land that had been Henry Badgery’s squattage, and the first blocks were offered for sale by auction in August the same year.

It is likely that the most suitable crossing of the Bega River (at the bottom end of what is now Auckland Street) dictated

the original layout of the new town and led to the lower end of Auckland Street becoming, in the early years, the main street of Bega. (This Auckland Street crossing was still being used at least up to 1900 by horse- and bullock-teams.)

But, as historian W A Bayley noted ‘For whole winters the river could not be crossed at Bega at the Auckland Street and Tarraganda Crossings. McGregors, in 1867, made a log raft capable of carrying 8 to 10 people across the river.’ The cost: 1 shilling per passenger, 6d for a horse!

So, a bridge from North Bega was constructed in 1878 and was opened by Daniel Gowing, a well-known local farmer and businessman. He described it as consisting ‘of six spans, one of 30 feet, one of 40, one of 45, three of 100 feet each, or a total length of 415 feet. The height from the river to the top of the truss-work is 44 feet, from the river-bed to the deck 35 feet. There are 27,666 cubic feet of timber in the bridge...which is known as a Queen’s Truss Bridge, has the largest span in the colony.’ It was located just upstream from the crossing near the end of Auckland Street. It was opened with great ceremony. [A bridge at Tarraganda, downstream from Bega, was erected a few years later, providing a second crossing of the Bega River.]

This original Bega bridge, which had serious access problems at both approaches to it, was replaced after 19 years. The new bridge was built in 1898, upstream from the



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original crossing and just downstream from today's Bega Bridge and was connected with the western end of Bega St. A sharp corner onto or off the bridge presented problems to traffic, so eventually the approach to the bridge was extended down to Carp St [today Poplar Ave]. The position of that timber truss bridge is, today, clearly visible. This bridge was superseded by the current Bega Bridge in September 1975.

Today's town was originally surveyed in 1854. It very much simpler than what is there today: the roads running east to west being (from the north) Bridge St (recently re-named Jacksonia Grove by Council – an unwarranted and unnecessary example of local history vandalism!), Lagoon St, Bega St, Carp St, Upper St and High St; those running north to south (from the east) being East St, Parker St, Gipps St, Auckland St and way over west near the river, Valley St and Angle St. Streets such as Church St and Canning St were later additions.

In general, small blocks for houses and businesses were designated between Auckland St and Parker St south from Lagoon St and down to High St, and running in the other direction between Upper St and High St from Parker St to Angle St. Again, in general, land to the west of Auckland St and east of Parker St were large acreages; the whole of the western frontage to Auckland St between Bega St and Carp St, for example, was two 2–3 acre blocks both owned

by S. L. Bransby; and from East St to Parker St there were just two blocks of land, each the size of or larger than the current block occupied by the Showground, between each of the streets that ran east to west.

As had happened when North Bega was surveyed, demand for the surveyed town blocks in (south) Bega was exceptionally high. Most blocks had been sold by about 1860; and even Kiss' Lagoon had been sold by 1875. In a significant number of instances, town lots were brazenly purchased for immediate amalgamation with adjoining agricultural blocks.

The first recorded house in (south) Bega was erected by Ferdinand Beck in Auckland Street, above flood-level and just up from the current primary school grounds. Opposite were several blocks owned by Ann White. Another building opposite the school was occupied by a Mr Diversi, and became the first store in Bega. It was run by a Mr Dawson.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the first public buildings erected in the new township of Bega were a pub (an inn, that served both liquor and provided lodging to travellers) and churches.

Ann White and her husband had previously operated a 'shanty inn' on the banks of the Brogo River at Yarranung, north of Bega, from the early 1850s. They rapidly moved their business to the emerging township Bega, trading under

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the name of the 'Victoria Inn'. In 1855 Isaac was killed, so Ann took over the business license and by 1858 had the Victoria Inn constructed of brick in Auckland Street (now No's 38 and 40 Auckland St). This was probably the first brick building in Bega and, today, the Victoria Inn complex is the oldest surviving building in Bega. The Inn had 3 parlours, 10 bedrooms, a kitchen, stables and coach house, and as noted Bega historian William Bayley observed, *'the town grew up around it'*. (For more information on the Victoria Inn and Ann White visit [www.bit.ly/begahh25](http://www.bit.ly/begahh25) The adjacent Family Hotel [now the Bega Pioneers' Museum premises] was built in 1859 and is the second oldest surviving building in Bega.)

The first mail service to the town (on horseback) commenced in 1856 and, as the township emerged, the first telegraph line was installed in 1869.

In 1857, building commenced on a weatherboard Anglican church on the site of the present St John's Church Hall in Bega St. It was dubbed 'Noah's Ark'. The materials were brought from Sydney and local farmers back-loaded them to Bega on bullock drays after they had delivered their produce to the port in Merimbula.

The church was opened on January 3 1858...but by 1860 there was still no clergyman in town. By 1871 it was reported *'the Church flaps around like a tent-cover, the whole building quaking and grunting as if about to collapse itself'* so, in 1872, a site for a new church was selected on the corner of Carp and Union Streets. The foundation stone was laid on January 26, 1874. Work on the project failed and the land was sold to a Dr Shiels for £160. (Dr Shiels, several years earlier, had successfully championed the construction of the



**The Victoria Inn**

Bega School of Arts.)

A brick Anglican Church was eventually built in Church Street and was opened in January 1878. The first resident Church of England clergyman in Bega was Rev J. L. Knight, who arrived in the late 1850s. (A brick Church of England School Hall was built on the site of the original weatherboard Church in 1898, the result of fundraising by Mrs Louisa Evershed, the wife of Dr. Montague Evershed.)

It took several more years for commercial activity to commence in the town with the *Illawarra Mercury* observing on 9th March 1857 that *'There is a good opportunity for some party with capital to commence storekeeping in our [Bega] town. It would be a safe and remunerative affair and a great accommodation to the district.'* The same article also noted that *'an Anglican Church is about to be erected'* and *'brickmakers - steady men - would be sure of profitable employment, as there are many persons anxious to buy bricks.'* William White began brickmaking later that year, his bricks being used in Mrs White's 'Victoria Inn', in Mr Needham's 'Family Hotel', and in other early buildings. The bricks were made from clay dug from near Glebe Lagoon and were wood fired.

From that point, the town grew relatively rapidly and assumed the character of a substantial and permanent town. By 1861 Bega's population had grown to 625, representing around 100 households. Initially (and, for a long time afterwards...and perhaps it still does!), the town functioned as the social and commercial nucleus for the Far South Coast.

The business and social centre of the town, initially at the lower end of Auckland St, gradually crept around the corner into Bega St (there was a swamp further up Auckland St, between Bega St and Carp St, that hindered immediate development of Auckland St), into Church St. For over 40 years, a vacant allotment behind St John's Anglican Church served as Bega's 'village green' with facilities for games such as cricket and marbles.

From around 1887 to around 1904, the centre of town moved from Church St into Carp St. This was encouraged by Bega Municipal Council's desire to create an all-brick, fire-proof town core that satisfied insurance companies and provided lower insurance premiums to landowners. This resulted in the demolition of several, very impressive wooden buildings in Church St. The closures of the large general store operated by H.O.T. Cowdroy (now utilized

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by Centrelink and Medicare) and loss in a fire in 1910 of Wickham & Co's 'Albion Stores' (see below) effectively deprived Church Street of its 'main street' status.

The town when surveyed in 1854 was symmetrical, with streets running north-south and east-west. This enabled an orderly residential area to develop immediately the east of the town. The topography of the five or six granite spurs immediately to the south of the town (the northernmost part of Black Range) determined that roads later built in that area would necessarily often be less symmetrical – the main road south from town, Newtown Road, providing the most obvious example. Those with money and those 'successful' families, perhaps predictably, chose to live on these elevated granite spurs, above the 'miasma' of the valley below, and with their homes having expansive views across the Bega Valley.

The oldest residential area of the town is to the north east (broadly between Bega Street and Upper St, to the east of Gipps St). The 'suburbs' of Newtown (south of the CBD) and Fairview (to the south-west of the CBD) were developed later, and generally post-1945. Street names in Newtown (such as McKee Drive, Blomfield Ave, Gowing Ave, Spindler St – all celebrating noted residents of the town) reflect this later development.

Regular population censuses provide an indication of the rates at which the Bega town grew:

1861	625
1871	872
1881	1,634 (i.e. the town had more than doubled in size in 20 years)
1891	2,023 (i.e. the town had more than trebled in size

in 30 years)

1901	1,960
1911	1,969
1921	2,024
1933	2,344
1947	2,967
1954	3,644
1961	3,858
2002	4,463 (The Shire's population was 29,423)

These figures indicate there was initial growth to around 1890 (although in the 1880s Bega was growing at about one-tenth the rate of surrounding villages and half that of Moruya), then there was a period of decline or stagnation to around 1911 (at which time Bega began growing, and surrounding rural towns were in decline), then growth again following World War II.

The Municipality was incorporated in 1883 (Incorporation enabled a Council to be established, thereby giving locals the power under State law to pass local ordinances and enforce them), largely through the efforts of David Kiss (Bega's Pound Keeper, and a cattle and property dealer, who lived above what is now Kiss' Lagoon). It was three square miles, and had 25 miles of roadways. (Up until about 1864 there was not a made road in the surrounding district [people travelled along bridle paths; the Princes Hwy did not become a gazetted highway until 1925, at which point responsibility for maintaining it was transferred from local Councils to the NSW Department of Main Roads], although there were formed streets in the town. Around 1864 the Government constructed a road from Moruya to Bega. Daniel Gowing

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had previously, in 1857, cut a privately financed road from Bega to Tathra. By 1927 it had become possible to travel from Bega to Sydney in daylight; Bega to Cooma took 2½ hours).

By 1873, the main road through town from Tathra to the crossing of the Bega River had been determined: from the Tathra Road one turned left into Upper St, right into Parker St, left into Carp St and right into Auckland St (and, later, left into Bega Street which led to the bridge). This, of course, significantly influenced the way that the town developed.

Macadamisation was carried out and kerbing and guttering was laid. The surviving original stone kerb and guttering (where it has not subsequently been replaced by concrete kerb and guttering) that runs along this route is evidence of this main through-town route.

Local newspapers regularly documented the development of the town:

*Bega Gazette*, 3.10.1868: 'Our little township, notwithstanding the dullness of trade, is, though slowly, yet surely, progressing. Within the last 12 months buildings have sprung up, and population increased to an extent little dreamt of a few years ago. Although many of the structures are not of a permanent description (weatherboard), yet they are well-built and ornamental to the town, adding largely to its picturesque appearance. However, there are a few substantial brick buildings erected or in course of erection. The Commercial (or billiards) room, the property of Mrs. Ann White, is a neat, commodious, though plain brick building, is quite finished and adds to the business appearance of Church Street. The Wesleyan Chapel, nearly finished, only requiring the internal fittings, is a tasteful structure, and the only brick building of worship in Bega. Mrs. Prescott's store, in course of erection, is also a brick building, and will give quite a city appearance to that part of the township. Mr. Malcolm's store and Mr. W Rixon's cottage, are two well-built houses; the former is intended for a store; it has a fine imposing shop-front and balcony over it. The latter is a neat weatherboard cottage upon a stone foundation. Mr W. Thomson has erected a weatherboard shop adjoining his store; it is to be occupied by a saddlery establishment. There are several other buildings about to be commenced, among which we may mention the School of Arts, a large store opposite, and dwelling house for the Church of England School. Bega at present presents rather a bustling appearance and however bad the times may be for shopkeepers and farmers, tradesmen cannot complain.'

*Bega Gazette*, 31.12.1868: 'Starting at Auckland Street, we notice the erection of extra rooms at the Public School, a new store for Mr. Ellis, and additions to the 'Gazette' Office; round the corner into Bega Street, a large butcher's shop for Mr. Underhill; in Church Street we find a substantial brick cottage, at present occupied as billiards-room and Oddfellows Hall; additional rooms to Messrs. Anderson's and Sattler's, and houses and stores upon Mr. Berne's [a stock and station agent] premises. Next comes the house and butcher's shop for Mr. Millar, and on the other side the residence for the teacher of the Church of England School. As we reach Carp Street, we observe a whole nest of buildings completed or in progress: a large frame store and dwelling for Mr. Thomson. Messrs.

*Myers' saddler's shop, the School of Arts, and on the opposite corner of Gipps and Carp Streets a fine place of business for Mrs. Prescott. Turning to the right and ascending Gipps Street, we find Mr. Malcolm's store, a cottage belonging to Mr. Berne. And over the way two frame cottages, the property of Mr. Gleeson, whilst higher up the hill stands the nearly finished Wesleyan Chapel.'*

*Bega Gazette*, 4.2.1876: 'There is a considerable centre of work in Carp Street. Mr Thomson's two-storey store approaches completion, Mr Britten's brick building is being roofed in and the walls of the new Commercial Bank are being rapidly run up. In Auckland Street, Mr Toose's premises are finished...Mr Shegog's cottage is nearly completed. In Upper Gipps Street, Messrs. Sonderman and Young's two cottages have filled up a gap opposite the Catholic Presbytery, and lower down the new premises erected by Mr Hearne, and Mr Braine's new store, are nearly finished. In the suburbs we notice Mr Walker's cottage in Chapel Paddock [upper Gipps St] is finished, and Messrs. Curtis' and Rawlinson's residences are nearly ready for the paint brush. Mr Sattler's new villa on this hill is nearly completed. We hear of several buildings to be erected shortly in Auckland Street, on some of the allotments sold by Messrs. Peden and Clissold this week.'

*Bega Gazette*, 15.6.1887: 'The principal public buildings are the Court-house, with goal attached; Post Office; School of Arts; and the Lyceum Hall, capable of seating 800 persons. The Churches are St. John's (Anglican), St. Patrick's (Roman Catholic), St. Andrews (Presbyterian), and a Wesleyan Chapel. There are also a convent, three banks, and a number of very handsome stores, hotels and private residences. On the opposite bank of the Bega River is the rising and populous suburb of North Bega, which has not yet been incorporated.'

*Nowra Leader*, 1927: 'The town itself is not as progressive as the district warrants; no public water supply, and many of the businesses are very old-fashioned. The School of Arts is an old structure of poor design, with a very small hall...A powerhouse for the supply of electricity has just been completed.' (The town water supply system was turned on in 1929, with water being pumped from a well to a reservoir. Cost £34,000. Electricity, as indicated, became available in 1927. The town sewerage scheme became operational in May 1937.)

Historian W A Bayley concluded that by the early 1910s 'stock sales caused Bega to be recognized as the commercial centre of the district, business houses began to flourish, and the town became the district's cultural centre.'

Post World War II, the town's role as the principal 'service centre' for the NSW South Coast area was reinforced when the State Government located offices of numerous regional

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departments and authorities in the town, such as those from the Department of Main Roads, the Department of Education, and the Department of Lands. These were in addition to the town being the site of the region's major hospital, a high school catering to students to Leaving Certificate (later Higher School Certificate) level that attracted students from as far afield as Batemans Bay, Delegate and Bendoc in Victoria, an office for School Inspectors, a regional depot for the Post Master General's Department, Commonwealth and commercial broadcasting stations, a major butter and cheese facility that also, in 1962, supplied 26% of Canberra's daily milk supply, and a local newspaper (the *Bega District News*) that had absorbed rival newspapers in Candelo in 1938 and Cobargo in 1950, and regional stock yards that served the area from Gippsland to Moruya.

### THE ARRIVAL OF MOTOR VEHICLES

The first motor cars owned by locals arrived around 1907. The arrival of motor vehicles had many significant impacts on the town, including:

- Local businesses started retailing petrol and oil. Petrol pumps, offering a variety of brands of petroleum, were initially erected on the curbside. This reduced

parking space in streets and service station owners, such as Whalan's Garage in Carp St, were forced to take measures to ensure that access was available to the pumps. Car service centres subsequently emerged, as did car dealerships;

- Many businesses (such as blacksmiths and saddlers) went out of business or changed trades;
- Posts supporting verandahs on commercial buildings on Carp St were removed after World War II – a move considered 'progressive' at the time;
- Provision of parking became a significant town-planning consideration;
- Efficient road transport revolutionized retail distribution, so stores in large service centres such as Bega were able to extend their service to wider localities. This impacted significantly on the viability of smaller retailers in surrounding areas;
- The increasing incidence of road accidents in the commercial area led to a push for the sealing and widening of town roads, for the installation of improved street lighting, and for adjustments to be made to intersections;
- The importance of and the prominent role of the town's hotels and, to a lesser extent, guest houses changed. From the late 1950s, motels emerged (the Black Dolphin Motel in Merimbula, opened in 1960 and designed by Robin Boyd, being one of the nation's earliest and perhaps most significant examples) which provided accommodation to travellers on the peripheries of the central business district.

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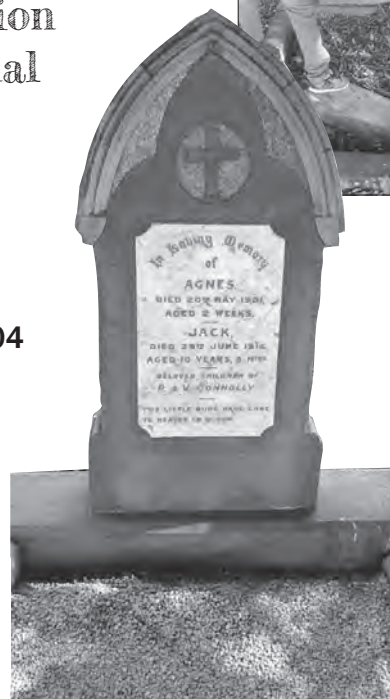
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## HISTORIC BEGA TODAY

The major changes to Bega town since Bayley wrote his history in 1942 have been:

- an expansion in the population of the town, resulting in fewer 'paddocks' or vacant land remaining in the town;
- the establishment of a significant-size 'Industrial Estate' at North Bega, and the disappearance of major industries (such as a tannery, a saw mill...even, recently, the Bega Hospital) from the town precincts. This is partly the result of the drafting of a Bega Municipal Town Plan that commenced in 1946;
- the opening of a new bridge over the Bega River and subsequent construction of the highway that now by-passes the town (in accord with the Department of Main Roads' policy to construct by-passes of all towns on major State highways; the route for the road was actually gazetted in 1987 and the land for the by-pass was purchased. However, Roy Howard, the Bega Mayor and a prominent businessman in town [he owned Howards Electrical and Howards Hardware], was concerned about the impact a by-pass might have on businesses in Bega, and convinced the DMR to not proceed with the by-pass but, instead, to construct the causeway across Kiss' Lagoon. The lagoon was very picturesque and Council had been attempting to secure land around it for a park, so dividing it into two smaller lakes created significant angst in the town. The originally-planned by-pass was eventually built and was opened in September 2014);
- a significant realignment of the major road into the town from the Princes Highway (the original town entrance was along what is now Poplar Ave. Once the 'Kirkland Estate' became available and the causeway was constructed across Kiss' Lagoon, this became the main entrance road to the town);
- the construction of a significant shopping plaza (Sapphire Marketplace, which includes a significant number of car parking spaces) away from the main town street – reflecting a trend in recent decades that has been common in many Australian towns.
- an increase in rentals of shops and offices in the main business district from the late 1970s resulted in the 'creep' of some businesses (primarily 'professional' businesses) away from the main business area into what were traditionally residential streets. This is particularly evident in Canning St (which is now almost entirely a business street) and in Parker St, where cheaper rents and easier client parking were available.

Less significant/more subtle changes have occurred – for

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example recessed entry doors to shops and post-supported verandahs in the town have largely disappeared; the type and mix of retailers has significantly changed (there are now no saddlers along the main street, and kerbside petrol pumps have disappeared).

Six particularly historically-interesting street precincts have survived:

**Auckland Street, north of Bega Street:** the original Bega CBD and the original roadway into the town. The most historically important nearby sites are the crossing of the Bega River, Nos 38 & 40 Auckland St (Ann White's Victoria Inn), the Family Hotel building on the corner of Auckland and Bega Sts, the Bega Primary School complex and the Commercial Bank of Sydney building at No 19 Auckland St.


**Church St:** An area with a notable collection of private and institutional buildings from the Victorian era in what was once the main commercial street in the town. This street (along with its Ayres Walkway 'extension') unites the town centre with its broader surroundings: it provides a visual link from the civic precinct, adjacent to Lyttleton Gardens, to Mumbulla Mountain (this has been described as '*a strong vista important to the character of the town*'). Highlights include St John's Anglican Church, Bell Tower, Church Hall and Lych Gate complex; McNamara's Centennial Building (Nos 49 – 61 Church St); the Bank Hotel (42 Church St); and the Red Cross Society building (No 33 Church St).

**The Commercial Hotel/Bega Court House area:** a group of mostly brick buildings built in the inter-war period or earlier, extending from 163-165 Carp St (once Rosevear's Jewellers) to the Commercial Hotel, plus the other 3 buildings on the Carp St/Gipps St intersection, plus the impressive Dr Evershed Memorial Clock Tower.

**The Balmain Brothers Bega Ltd/Grand Hotel area:** a grouping of principally art-deco style buildings that provide a unique streetscape in Bega – extending from the old Lyceum Hall building (No 247 Carp St) to around the corner to No 95 - 101 Auckland St, plus the Grand Hotel building.

**The Canning Street cottages area:** A group of simple cottages, mostly constructed of weatherboard and iron, that demonstrate housing patterns of the early twentieth century. A well-designed Kings Cinema façade in Carp St once terminated (and dominated) the Canning St vista.

**The Carp Street (West) streetscape:** broadly the buildings in Carp St between Auckland St and Ayres Walkway/Church St.

At least 100 buildings or sites in Bega have historic or heritage significance, so Bega has plenty of interest to those planning to learn more about the development of the town. Regrettably, there is currently a distinct lack of explanatory signage in Bega highlighting the historical significance of any of the town's streets and buildings. However, Bega Valley Historical Society and South Coast History Society have recently combined to document the histories of individual streets and the properties in each of those streets so, for example, a drive or a stroll down Carp Street will now be far more meaningful (and enjoyable!) with this information at hand. Details are at [www.bit.ly/Begahistory](http://www.bit.ly/Begahistory) 



## Three Bega Gems

### LITTLETON HOUSE (24-30 BEGA ST)

Littleton House was constructed in 1875 by local builder John Malcolm (who also built the [Old] Bega Hospital) for Mr Thomas Rawlinson, a local solicitor who became Bega's first Mayor in 1884 and was Member for Bega in the NSW Parliament in 1894-1895. He had engaged architects

Cyril and Arthur Blacket (sons of Edmund T Blacket, who designed St John's Church in Bega) to design a 'gracious residence fit for a professional gentleman and his lady'. It is of a style common to the period.

The Sydney Deaconesses Institute of Nuns later purchased the property. In January 1902 it became Deaconess High School, a day and boarding school for girls. The school was run by Sister Katherine Nichols, Sister Edith and Sister Gregory from Melbourne.

An outbreak of diphtheria in 1907 took the life of two little girls and resulted in the closure of the school. It is believed that the ghost of one, Sarah, remains in the house.

In 1911, the house was purchased by members of St John's Church but was subsequently transferred to the Church of England Property Trust. It then became the Church Rectory.

In 1947 Littleton House was sold to the Department of Education Hostel Association for use as a girl's hostel for Bega High School students.



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Improvements in transport eventually lessened the demand for hostel accommodation, so the Bega Historical Society made representations to acquire Littleton House as a Museum. These were unsuccessful, and in the 1960s, it became the property of the NSW Department of Technical Education and became a TAFE College. In 1990 it was sold and, once again, became a private residence.

#### **KING'S THEATRE (106 CARP ST)**

The King's Theatre was built in 1935. It was designed for Violet Mary Bardsley by Kaberry and Chard (a Sydney-based theatre architectural company that also designed Sydney's Empire Theatre [later Her Majesty's], the Enmore Theatre and the Valhalla Theatre) in the then-popular art deco style. The interior displayed Mayan motif decorations. The theatre seated 900 people and initially, on Saturday nights, almost every seat was reserved, making it very difficult for visitors to Bega to get seats. As a result, after a short time, seats could not be booked – so a queue would form up Carp St, then up Clark Lane and around to the back of the theatre. Men would wear tuxedos and women the latest fashions. The first eight rows of the downstairs stalls were always full of Aboriginals – possibly because they were forced to sit there, possibly because these were the cheapest seats. The most important people (e.g. the Mayor) sat in the back row of the dress circle. Overcrowding was a controversial and common occurrence (a screening of *'Davey Crockett'* attracted 1,117 moviegoers and 'every step and space was filled'. Later the manager, Ted Thistleton, was fined £1 for overcrowding the theatre at a screening of *'Snow White.'*) *'The Sound of Music was claimed as a 'state success' in Bega where it was shown thirty-five times*

*with everyone in town going to see it at least once'. The Bega Band regularly played in front of the theatre on Wednesday nights to attract patrons; the Band members were then provided with free tickets to the movies.*

The theatre functioned until the 1980s when television and videos led to its demise. In the early 1980s all the stalls seats were removed and the downstairs section of the theatre was used for roller skating. Movies were still screened upstairs. In 1991–92 the

downstairs area was converted into shops.

(The main cinema space is now used by a furniture retailer. Many of the original theatre features [such as the stage, the upstairs circle, the Mayan motifs] are still clearly visible.)

#### **ST JOHN'S CHURCH (CHURCH ST)**

In 1876 Edmund Blacket, the NSW Colonial Architect and the architect most favoured by the Church of England in NSW, was engaged to design Bega's St John's Anglican Church with seating for 300. The Church was built by well-known local builder R W Thatcher (see [www.bit.ly/Recollections9](http://www.bit.ly/Recollections9)) and was opened in January 1878. There is no record of Blacket ever having visited Bega, but the Church (distinguished by good proportions, good materials and a minimum of fussy detail) is considered as one of Blacket's finest country churches.

In 1897 the adjacent Gothic-style St. John's Anglican Church School Hall was designed and built by Underhill and Thatcher. It was constructed as a result of fundraising undertaken by Mrs Louisa Evershed, the wife of Dr Montague Evershed (see [www.bit.ly/Recollections7](http://www.bit.ly/Recollections7)). **R**



Image courtesy Bega Pioneers' Museum



# Three Sadly-No-More Bega Gems

## THE CLUB HOTEL (CNR CARP AND CHURCH STS)

Bega's Club Hotel was also known as the Rose Hotel because (as can be seen in the photograph) a prolific rose grew up one side of the building. In 1887 a fire started in the hotel stables which was extinguished by a bucket brigade after the alarm was raised by the ringing of bell at the other end of Church St at St. John's Anglican Church. The hotel closed

its doors in September 1909 as a result of decision by a Licensing Reduction Board that met after a referendum in the local State electorate voted to reduce the number of licensed hotels in the local area. The hotel premises became Stanley Rodd's drapery until the Depression, before being used as the Neon Café, then as a bookshop and newsagency. The building was demolished in July 1988 and far less



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attractive modern shops and offices were built on the site in 1991.

### BEGA POST OFFICE (CARP ST)

The current Bega Post Office building, erected in 1972 at a cost of \$225,000. It has been described as 'a modern building (that) blends architecturally with the adjoining Court House and Coles Stores Ltd structures.' It is, however, far less

elaborately decorated with iron lacework. A horse-hitching stand was also included originally to cater to customers who rode to the Post Office. It was believed to have been built by William Isley. In July 1878 (a couple of years after the Postmaster General had been petitioned by 51 'magistrates and others in the District of Bega' to increase his salary), the then-Postmaster, a Mr Charles Harrison, was summonsed by police for allowing his servant to cause a nuisance by allowing dirty water to flow into and stagnate in Carp St. He did not need to travel far to appear in Court (it was located next door, behind the picket fence in the photograph)!



Image: National Library of Australia, 3039602

interesting architecturally than the Post Office building that stood on the same site (albeit with numerous extensions and alterations) from 1877 to 1971, illustrated above: a two-storey building (the upper storey providing a 4-bedroom residence for the Postmaster), with a post-supported verandah extending out over the footpath that was

### ALBION STORES (CHURCH ST)

The Albion Stores building in Church Street (where the CWA Rooms now stand) was constructed in 1883 and opened on 1 April 1884. The business was originally owned by Hughes, Jones & Co. According to advertisements of the time, the new building included 'speaking tubes to enable instant communication', and the company employed 'first-class tradeswomen' to assist those purchasing millinery and dresses. The *Bega Standard* wrote in April 1884: 'We cordially wish Messrs. Hughes, Jones and Co a full reward for their enterprise and energy in having erected the largest premises for such purposes south of Goulburn.'

At that time, Church Street was the town's business centre. All buildings had verandahs reaching to the roadway; and



R.N. Bull & Co Albion Stores, c. 1900-1904 Image: State Library of NSW, FL8855837



the streetscape was certainly much more impressive than it (or any other streetscape in Bega) is today. Several doors up the street from the Albion Stores, and closer to Carp Street, was 'Bega House' where, also in 1884, Mr H.O.T. Cowdroy opened another substantial department store which became known as Cowdroy's Emporium. His advertisements, when the Emporium opened, took an obvious swipe at The Albion Stores, promising that there would be 'no more extortion

after this week'. Cowdroy's Stores' impressive building has survived and now houses Centrelink and Medicare.

The Albion Stores business was run by several companies after Hughes, Jones & Co.: it was A. M. Cansdell & Co's Albion Stores from 1896 to 1900, R. N. Bull & Co's Albion Stores from 1900 to 1904, and Wickham & Co Albion Stores from 1904 to July 1910. The building was destroyed in a spectacular fire in July 1910. **R**



Church St, c.1905. From left, Cowdroy's Emporium; Morton's Photographics and Braine's Books and Stationery; Ziegler's Monumental Masons, D. West, Chemist; The Albion Stores; St John's Church of England (behind the picket fence on the far right). Image: State Library of NSW, FL1692922



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## The Town Needs a Hospital

The 'Old Bega Hospital' (as it is now called) opened in 1889.

The need for a local hospital had been evident for some time: people suffering from accidents or illnesses were dying from lack of proper hospital care and, to receive any ongoing care, often had to rely on the goodwill of others or from the hoteliers who happened to be accommodating the only available doctor in town at the time.

The initial moves to build a hospital in Bega can be traced back to 1876, in the aftermath of a scarlet fever pandemic that had swept through the district, but little action followed because no agreement could be reached locally on where the hospital should be sited.

A Government proclamation, in April 1886, resolved that debate. It would be constructed on five acres of the Bega Permanent Common, on the crest of the hill to the south of town. The local newspapers of the day responded by declaring the site was too far out of town and they predicted that years would elapse before any building was completed.

The town, however, had the good fortune of having an Acting Police Magistrate, Leslie McArthur, recently appointed to the town. He had previously researched the formation, construction and operation of several country public hospitals and was able to present his findings to a well-attended public meeting on 12th June 1886.

Despite there being some who viewed McArthur as a 'Johnnie come lately upstart', the meeting endorsed the choice of site, agreed that the project should proceed with as little delay as possible, vowed that no obstructions should be allowed to interfere with progress, and appointed a fundraising committee.

Local doctor, Montague Evershed, subsequently provided a suggested design for the hospital (which was

ignored) and a government grant to build the hospital was sought.

Two years later the project had advanced to the stage where a board of trustees needed to be appointed and a committee was formed to oversee plans and to call for building tenders.

By June 1887, the Government had approved plans (insisting that plans produced for Taree's hospital be utilized – a strategy that later was to be criticised locally for adding unnecessary cost to the Bega project) and it committed to funding the cost on a £ for £ basis with the local community.

A local contractor, Mr John Malcolm (who built a number of buildings in Canning Street, Bega, including the prominent [still surviving] 'Malcolm House'), won the tender to build the hospital and by January 1889 had completed the building. It comprised a main building of brick, two wooden wings, and two outbuildings for an infection ward and a mortuary. The cost, including extras and furnishings, was £1,175.

The official opening was undertaken by Robert Lucas Tooth, the owner of the Kameruka Estate near Candelo (see [www.bit.ly/Recollections10-](http://www.bit.ly/Recollections10-) ), who donated £50 that day (in addition to £100 he had previously donated, and £150 he would later donate) to help reduce the then community fundraising shortfall.

The hospital was well used and, over a long period, received considerable financial and in-kind support (vegetables, preserves, towels, bed linen, supplies of wood for the hospital boiler, etc.) from the Bega, Candelo, Bemboka and Cobargo communities. A local dairy farmer, Mr C.T. Stiles of 'Kanoona', regularly provided new milking cows to the hospital – a practice that was continued by his family



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until at least 1935, well after Mr Stiles' death in 1916. (The cows were permitted to graze at no charge on the adjacent Town Common. From about 1925, Mr J.B. D'Arcy was also regularly provided milking cows to the hospital.)

In 1904 the wooden western wing of the hospital was

replaced and extended. In 1908 the eastern wing was replaced and extended. A new fever ward was built in 1912 to replace the original structure that had, by then, been destroyed by white ants. In 1914 a new fuel kitchen store boiler was added to provide hot water. In 1918 town gas



The Old Bega Hospital in 1988



and after the May 2004 fire.



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was connected to the hospital, replacing an old (and costly) carbide lighting system.

Also, in 1918, the hospital was gazetted as a nurses' training school, providing an employment boost to Bega.

Enhancements to the hospital continued as finance became available. An x-ray unit and electric lighting were installed in 1920. A septic sewerage system was added in 1923 (coinciding with a diphtheria epidemic in the area) and a new sterilizing unit was installed in 1924.

In 1924, the hospital purchased a Ford car to replace its horse and buggy. (One of the hospital's horses had been affectionately known as 'Day and Night', because it worked for the hospital during the day and was used by nurses to visit their boyfriends at night!) In 1928 new nurses' quarters at the hospital were completed, allowing the hospital's isolation ward which had been used to house nurses to again be used as an isolation ward.

Local economic challenges in 1928, followed by the Great Depression, resulted in financial challenges for the hospital for a number of years. A community Hospital Contribution Scheme was introduced to bolster income, guaranteeing subscribers access to free hospital treatment. (This scheme continued to successfully operate until 1946.)

Ever-increasing demand on the hospital's services resulted in three times the number of patients being treated

in 1937 than had been treated just a decade earlier.

In 1940, the hospital was connected to the town's water supply, replacing the then-supply from a hospital well.

In 1946, construction of new nurses' quarters was completed. These were located 3km away, adjacent to the site of a proposed new (since replaced) hospital that was to open 10 years later, and necessitating a taxi service to be provided, at considerable expense, by the hospital to all nurses at the beginning and end of each shift. This was justified 'because the staff could not be allowed to live a moment longer than was absolutely necessary under the deplorable conditions at the old home, with three nurses using one bedroom and staying on verandahs.' The old nurses' quarters were transformed into the hospital's maternity ward! (And, perhaps unsurprisingly, two of the contracted taxi drivers, Bob Scott and Billy Flood, ended up marrying hospital nurses who were also regular passengers in their taxis.)

The 'Old Bega Hospital' finally closed on 2nd July 1956 after the new Bega Hospital had been completed.

The question, then, became what to do with the old facility. The Hospital Board recommended it be used for (a) a boys' hostel (b) an agricultural farm or (c) an old people's home.

From 1957 to the mid-1980s the buildings and site served as a NSW Department of Agriculture experimental farm and as a hostel for boys attending Bega High School (a Prospectus from the time boasted 'The boys are housed in a large brick building surrounded by farmlands, almost two miles from the school, which is well appointed with amenities. A bus takes the boys back and forth to school each day. An attractive feature for the boys is the surrounding Bega High

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School farm of over 210 acres, where agriculture is taught. A considerable amount of money has been expended on providing comfortable and cheerful quarters for the boys. A resident house master, a member of the staff of the Bega High School, ensures discipline, whilst a resident matron cares for the well-being of the boys as housekeeper'; the high school girls were accommodated in Littleton House, a large family home that had previously been a private girls' school, at the other end of town in Bega Street), before gradually falling into disrepair.

In 1990, the site became a Crown Reserve 'for preservation of historical sites and buildings and community purposes' and the old hospital and its grounds and buildings were used by a variety of community arts and childcare groups, a café, and a community radio station.

On the night of 2nd May 2004 (at which time 42 community groups were utilising the old Hospital and grounds) the main building of the old Hospital caught fire, severely damaging the roof, floors and windows, but leaving most of the brickwork, including the chimneys and most of the outbuildings, intact. The building was not insured.

Since then, The Friends of the Old Bega Hospital have been working to have the Old Bega Hospital (which is listed on the Australian Institute of Architects' Register of Significant Architecture in NSW and on Bega Valley Shire's Schedule of significant heritage items) restored. 

Sources: C.S. Day's history of Old Bega Hospital at C.S. Day at <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=1100009>; information from The Friends of the Old Bega Hospital

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Trove is every Australian historian's friend. In fact, their very best friend. We use it often when researching ideas for inclusion in 'Recollections'. Since it 'was launched in December 2009, the bright idea of National Library of Australia staff' (as a search of Trove reveals), Trove has greatly simplified the process of searching for information from our past, and enables history research to be undertaken at any hour of the day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks of the year. (Oh, if only all Australian libraries and museums that are the repositories of historical documents were similarly accessible!). Sydney journalist and author, Richard Glover, recently identified another valuable use for Trove in his column in the Sydney Morning Herald on January 9th 2021:

## WHO LIVED AT YOUR PLACE? A PONY LIVED AT MINE

*For those of curious mind, Trove is a treasure.*

Here's my latest lockdown game, playable by as few as one person, alone at a computer, and perfect for those difficult times. It's called Lockdown House Hunt and all you need is the address of a house that's been around for a while – your own, that of someone famous, or a place down the road.

The game started a week ago when I was planning a visit to Concord. It was there, in a backyard shed, that Mervyn Victor Richardson created the first prototype of his rotary lawnmower, famously using an old jam tin as the petrol tank and a billy cart to provide the wheels.

I had an evil thought: what if the current owners of the place have failed to keep a well-trimmed front lawn? Sure, I'm easily amused, but, it's only down the road, and maybe worth a detour. It would give me a story to tell Jocasta, who is also easily amused.

To find the exact address, I consulted Trove, the National Library's online database of Australian newspapers. Trove is searchable, so the word "Victa", and a 1950s date range, reveals classified advertisements in *The Sydney Morning Herald* in which Mervyn Victor Richardson was selling the machine from his home workshop, "open all day Saturday".

I now had an accurate address to whack into Google. Instant disappointment. It emerges the house was demolished in 2018 and replaced with a duplex – seemingly without any concern, or even awareness, of its place in industrial history. The front gardens of both new properties are entirely paved, so not much role for the device that was created there.

I find this less amusing than the overgrown lawn I was hoping for, but, by now, I'm gripped by Trove. I'd used it before but hadn't realized the spectacular results available once you search for a street address. Type one in, enclosed by quotation marks, and suddenly the smallest events are

revealed – items for sale, competitions won, letters to the editor from long ago.

Once started, I can't stop. I begin with my own address, a house built in the early 1900s. Trove throws up two hits – both entrancing. In 1914, the then-resident advertised in the *Herald* that he had a pony and sulky for sale. The pony was 13-14 hands and was going "cheap". Presumably, the pony lived in our backyard. Maybe one day, digging up weeds, I'll find a rusty horseshoe and will now know the height of its owner.

The second mention came in December, 1931. The Holbrooks company, producer of various condiments, was running a sales campaign. Three people had been hired and instructed to visit 10,000 homes in NSW, knocking on doors to ask if the household was equipped with one of the company's products – Worcestershire Sauce, No 2 Sauce or Pure Malt Vinegar. If you could prove you had a bottle, they'd give you 10 shillings' worth of goods; if you had all three, they'd hand over a cheque for ONE GUINEA (the capital letters as featured in the *Herald*).

Trove is silent as to which of the products was in use in our house, back in 1931, but at least one of them was. I'd like to think it was the Holbrooks Worcestershire, as the house's kitchen still features a bottle of the stuff.


If it works for my house, what about others? I decide to check the childhood homes of past prime ministers, as the address is generally listed in their memoirs. I strike out with Paul Keating's childhood home in Bankstown, but Trove is more helpful when it comes to John Howard. His childhood home – 25 William Street, Earlwood – is now the site of a KFC franchise, but back in the 1940s, the address twice featured in the pages of the *Sydney Sun*.

***I decide to check  
the childhood  
homes of past  
prime ministers.***

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In both cases, it was a competition victory for Stanley Howard, John's older brother. He won in 1941 for submitting a joke to the "Let's Have Some Fun" column in that paper, and again in 1945 for submitting a magic trick to the same newspaper's "Tricks Time".

I end the day in a Trove frenzy. The house in Adelaide in which the Hills Hoist was invented by Lance Hill is still standing but, staring at Google's satellite image, I can see no Hills Hoist in the backyard. What an affront!

Talking about Adelaide, Julia Gillard's childhood home, I discover, was previously the residence of one Marion Carnegie who, at age 10, wrote to the local paper requesting a penpal in Norway, the US or South Africa. She wanted someone who, like her, was 10 years old.

Of course, having discovered the name "Marion Carnegie", you can then use Trove to reveal if she did anything else newsworthy. Oh, here it is: at age six, she presented a bouquet to Lady Norrie, wife of the South Australian governor, to

mark a visit to the local school. There's even a photograph of Marion, page three of the Adelaide *Advertiser*, her back to the camera, as Lady Norrie beams down.

Could it be that lockdown has finally sent me mad, or could Lockdown House Hunt, and its endless accompanying searches, prove a winner for the times? **R**

Many thanks to Richard Glover for kindly permitting us to reproduce this article .

If you live in Bega and decide to use Trove to also search your home address, and then discover anything interesting, please let us know. We are currently attempting to document the history of as many properties as possible in this town. [However searching Trove for this information may not be all that successful because, regrettably, a number of major South Coast newspapers, including the Bega District News, are still to be digitized and added to Trove's collection – a continuing major frustration to local historians. But 'Recollections' is there!]

## THREE NOT-TO-BE-MISSED EVENTS IN APRIL

- \* The 2019–20 South Coast bushfires and then Covid-19 resulted in the postponement, over a year ago, of our **'Back to the Swinging 1960s'** presentation of the fabulous music from that era. But it's now back on – with just ONE PERFORMANCE featuring Sam Stevenson – at Club Sapphire in Merimbula on **TUESDAY 20th APRIL** at 2pm. It's FREE and afternoon tea is included. Seats are strictly limited. **ADVANCE BOOKINGS ARE ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL** – at 0448 160 852.



Sam Stevenson performing at the 'Band Together' concert following the devastating 2018 Tathra bushfire.

- \* South Coast History Society and Bega Valley Historical Society recently jointly organized a **history-based bus tour of Bega township**. The available seats filled rapidly and an outstandingly successful trip was held at the end of February. As a result of the overwhelming interest in this activity, two additional 90-minute bus tours have now been scheduled for April. One is already full. Some seats – as we go to press – are still available on the second bus leaving at 10.30am on **THURSDAY 22nd APRIL**. If you'd like to join this tour, call us on 0448 160 852 to reserve your seat. Morning tea will be included from 10am, before the bus departs.



All aboard the Bega Bus

- \* South Coast History Society will also be represented at Bega Shire Council's **'Never too Late to Make It'** Expo on **SATURDAY 10th APRIL** at Bega Commemorative Civic Centre from 10am to 3pm. This event is part of the 2021 NSW Seniors Festival. Admission is free. Please join us on this occasion as we further promote the area's interesting, unique history. **R**

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- ✓ Elegance – smaller lift 1-2 person, 170 kg
- ✓ Elegance Plus – Larger lift 1-2 person comfortably or 1 Person and wheelchair, 220 kg
- ✓ See Compact Home Lifts brochure on web site or South Coast Lifts can mail a brochure and standard costing to your home for your convenience

Call today for a Brochure or an obligation-free Assessment & Quote

**(02) 4476 7977**

<http://www.southcoastlifts.com.au>

(Member of Lift Engineering Society of Australia)

*"We bought a Compact Home Lift because it has allowed us to stay in our home. It was a far cheaper solution when compared with the cost of moving house" — George, 66*

*"We looked at buying a stairlift but made the right decision choosing a Compact Home Lift. It has exceeded all our expectations" — Pippa, 56*