

South Coast History Society Inc.

Recollections

June–July 2021

Issue 28

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Lifeline

Our intriguing local history...EXPOSED !



Eden's Hotel Australasia in the early 20th century.

Image: National Library of Australia Nla.obj-148656100

Saving Hotel Australasia

In 1957 the facade of the Hotel Australasia in Eden was 'modernised' (see photograph page 5). It was part of a push at the time to update the look of Imlay Street, the main road through the Eden CBD.

A concrete slab verandah and concrete steps were installed on the street level, a suspended concrete balcony with rendered brick balustrades was installed on the first floor, and a suspended concrete parapet was installed above that. The whole look of the original 1904 Hotel Australasia was changed. It simply became (as it was subsequently described) 'a two-storey cement rendered brick structure'.

Fast forward 64 years, and the Hotel Australasia's original façade is being restored.

(It's actually a miracle that this is now happening at all. In the mid-2010s, demolition trucks were travelling down

Brown Mountain headed to the Hotel Australasia when the then owner had a last-minute change of mind and turned them away. Bega Valley Shire Council, responding to the local community's calls for the Hotel to be saved, bought the building in 2016. They then sold it to Neil Rankin [the area's most prominent commercial builder] in 2020, and he is now restoring the exterior of the building to its original condition.)

As this issue of 'Recollections' goes to print, there are tantalizing glimpses of the restored exterior of the Hotel jutting above the surrounding scaffolding and its builder's curtain: simple, elegant, original lines along the top of the building; the 'Australasia 1904' date panel; ornate finials on top of the roof. (When you read this, that curtain and the scaffolding may well have been removed, revealing Rankin's

**Fantastic
Reads**

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Neil Rankin at the Hotel Australasia's yet-to-be restored Kauri pine staircase

stunning restoration of this historic street frontage.) Internally, however, building work is still far from complete.

Neil Rankin promised to restore the exterior of the Hotel to 'within a millimetre of the original'. This has proven to be a real challenge.

We asked him about the condition of the building he acquired in 2020.

He indicated that much of the original Hotel Australasia building was structurally sound. But, it had been significantly altered on numerous occasions in the 105 years that it had operated as a hotel.

A mish-mash of alterations and new buildings had been added over time, particularly at the rear of the hotel. Toilets, a bottle shop, a barbecue area, storage areas, a caretaker's cottage, a kitchen and restaurant (some utilising what were originally the hotel's stables), a garden have now all gone – revealing, for example, three levels of concrete slab that had been laid one on top of the other as the area was progressively repurposed. And, providing Neil with 'beer money for months', he even discovered \$250 in notes and a bucketful of coins in an old barbecue shed that he demolished!

The removal of wall coverings, ceilings and floorings within the hotel revealed a lot about the original building. Doorways and windows were discovered that had been plastered-over; the original colours of walls were revealed as later coverings were removed; entire attractive sandstock brick walls that had once been rendered or painted over were found. (Examples of these alterations are clearly evident in the accompanying photographs: for example, compare the right-hand front corner of the early 1900s building with that of the 2020s building that Neil acquired.)

When Neil took possession of the building in 2020, he also acquired many of the hotel's furnishings – including

beds (still made up, bedspreads in place!), crockery and photographs. And under floor coverings he discovered old newspapers (one including advice that 'Doctors surely would find their patients less trying if they permitted them to smoke before entering the consulting room!') along with a 1937 edition of the Australian Women's Weekly (its cover is to be displayed in the new interior of the hotel).

'Treasures' included a 1920s uranium glass art déco style ceiling light that was hidden away on the top shelf of a pantry. Its discovery prompted Neil to then buy about 40 other period light fittings that will be installed within the building. (These will be one of the few concessions to a totally faithful reconstruction of the original hotel. The hotel's lights were originally oil lamps, which were later replaced by gas lamps, which were then replaced by electric lights in 1922.)

Numerous old photographs of the Hotel were among other 'treasures'. These historic photographs, along with others given to Neil by local residents, have proven to be an unbelievably valuable resource as the restoration work has progressed. Templates for the verandah posts were able to be produced by copying exactly the shapes of the original posts depicted in the photographs; and Neil has even been able to ensure that the heights of reconstructed doorways are true to the originals by counting the number of courses of bricks alongside the doorways that were revealed in these old photographs.

As much of the material as possible from the original building has been used in its restoration. All necessary modern replacement materials have been carefully selected to be as close to the originals as possible – even if this has meant that aged timber, for example, had to be brought from demolition sites in Brisbane Showground or from the old Welshpool Wharf in Victoria. Interestingly, Facebook Marketplace has also proven to be a valuable source of appropriate materials.



Tantalising glimpses of the Hotel Australasia's restored finials and date panel above the scaffolding and the builder's curtain.



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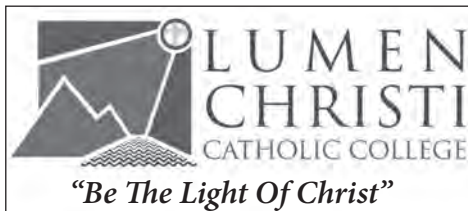
Past issues are at bit.ly/RecollectionsX where X is the issue number (1 to 27, except issue 3 which is 3- and issue 10 which is 10-)





The first-floor balcony is restored to its original grandeur

To page 4, please



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Busy ... Busy ... Busy

The South Coast History Society has been exceptionally busy lately – sharing our fascinating history, and going in to bat to help preserve our important local heritage.

Our 'Back to the Swinging 1960s' presentation in Merimbula was very well-attended with several hundred people enjoying the fabulous music of the 1960s, superbly presented by local musician Sam Stevenson, whilst also being reminded of some of the extraordinary events that made the 1960s such an unusual and historically-important era.

We'd originally planned to run a single '90-minute Whizz Through Bega Town's Fascinating 170-year History' bus tour... but it soon became apparent that four tours would be needed



Sam Stevenson entertaining at South Coast History Society's 'Back to the Swinging 1960s' concert. Photo courtesy Bega District News

to meet the demand for seats...and even then, we couldn't seat everyone who wanted to join us. It seems many, many of our passengers went home and urged their friends not



All Aboard Bega's History Bus!

to miss the next bus. So, we'll schedule the tour again later in the year, once we've all had a chance to catch our breaths! And, following repeated requests, later in the year we'll also definitely organise a walking tour of Bega's Carp Street's intriguing history ... and we may also organize a couple of other bus tours, aimed to be of particular interest to locals, to other historic areas along the South Coast. Details will be outlined in future issues of 'Recollections'.

We've also given talks in recent months to a number of school classes, to seniors' groups, to service clubs, to a Chamber of Commerce, and even addressed a meeting of Bega Valley Shire Council. We were also exhibitors at a 'Never Too Late to Make It' Expo, hosted a tour for attendees at the recent CWA State Conference in Bega, and took up cudgels to help preserve our history and heritage (see page 8).

Somehow, we've still found time to put together this issue of 'Recollections', which we hope you'll enjoy reading.

Occasionally Neil 'got lucky'. He discovered identical moulds for the ornate decoration that had adorned the front verandah were available at Central Foundry in Mascot, so he was able to easily secure replacement decorative features from them (albeit in aluminium, not in the original cast iron, because Central Foundry no longer works with ferrous metals; however, these feature panels will, when they are in position, be indistinguishable from the originals).

When asked about the challenges of restoring an old building, such as this, Neil revealed that he has spent more money on obtaining expert advice and specifications from consultants than he will spend on materials for the building. This was necessary, he indicated, to obtain all the approvals required for the project to be successfully completed.

Some of these specifications related to major works – such as installing necessary (today) fire sprinkler systems in a building that was never designed to include fire sprinklers. To a layman, other (recently introduced) requirements appear to be ridiculously obstructive – like having to widen a doorway by a mere 50mm to comply with today's regulations, which necessitated courses and courses of brickwork on either side of the doorway having to be removed and then having to be re-laid...which, in turn, meant that the original door could not be reused – all effectively contributing to a lessening of the overall heritage integrity of the building (not to mention adding significant cost to the project!).

Work on restoring the building has been slow. The reason, as Rankin explained, is that a team of only four or five very exceptionally skilled tradesmen has been engaged to sympathetically peel away 117 years of building, repairs



Removing the reinforced suspended concrete parapet that had been installed in the 1950s from the restored façade of Eden's historic Hotel Australasia

and alterations, and then faithfully rebuild or restore the hotel. 'It's simply not the sort of job that can be undertaken quickly by the usual large teams of builders,' he explained.

Eden's Hotel Australasia

Eden's Hotel Australasia appears to have always been looked upon as the town's 'jewel in the crown'.

In 1904 a Mrs Sabina Pike paid £500 for a one-acre lot 'in a commanding position' at the top of town. Her intention was to erect 'a large up to date' 43-room brick hotel in anticipation of Twofold Bay becoming the National Capital's port.

Her builder erected brick kilns near the town cemetery because good supplies of local clay were available there. A sawmill was erected at Lake Curalo, just north of the town, to supply the timber that the building would require.

'Quite a small army of men' were engaged to erect the hotel. The ground floor was completed in April 1905 and the hotel opened its doors in early January 1906.

It was to be described by the Illawarra & South Coast Steam Navigation Company as 'one of the finest hotels in the state'. After the Australian Governor-General, Lord Northcote, stayed at the Hotel in 1907 and NSW Governor, Sir Harry Rawson, visited it in 1908, Mrs Pike was advertising Eden's Hotel Australasia as having 'the Patronage of his Excellency Lord Northcote, late Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, and his Excellency Sir Harry Rawson, late State Governor of New South Wales.'

Mrs Pike retained ownership of the hotel until 1923. From then, until it abruptly closed in May 2010, the Hotel Australasia had a succession of owners who regularly extended, altered and renovated the building. The most dramatic of its transformations occurred in the 1950s when its exterior was given a brutalist 'modern' update.

Even though the hotel played important roles in the history

of and social fabric of Eden it had never been heritage listed. (In 1945, for example, Eden's Hotel Australasia and Great Southern Hotel were both declared 'black' by the local community for allegedly overcharging and not always being open when advertised – and many locals now believe that this community action led to the establishment of the Eden Fishermen's Club.) So, after the hotel closed in 2010, its demolition became a real possibility – until Council responded to community pressure and bought the property.

Council, amid considerable controversy, ultimately sold the building and site to Neil Rankin (who had promised to restore and return the façade of the building to its original 1906 condition) at a price that enabled the necessary restoration work to realistically be undertaken. (Neil believes other historically-important buildings that Council currently owns in the Shire – such as the 1860s Court House/Police Station complex in Pambula and the 1860s Commercial Bank building in Bega – could also be restored and be usefully repurposed if they too were made available at similarly attractive prices.)

Work on the exterior of the building is almost complete. Repurposing the interior is Neil Rankin's next challenge: much of it (such as the impressive kauri pine staircase and the Wunderlich pressed metal ceilings) will be restored, some of it will be reconfigured (for example, upstairs there are fifteen very small bedrooms with shared bathroom facilities that will be transformed into two, more practical, large family holiday units). A microbrewery and restaurant will have prominent positions on the ground floor. **R**

From the outset, Neil Rankin has declined to set a completion date for the project or limit the amount of money he is prepared to spend restoring the hotel. 'When that surrounding curtain comes down – whenever that may be – nothing between Sydney and Melbourne will be as magnificent as this Hotel Australasia building,' he said. 'And it will cost whatever it is going to cost, because this project is my equivalent of other peoples' challenge in restoring an old car. They start with a budget in mind of say \$20,000, and when they reach that point any additional cost is not really a consideration because they then simply must finish their restoration project to their complete satisfaction.'



The brutalist 1950s façade of Eden's Hotel Australasia

When the Hotel Australasia was opened in 1906 the *Eden Observer* and *South Coast Advocate* wrote it was 'a credit to the contractor ... and an ornament to the town.' Similar sentiments are bound to be expressed when the restored Hotel Australasia reopens its doors.

Peter Lacey

(This article resulted from a suggestion from a 'Recollections' reader who enquired about the challenges of restoring heritage buildings. I thank Neil Rankin for his considerable assistance in preparing this piece. Neil has an enormous collection of high-quality photographs depicting the history of the Hotel and illustrating the rebuild of this 'Eden jewel', and it would be very appropriate if a relatively small additional amount could now be found to commission a suitably qualified author [someone like Lenore Coltheart who produced the very impressive 'The Timber Truss Bridge Book'] to permanently document, in a similarly-impressive coffee table-style book, the history of and details of the resurrection of the Hotel Australasia. **PL**)

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More Hotel Makeovers



The Central Hotel, Bega

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The Central Hotel in Gipps St, Bega, and the Bank Hotel in Church St, Bega, received similar brutalist makeovers in the mid twentieth century and, thereby, lost much of their original street-appeal – as these photos of the Central Hotel illustrate.



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Preserving Our History

Events over the past 12 months have dramatically highlighted the need to digitise as many local histories as possible, and then to make these widely-available on the internet – and for this to happen as soon as possible.

First, digitizing histories will be of **immense** value to historians – not just now, but for centuries to come. And in doing so, we will simply be moving from using now-outdated 18th, 19th and early 20th century ways of recording and storing history and history sources to adopting modern, 21st century thinking and employing up-to-date (21st century) technology and now widely-used (21st century) methods of making information accessible. And, it will be an acceptance today that this is how history will be routinely recorded and will be made accessible into the future.

The recent bushfires on the South Coast demonstrated, once again, how threatened our local histories are ... 'histories' in this case including both history studies from the past (be they published or unpublished) and the all-important source documents relating to our history (things such as letters, business records, meeting minutes, etc.). These histories are scattered throughout the South Coast area – some in libraries or museums, but many extremely valuable ones also in family libraries or archives.

Most of these local histories and source documents are on paper – but paper is not a permanent medium. It degrades, is prone to insect and fungal attack, burns easily and is seriously affected by moisture. And, in many cases (for example, histories and documents held by old-established

families throughout the South Coast), if these (paper) histories were to be destroyed (which, inevitably they will be, as were many during the recent bushfires!) then they will be effectively lost forever. That, simply, is tragic.

The irony is that obtaining digital copies of these histories is so easy – as easy as photostating or taking a digital photograph. And then we will have that permanent digitized 'back-up' copy, with all the information it contains, available forever.

The recent, Covid19-caused, prolonged closure of all libraries and all museums also dramatically highlighted how inconvenient and outdated it is to only make history (and other books or documents) accessible when libraries and museums are open. Unfortunately, these are the only places where many local histories, many documents are stored – so if the library or museum is not open, then the information being sought is simply not available. Again, outdated 19th and 20th century thinking needs to be replaced – and access to our histories (which, after all, are public property!) should now be available to the general public 24 hours a day, 7 days a week via the internet.

Again, this is an easy process. The National Library of Australia's remarkable *Trove* facility makes many documents (for example, copies of many newspapers, copies of hundreds of thousands of photographs) instantly available via the internet; local libraries and museums already have some documents (but only a relative few) available via their websites; and, as the Tomakin Community Association recently demonstrated (see '*Recollections*' issue 20) [and



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South Coast History Society repeatedly demonstrates with 'Recollections', it's an extremely easy process to make histories and documents readily available, at no cost, utilising widely-used internet sharing facilities such as *Bitly*.

Basically, what is needed, and what we are now seeking, is funding to start the process of digitising (i.e. electronically copying and storing) as many South Coast histories and historic documents as possible so that these can immediately be uploaded to (and be available on) the internet. If South Coast History Society were to receive that funding, we'd immediately employ someone or some people to get the work underway.

The digitized copies of local histories would all be available (at no charge) to local libraries and museums to add to their on-line collections – so they too would benefit from increasing their collections, and would be providing greater service to their 'customers'. And the (paper) originals would simply remain with their current 'owners'.

So, who should be providing the funding to start digitizing our local histories? Public funding (from Commonwealth or State governments, from local Councils) would be the ideal but, being realistic, it's more likely to come from grant(s), or from a philanthropic organization or individual that appreciates the need for and benefits that will flow from digitization of our histories.

Oh, to be a rich man ... and to see this dream of digitizing all our local history being realised!

Peter Lacey

A TRAGIC POSTSCRIPT: Unbeknown to South Coast History Society (because only Councils could apply), the NSW Government recently offered regional Councils (including Eurobodalla and Bega Valley Shire Councils) at total of \$1.7 MILLION for digitization of history and heritage collections. One Council received \$478,000, another \$309,000. Unbelievably, neither Eurobodalla Shire Council nor Bega Valley Shire Council bothered applying for these substantial grants. (If you want to know their pathetic excuses, do contact me). Come on guys and gals at these Councils – our history & heritage, the history & heritage that YOU are meant to be striving to preserve, deserves a LOT better.

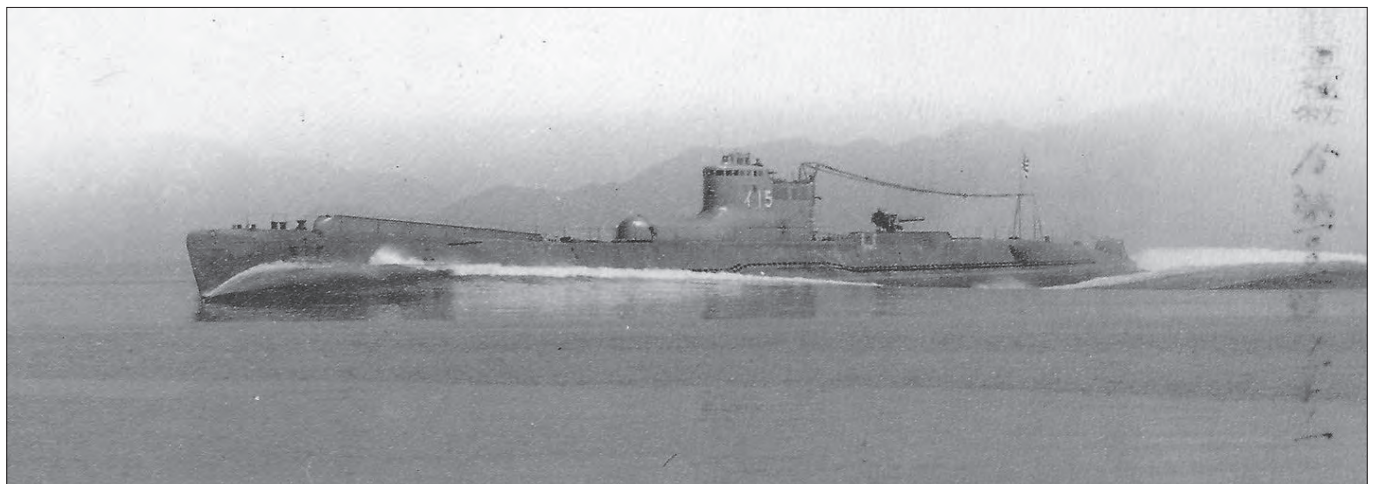
On a more positive note, Bega Valley Shire Councillors (at the urging of Councillor Cathy Griff – thank you Cathy!) have accepted that the renaming of Bridge Street, Bega as Jacksonia Grove (described in the last issue of *Recollections* as 'an unwarranted and unnecessary example of local history vandalism') was unfortunate, and have resolved to reinstate its Bridge Street name. A significant victory for the preservation of local history; a victory for common sense! **R**

1942: Preparing for Invasion

In 1942 there was a serious fear that the Japanese would invade Australia – even though much of the information supporting the possibility was withheld from the Australian public. The first and deadliest attack on the Australian mainland occurred on the morning of 19th February 1942 when 242 Japanese aircraft bombed Darwin, resulting in at least 235 deaths. Over the next two years there were 111 Japanese attacks on the Australian mainland, outlying islands and coastal shipping. At that time, 13 Japanese submarines were known to be operating off the south-east coast of Australia. They sank 17 Allied ships, 12 of which were Australian ships. They were operating in the area to disrupt coastal shipping – particularly those transporting

raw materials and war supplies from Whyalla in South Australia (the port from which iron ore from Iron Knob was shipped, the site of a BHP blast furnace and steel mill, and the location of a major shipyard) to the eastern seaboard. There were also expectations that, if the Japanese were to decide to attack and attempt to capture the major industrial/urban Newcastle-Sydney-Wollongong conglomerate, troops would be landed on the sparsely populated – and therefore, likely, lightly defended – NSW South Coast.

So, two plans of action were implemented: preparations were made to evacuate residents from the area to the Monaro and Southern Highlands and to simultaneously initiate actions that would slow any advance by the invading



Japanese B1-type I-15 Class submarine—these submarines launched midget submarines, float planes, and torpedoes in Australian waters. Source: Wikipedia Commons

Japanese (this, it was hoped, would allow the Australian military forces time to mount a defence) and a system of monitoring sea and air activity in the area was established.

Mallacoota (just south of the border with New South Wales) and Moruya were key locations in that coastal intelligence network. Airfields were located near both towns and associated with them were Advanced Operations Bases from which coastal shipping and air activity was monitored and associated intelligence was collated (see adjacent story).


A network of 'coast watchers' was also established. A Volunteer Air Observers Corp was formed in 1941 to provide the RAAF with information about aircraft sighted near and above Australia (the Japanese submarines that operated off the NSW South Coast were large submarines, and some carried float planes, so Japanese air activity in this area was not inconceivable). The VAOC also assumed general coast watching and weather reporting roles as the war progressed.

Measures were taken to minimize damage from air attack. For example, bunkers at Moruya and Mallacoota were built into the ground to provide some protection from bombing, and concrete pillboxes were constructed in some locations to serve the same purpose. Some air raid trenches were also dug – there was certainly one in the grounds across the street from Bega Intermediate High School to provide

protection to its students.

If an invasion actually occurred, the civilian population along the South Coast was to be rapidly evacuated to the Southern Highlands and the Monaro. Detailed planning for this was undertaken (see www.bit.ly/Recollections4).

Simultaneously a 'scorched earth' policy was to be implemented to ensure that anything of potential use to the invaders was destroyed and their advance made as difficult as possible. Explosives were placed in South Coast wharves, bridges and along roads that would destroy these structures; tank traps (even as rudimentary as piling logs together) were constructed; small boats were corralled and then guarded in places such as Blackfellows Lagoon (actually a branch of the Bega River) near Kalaru where they could be rapidly destroyed if necessary.

Thankfully, no invasion occurred. There was some loss of coastal shipping (outlined at www.bit.ly/Recollections2), there were aircraft losses (none whilst engaged in action with the enemy)...and there were numerous reports of parties of Japanese coming ashore on the South Coast from submarines to replenish food and water supplies – most of which were, at least officially, dismissed as nothing more than 'subversive rumour'. 

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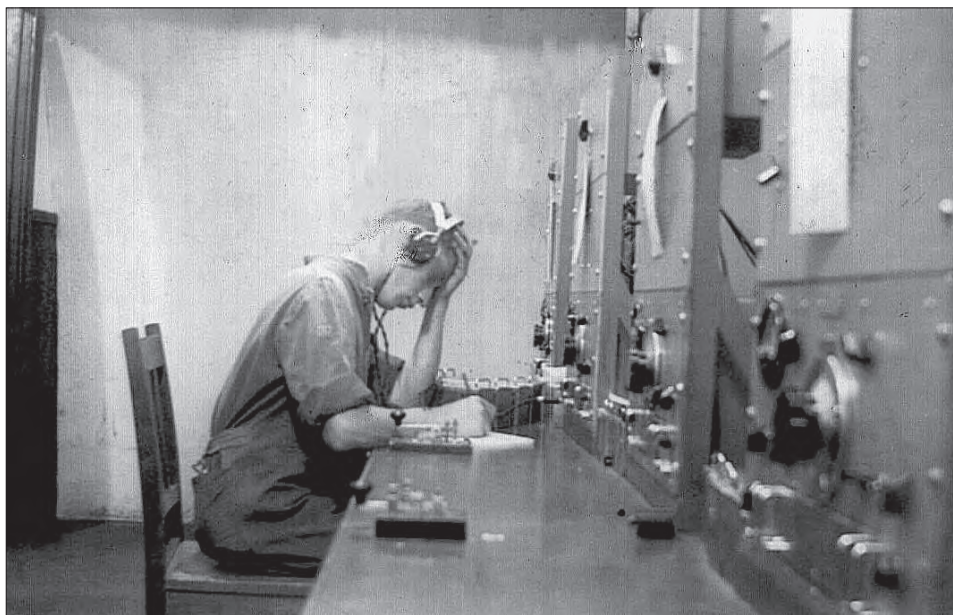
The Mallacoota Bunker

Just before the outbreak of World War II a RAAF landing ground was constructed on the outskirts of Mallacoota. It was a facility that provided refuelling, rearming and maintenance of aircraft. At the height of its operation, 70 servicemen were based at the landing ground.

The Mallacoota landing ground was the northern link for a wider RAAF presence in Victoria with larger, war-training aerodromes operating at, for example, Bairnsdale, West Sale and East Sale. The Mallacoota landing ground effectively extended the operational range of aircraft based further afield that were engaged in coastal reconnaissance and, occasionally, provided some protection to coastal shipping. Avro Ansons and later Beauforts were the main aircraft to use the facility.

A sea plane base was also located on the lake at Mallacoota. No 9 Squadron Detachment Operations operated five Seagull V planes that performed patrols in the vicinity of Gabo Island, and had it also had maintenance facilities at this base. Mallacoota was also chosen as the site for this northern landing ground because it was close to a significant RAAF Radar Station on Gabo Island.

Surrounding the landing strip were three bunkers. The largest of these (which today is Mallacoota's interesting World War II Operations Bunker Museum) was a regional headquarters for RAAF coastal intelligence. Its main purpose was to keep Australia's shipping lanes open. Shifts each of 9 men were employed 24-hours a day to listen to coastal shipping and aircraft and to collate intelligence that



Radio operator working at Mallacoota Bunker during World War II. Image courtesy of the Mallacoota & District Historical Society.

was then sent to East Sale and to the War Cabinet Room in Melbourne from a transmission station in a second of the base's bunkers.

The facility was a high security installation so it was heavily guarded. High explosive charges were laid in the surrounding area enabling it to be destroyed in the event of enemy invasion. To provide some protection from possible air attack, the main Advanced Operations Base bunker was constructed underground.

An impressive museum, operated by the Mallacoota and District Historical Society, now operates from the Advanced Operations Base bunker.

Around half of the museum is devoted to the original use of the building and associated World War II activity in the area. The remainder is local history-focused, providing details and displaying artefacts relating to the district's pioneers and early settlers, outlining the development of Mallacoota and examining the role of tourism in Mallacoota's history, telling the stories of the many nearby shipwrecks.

The museum is well-worth visiting. It is open on Tuesdays from 9.30am to 11.30am and on Sundays from 1pm to 3pm. Further information is available at www.mallacootabunker.com.au

* * * * *

On Anzac Day this year, an Honour Stone was unveiled outside one of the bunkers near Moruya Airport. It is a scaled-down version of the 20-tonne Honour Stone that was erected in 1927, using blocks of granite from Moruya, to form the Cenotaph in Sydney's Martin Place. This new Moruya Honour Stone was erected to especially remember the three Merchant Seamen and eight RAAF members who lost their lives in World War II near Moruya. **R**



The Mallacoota Bunker, well-hidden in bushland near the Mallacoota Landing Ground.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN

by Ian W. Shaw

PANDEMIC: The Spanish Flu in Australia 1918-1920

by Ian W. Shaw

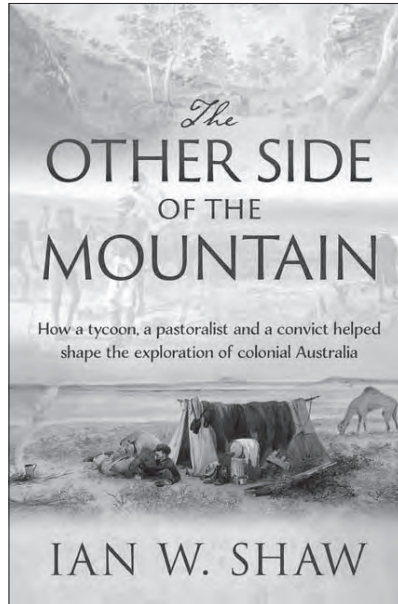
Quite by coincidence, I recently purchased two books by Australian historian Ian W. Shaw that were published last year. I had not, at the time, remembered that I had previously read and really enjoyed his 'well-written yarn about a fascinating World War II challenge... that should be read by everyone with any interest in NSW South Coast history' – 'The Rag Tag Fleet'. (It was reviewed in Recollections 5, which is available at www.bit.ly/Recollections5).

'The Other Side of the Mountain: How a tycoon, a pastoralist and a convict helped shape the exploitation of colonial Australia' is presented as 'the enthralling stories of three very different men on the wild Australian frontier'. I suggest, however, it's more of a collection of three mildly interesting stories about three 'dreamers' in rural areas of Australia, all of whom ended up becoming 'losers'.

One story is about a runaway convict who dreamed of leading a successful rebellion against the NSW convict system and who – until he was quickly captured and, very soon thereafter, was hanged in Bathurst – led a small gang

of bushrangers known as The Ribbon Boys. A second story is about a settler in rural South Australia who dreamed of exploring Australia's interior using a camel (the first time a camel had been used by a party of Australian explorers) and who, a month into the expedition (but not a great distance from where he had set out), accidentally shot himself and subsequently died from his wounds. The third story is of a pastoralist who dreamed of developing a huge property in far north Queensland and who, along with his band of fellow-settlers, was massacred by local Aboriginals.

These are stories that, undoubtedly, are well-known to local historians in each of their local areas and are stories that, undoubtedly, are worth telling, but – sorry – I just could not get excited by their being presented together to make up this book. (I kept expecting there would be some strong, logical 'link' that would tie the three stories together, but that was missing.) And, overlaying this, were numerous, very annoying typographical errors scattered throughout the book. It, obviously, had not been adequately proof-read.



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In direct contrast, 'Pandemic' is a very interesting book. Basically, it traces the progression of the pneumonic influenza pandemic (commonly known as the 'Spanish flu') in Australia between 1918 and 1920 and details how the community (governments, other authorities and the general public) dealt with it.

In essence, the approach to combatting the pandemic was not all that different to the way the Covid-19 pandemic has been handled: identification of those who were infected, placing them in isolation, treating them as best the medical and general communities were able, closing borders between states, banning group gatherings, developing and rolling out a vaccine (newly-formed CSL rapidly developed a vaccine they called Coryza, which in NSW was produced under licence in the medical laboratories of Royal Prince Alfred Hospital).

But there were differences, too. For example, in NSW neighbourhoods, community-based Influenza Relief Depots were established which distributed 'SOS Cards' locally (these were to be displayed in front windows of homes, when necessary – SOS being printed on one side for when help was required, FOOD on the other, when food was needed), provided in-house nursing assistance, provided necessities such as food, bedding, towels and clothing, provided relief payments to families unable to work, and even provided volunteers to stay in the family home when multiple influenza cases were present or the sufferer was the family's primary carer. (79,131 applicants officially applied for some aspect of this assistance, but the actual number helped was probably twice that.)

Two significant events at the time provided abnormal challenges to how the pandemic was handled in Australia: Australian Federation had only recently occurred, so the states and federal governments were still working out how best to work together, creating some problems; and numerous ships were arriving from England, Europe and South Africa (where the pandemic was out of control) that were overcrowded with soldiers who were returning home from having fought in World War I.

The latter even led to a couple of quite significant 'mutinies' (one off Adelaide, the other off Perth) – the result of authorities' uncertainty about how to process arrivals, and how to best minimize any potential spread of the virus by returning troops.

The West Australian case involved the *H.M.A.T. Port Lyttelton* (regrettably, mis-spelt Lyttelton in this book) in December 1918, which was returning 800 – 900 troops, including around 100 Western Australians. 'The Port Lyttelton was a "clean ship". In the two months since they

departed Southampton, there had been no illness aboard, no bouts of seasonal influenza, no spreading of the common cold.'

The ship anchored off Fremantle at dawn, 'but, around the time the men expected to be going ashore to meet the friends and relatives waiting on the main wharf, the anchor was again weighed and the Port Littleton turned her bow to the open sea. This was a much shorter trip than the previous, though, and the ship was soon at anchor off Rottnest Island.'

There she remained for the next day and a half, until 'the soldiers aboard learned that this was to be more than a slight delay; their ship had been once more ordered to get underway, but this time they would be sailing to Melbourne... which would add several weeks to their return journey and they were not in a mood to accept that.'

'A plan was hastily put together. That plan would see the 100 Western Australians take four of the ship's lifeboats and row to the mainland, coming ashore at Cottesloe Beach. They would then contact the local police and ask for transport to be arranged to take them all to the Woodman's Point Quarantine Station where they expected to be placed in quarantine for seven days.'

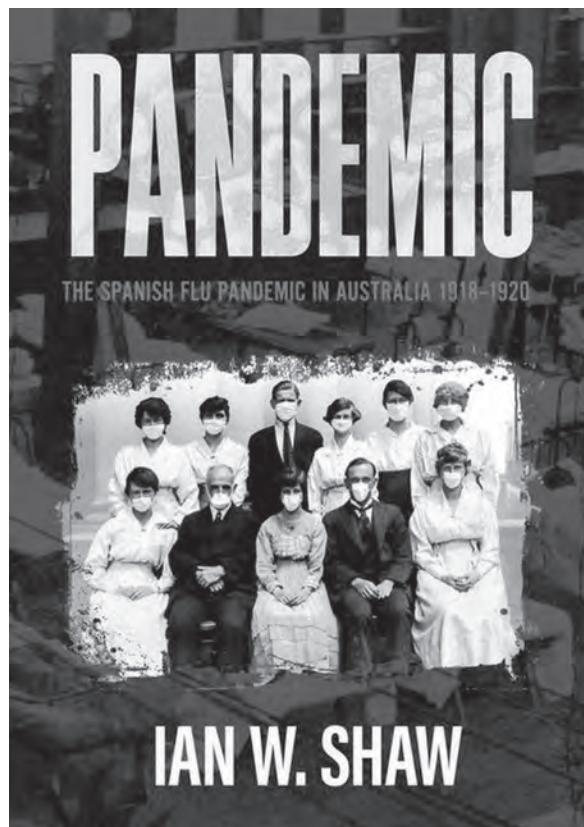
After a request to arrange for tugboats to be sent to ferry the Western Australians to shore

was refused, and a request to the ship's captain to take the lifeboats was also refused, 'the engine room stokers were called up to the deck while the forecabin was picketed and the windlass surrounded to prevent the anchor being raised.' The lifeboats were then filled and winched down to the choppy waters below.

'It soon became obvious that soldiers and sailors possessed different skill sets...it was dark, the seas seemed to be rising even more. As the men in all four boats began to worry about the others, and about how they would ever make it to shore, the sky was lit by a number of flares.

Those flares, and the occasional Verrey light, were fired from one of the Fremantle tugboats, the *Albatross*, and were being used to illuminate the sea as the tug rounded up the lifeboats and transferred their occupants to her own deck spaces.' In doing so, one of the lifeboats sank.

'Despite pleas to be taken ashore, the *Albatross*' captain followed the orders he had been given and sailed back to the Port Lyttelton, sitting well off the much larger vessel until some kind of transfer could be made when it was daylight. Again, this was never going to happen while the hundred soldiers outnumbered the tugboat crew by a factor of ten to one.' A smaller tugboat subsequently arrived, and senior officers from the Army and the Quarantine Service ordered the soldiers to return to the Port Lyttelton and then asked to speak to the officers accompanying the men. 'There were



officers among them, two majors and two captains who sympathized with the plight of their men, but the shouted response from the Albatross was that those officers were in detention and would not be allowed to speak.'

'It seemed hundreds of soldiers were now lining the rails of the Port Lyttleton to watch the entertainment below. As the tug pulled up to the ship's gangway, those troops started pelting it with missiles, anything that came to hand but primarily potatoes and lumps of coal...Albatross remained where it was for the night...Shortly after dawn the next morning, Albatross crossed the water to the Port Lyttleton where some soldiers called up to their comrades watching from the ship's rails. They asked for breakfast, and within minutes a supply line of men were (sic) bringing buckets down the gangplank to the tugboat. Some contained a thick beef stew and others carried freshly brewed coffee; both were received gratefully.

Aboard Albatross, an agreement had been reached with the boat's captain and the authorities ashore. After the men had

finished breakfast and sent the empty buckets back to the Port Lyttleton, the tugboat raised its anchor and started its engine. Within a few short minutes, it was making its way to the Woodman's Point Quarantine Station where the men would spend a week in strict quarantine...No formal action was taken against them, beyond all having their pay docked to pay for a replacement lifeboat...Any breach of the Army Act was tactfully ignored.' (Two soldiers involved in the Adelaide incident were convicted of mutiny, one being sentenced to 30 days detention, the other to 60 days detention.)

If this book has any shortcoming, it is that it doesn't include examples of how smaller Australian county towns responded to the pandemic. These stories are fascinating in their own right – as Anna Weatherley's article about the effect the 1919 pneumonic influenza pandemic had on the NSW South Coast (printed in Recollections 3, available at www.bit.ly/Recollections3-) vividly demonstrates.

Reviews by Peter Lacey

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It Could Have Been *'The Gay Dolphin'*

'He was somewhat taken back when I told him what that would imply.'

Merimbula's Black Dolphin motel was considered to be *'one of the ten best buildings designed and built anywhere in Australia in 1960-1961'*, *'the most significant motel building in Australia'*, and *'an original and highly significant architectural response to the native environment'*.

It was the brainchild of businessman David Yencken who, at a time when the first motels were being built in Australia,

foresaw an opportunity to build and operate motels along the Princes Highway. So, in 1957, he built what was to be the first motel in regional Victoria – the Mitchell Valley Motel on the Princes Highway in Bairnsdale. It provided him with the opportunity to *'do exciting things with design.'*

The motel was immediately successful. *'There was no need to set out on a major promotional campaign. There was no serious competition from hotels, so it didn't take long for*



Black Dolphin Motel, Merimbula in the late 1950s. Image: State Library of Victoria



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enough regular commercial visitors to shift their allegiances to the motel and keep it reasonably occupied throughout the year. In the summer months tourists and travellers kept it full.

Among those who regularly stayed at the Mitchell Valley Motel were three Melbourne businessmen who had acquired an option to purchase a large and attractive site between the inlet and the surf beach at the southern entrance to Merimbula. They asked Yencken to build and then to operate a motel there, based on the key features that he had incorporated into the Mitchell Valley Motel.

Well-known Melbourne architect Robin Boyd was engaged to design the new motel. He consciously attempted to design a building that related to its environment – so retained a group of native mahogany gums in a small courtyard and extensively used locally acquired tree trunks as colonnades for the walkways and as uprights in the main two-storey reception and restaurant building. (Arthur Kaine, a local sawmiller, and after whom Merimbula's Arthur Kaine Drive is named, subsequently became one of the building group's Directors.)

The building, to put it politely, 'was ahead of its time' and did not immediately appeal to everyone. 'David Saunders, then a senior lecturer at the architecture school at the University of Melbourne and later Professor of Architecture at Adelaide University, brought a group of architectural students to the motel. 'Well,' he said after the tour of inspection had finished, 'What do you all think of the design?' One young woman, after hesitating a moment, said: 'I like the buildings but I think the tree trunks are rather over-designed'. David Saunders walked up to one of the poles and wrapped his arms around it. 'Dear God' he said looking to the skies, 'please don't

do it again.'

Many of the (few) guests who initially stayed at the motel were confronted by the unusual design and its avant-garde furnishings, so much so that Boyd and Yencken were forced to draft an explanation of what the design was attempting to do (how it related to the bush site, why the buildings were placed as they were, why the materials had been chosen, why the rooms had their 'different' layout) and pinned these up on the back of the door to every room. 'The effect was remarkable; it caused people to think carefully about their previous judgments. Several said to me words of the kind: 'When we first arrived we didn't like the place but now that we have been here for a few days we have found the setting and the design increasingly comfortable and relaxing.'

Yencken soon found he needed to advertise to attract guests to the Black Dolphin motel ('The Mitchell Valley Motel was a nice name, but unfortunately few people could ever remember it. Thus, the Black Dolphin was chosen after one of those interminable naming discussions. I recall that one of my older fellow directors suggested that it should be called the Gay Dolphin; he was somewhat taken back when I told him what that would imply'), so he 'asked John Handfield, who had a small but well known public relations and advertising business (in Melbourne, and who lived in a recently-completed house in Eltham that Robin Boyd had designed) to prepare some advertisements for the motel and to suggest their placement. I also asked him if he was interested in a campaign to get more people to use the Princes Highway rather than the Hume Highway. He set about the task with energy and purpose and would have been able to achieve much more if there had been greater support for the



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campaign from business enterprises that would have gained most from it. I, in turn, tried to get more political support for improvements to the highway. We held a protest meeting in Merimbula attended by local members of parliament ... (but) the advertisements for the motel were a disaster. Their flavour was the romantic charm of prawning in the moonlight – suitable perhaps for tropical resorts but not for the Black

Dolphin. They attracted no more than a handful of people. Worse, the few people who did come arrived with the wrong expectations and were as a consequence bitterly disappointed. Something different was needed.'


So Yencken then wrote and placed two small, very unusual advertisements in a recently launched magazine called 'Nation'. These, Yencken concludes, 'cleverly appealed

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A war of primary colours
Second-rate imported wines
The latest American
gimmicks*

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— AND FELLOW
MOTELIERS AND
MUSICIANS — ARE
QUITE SURE THAT
WE ARE NOT LIKE
OTHER MOTELS



the **Black
Dolphin** MERIMBULA

*Even our architect, Mr. Robin Boyd, assures us that we are not futurists

**at the
Black
Dolphin**

YOU WILL FIND

*A natural bush setting
with a lake and ocean frontage
A building listed amongst the ten best
(of any kind) in Australia in 1961
An airport exactly 5' above sea level
Good food prepared with love and care
A few outstanding Australian wines
Even a copy of Nation
now and then**



the **Black
Dolphin** MERIMBULA

*But not the Partisan Review or the New Left or Daedalus or just anything

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to an intelligentsia newly awakened, thanks largely to Boyd, to the aesthetic sins of Austerica’.

In time, Boyd and Yencken’s Black Dolphin motel achieved considerable fame and was even used by the government in overseas trade promotions. It was sold in 1965 and, since then, has undergone considerable change – but many of Boyd’s original, groundbreaking design elements have survived. **R**

(David Yencken was also responsible for building Baronda House in Tanja, featured in Recollections 23, accessible at bit.ly/Recollections23)

Source: ‘A Tale of Two Motels’ by David Yencken, published in *La Trobe Journal*, 1993–1994, available at <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/La-Trobe-Journal-93-94-David-Yencken.pdf> It is a fabulous, quite funny yarn and so is highly recommended!


Building a motel has challenges... staffing it presents others

‘Getting staff for the motel in a very small community was always a problem; Merimbula was not much more than a small coastal village at the time. I hired a young Japanese woman. She was delightful and worked hard and effectively – when she was there. The problem was that she was not always there when she was supposed to be.

Rather too regularly she would arrive too late to help with the delivery of the breakfasts, always a very busy time. I knew, however, that I had no more than a minute to be really cross with her. She would always arrive with a present. ‘Here is a cake I baked specially for you’ she would say with a beatific smile paying no attention whatsoever to my fury. It was always obvious that she had stopped at the bakery to buy something as she drove past. The explanations for her tardiness were equally outrageous. But she had such a way of making me feel complicit in her deceits that after a while I would end up laughing.

In those first years there was not money to employ a properly trained chef so I had to use whatever local talent was available. I found a young man who had been trained as a baker in the navy to come and work in the kitchen. I had the notion that with him on staff it would be a great idea to make croissants and brioches for the motel guests. The problem was that he had never heard of them. There were no references to them in his naval baking manuals; the navy clearly had no truck with such Frankish fripperies. For my part having grown up in Europe I had eaten croissants and brioches on many occasions, knew what they should look and taste like but had no idea how to make them. So together we set out on this extraordinary enterprise. I should have kept all the different

objects that emerged from the oven and donated them to a museum. The process was comparable to the story of evolution. With each try he got closer and closer. He eventually produced genuine croissants and brioches; it was a triumphal moment. It must have been, however, all too much for he left shortly afterwards.’ **R**



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Tantawangalo's First Postmaster

Time (102 years of it) has not been kind to this memorial in the Kameruka Cemetery.

The headstone actually reads 'Myra Ellen Grant, died 8th August 1892, age 60 years; also John Alfred Grant, died 17th January 1919, aged 88 years.' An inscription is still visible on the original sandstone headstone and, probably after John died, a marble plaque was affixed over the original inscription.



The graves of Captain John Grant and his wife Myra in Kameruka Cemetery. The Kameruka Lords Oval is in the distance.

Volume 1 of 'Tales of the Far South Coast' reveals the story of Captain John Grant who is buried in this grave:

'Captain John Alfred Sage Grant, a pioneer of Bega and district, was born at Margate, England, in the year 1834. His father was Captain William James Grant, and his mother, Ann (nee Brockman) managed a lodging house in Margate. Grant came from a family of seafarers, with the marine way of life in his veins.

At the age of ten Grant was apprenticed to a chemist but found this life unrewarding. He then went to sea as a cabin boy, but deserted the ship after being cruelly treated. Grant was recaptured and returned to the ship where he was severely flogged, which resulted in life-long scars on his back. A further attempt at desertion proved successful. Acquiring a position on another ship, he found his new master to be much kinder. He then worked his way up to being a mate on the England-Australia run. On one occasion Grant was asked to take charge of the ship during a storm and succeeded in getting the ship safely to port in India. Later he was given charge of one of the company's ships.

Grant came to Australia as a passenger in 1851 and arrived at Sydney. In that same year he was induced to take a boat into the Bega River, being the first man to enter and investigate it. The mouth was discovered and recorded by Bass. Grant's purpose was to examine whether or not it would be possible to navigate the river for trading. He writes

in a letter to Mr Henry Parbury, dated September 9, 1913,

"There was not at the time a House in South Bega about three in North Bega as I passed onto the river mouth I saw just opposite Mr Rixon House now was a camp two or three slabs on end these were Jock and his mate camp when I called and saw them not a house in the neighbour one of Wararugobrough blong to the Walker that owned the Kamarook Estate."

For several years Grant traded a ship between Sydney and Pambula, visiting the ports of Tathra and Bermagui. He also assisted in ferrying stone across Merimbula Lake for Munn's Maizina Works and the Bacon factory. He left the seas, in 1864, and by bullock and dray, and later horse, took supplies from Twofold Bay to Kiandra Goldfields. Grant writes,

"I left off going to sea about year 64 came on land and I regret it today but no use complaining."

Later Grant took up about 700 acres of land at the crossroads, Tantawangalo. There he dairied and made cheese on the property. Grant, due to indifferent management and the family boys being too fond of horse racing and foot running, was forced to leave the farm. He then ran the post office at Tantawangalo.

Grant was renowned for relating interesting and thrilling experiences of his travels in the old days. He used to tell of his visits to cannibal islands where natives would gather around white people and feel their legs to see if they were fit to eat.

In 1855 at Sydney, Grant married Myra Ellen Evans (nee Braithwaite) a widowed schoolteacher, wife of the late William Evans. Myra had three children from her previous marriage; John M, Henry B and William E Evans. John and Myra Grant reared a family of six; John Richard Grant, Annie Eliza Mussared, Louisa A Turner, Emily J Surplice, Wilfred Alfred Grant and Emily C McNaught. Many of Grant's descendants are still living in the district.

Myra Grant died in 1892 at Tantawangalo, aged 60 years, and was buried in the Kameruka cemetery. Captain John Grant died in 1919 in the Bega District Hospital at the age of 84 years and was buried next to his wife. **R**



Captain John Grant

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Along the Road to Bega.

Songs and lyrics have been sung,
And praise been heard on every tongue,
About the roads and routes that be
From Cambellong right to the sea;
But never have I overheard
A written verse or spoken word
About the road to Bega.
But I, who know it day by day,
See beauty in it all the way;
The scattered farms, the furrowed field
That soon such bounteous wealth shall yield,
The gurgling creek that winds away,
The lucerne patch, the new-mown hay,
Along the road to Bega.
The crossing where the river turns,
The giant oaks, the waving ferns,
The cattle track upon the hill,
The clover by the ruined mill.
I've travelled east, I've travelled west,
And these are things I love the best
Along the road to Bega.

—Kate O'Connor



The Brogo Bridge (along the road to Bega) after a flood in 1932

and finally...

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