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The ss Merimbula's last voyage – see story page 12

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Playing the Big Game

Judi Hearn

The 1930s seems to have been an era when men were pitting themselves against great beasts in Africa and bringing home trophies to show for it. In Australia, where there were no lions and tigers, this attitude was carried through to the beasts of the sea.

For over a hundred years, men had been catching whales off the coast of Australia for the oil and perfumes they provided, but catching other big fish for the sake of sport had yet to be defined.

In 1933 this was changed by Roy Smith at Bermagui on a fishing holiday from his home at Yass.

'February, 1933. About 4.00 p.m. Roy Smith on Bill Warn's boat "Merlin" was drifting about a quarter of a mile off the north-west end of Montague Island when he felt a tug on his line that he thought was a small shark. Very slowly, about

a hundred yards of line were run out. He struck, and with beginner's luck got the hook in the side of the fish's mouth. Quietly, the line started to lift, and the next minute a marlin came out with a terrific leap. When it gave one last jump the rod snapped! However, the trace was in Bill Warn's hands and relieved any further anxiety.'

When Roy Smith brought this first marlin of 262lb, (119kg) in to Bermagui in 1933, little did he realize the importance of his catch and the huge interest in big-game fishing that it would trigger. Could he have believed that the small village of Bermagui would become one of the biggest big-game fishing meccas in the world?

The word spread! Enthusiasts in the form of businessmen from Victoria arrived and in February 1934 formed the Swordfish and Tunny Club of Australia. It was to be the

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Reads**

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Roy Smith. 1933 First recorded Billfish capture on rod and reel Image: Bermagui and District Historical Society

first such Club in the nation. The first meeting was held, suitably, at Lyne's camp on Montague Island. The trip out to the island was memorable - not only because the club was formed there, but also for the horrific weather they encountered along the way. Without the experience of the boatman Bill Warn the group may never have reached the island at all. But there, on Montague, with the wind howling about them and a raging sea battering the shore, sitting in the fitful light of a spluttering hurricane lantern, the first Swordfish and Tunny Club meeting was held.

The optimism of these men was justified. Over eighty marlin and one mako shark were caught or sighted in the next fortnight now that the anglers knew what to look for. Bermagui was being pushed onto the world stage.

The Victorians were followed by well-known anglers and members of the NSW Rod Fishers Society. One of these men, Clive Firth, was a man of vision and ideas. He realized that, with the increasing interest in the sport, Bermagui should have its own big game fishing club to set rules and regulations for its members. And so the Bermagui Big Game Anglers Club (BBGAC) was born. Firth believed there were many more fish in this part of the coast to be caught and could see a future for game fishing being centred

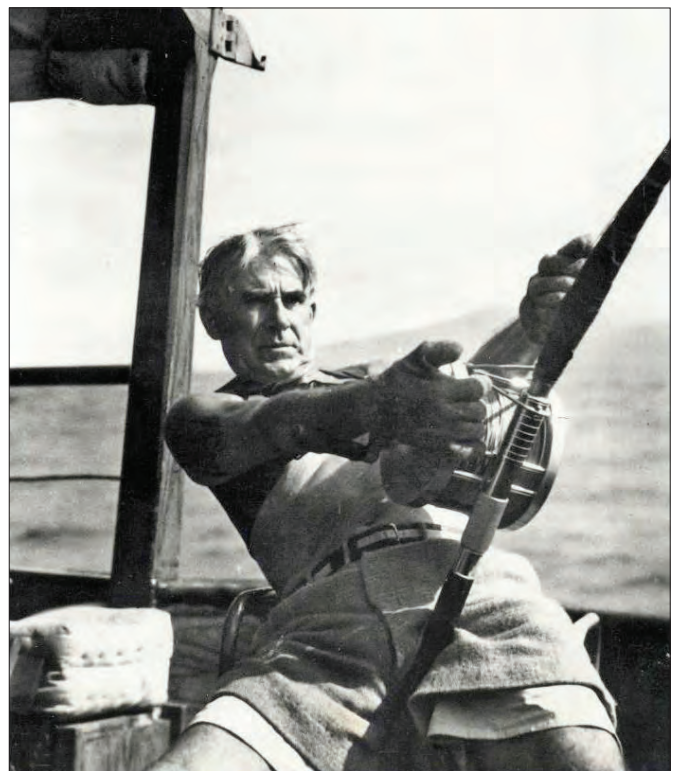
in Bermagui, a small coastal town in New South Wales.

But why was it that game fishing was taking place here? For one thing, the Continental Shelf is only thirteen kilometres wide between Cape Dromedary and 'The Kink', on the edge of the shelf. It was within reach of the ponderous slow-travelling fishing boats of the time. Another reason is the warm seasonal currents that flow through canyons on and along the continental shelf are the domain of an enormous variety of pelagic fish, the fast swimmers and fighters that frequent the surface water.

The population of Bermagui then was living in two towns, Bermagui North and Bermagui South, one each side of the river, each with its own post office. The north side had developed first until a bridge across the river was built in 1888, after which Bermagui South became the larger commercial hub. The Horseshoe Bay Hotel had developed as the main place for social gatherings and this was where on 21st February 1936 the first meeting of the Bermagui Big Game Anglers Club was held.

Fishermen from both New South Wales and Victoria were keen to become members and Zane Grey, an author and keen big game fisherman from the United States of America, was asked to become patron.

In January 1936 Zane Grey arrived in Bermagui. He brought his own boat, "Avalon", with him from New Zealand where it had been made to his own design. He set



Zane Grey fishing from his boat Image: Bermagui and District Historical Society



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up a substantial camp amongst the scattered trees on the headland (now known as Dickinson Headland) on the eastern side of Horseshoe Bay. His attractive young secretary, Mia Turnbull recorded his activities. During the day he would go fishing then give radio broadcasts and write articles for newspapers that promoted Bermagui as well as his own game-fishing experiences each day.

Grey's stay in Bermagui lasted for six weeks and he managed to catch a cross section of game fish including a yellowfin tuna that was destined to change the thinking of anglers. Grey recognized it as a valuable fish in the canning industry; as time went on, it became sought-after as a good fighting fish and was sold for very high prices as a delicacy to the Japanese.

Zane Grey brought his tackle with him, great heavy reels that could carry more than a thousand yards (1000 metres) of 37 thread line, and long rods made of hickory, but he found, by the end of his trip to Australia, that the Australian cane rods and reels were superior to use. But, as Australian anglers were not used to big game fishing, Grey was able to instruct these enthusiasts in better methods of catching the denizens of the deep.

Big-game angling was a sport that caught the excitement of many women – maybe because it was a challenge that was more easily accessible to them than walking around the plains of Africa. It is believed that Mrs Vernon Nathan of Bowral was the first woman big-game angler in Australia, catching a 270-pound (122.5 kg) striped marlin and a 300-pound (136 kg) hammerhead shark off Narooma in January 1936.

This feat was followed soon after by BBGAC member Mrs E M Reichelmann from McKay in Queensland, who captured a 189-pound (86 kg) striped marlin from “The Edith” owned by Pat and Jock Dinse. A 203-pound (92 kg) striped marlin was caught by Mrs Dennis Moore from Melbourne a week later from the boat “Amelda” skippered by Eric Staunton.

The BBGAC developed as the Australian headquarters of big-game fishing. As big-game fishing enthusiast T. C. Roughley, Economic Zoologist at the Technological Museum, said at the time *‘Big game angling in Australia is still in its infancy, but it is a lusty infant with a vigour that promises a wonderful future’*. But the infant disgraced itself. Such enthusiasm had a hiccup and the BBGAC found it had not been officially constituted; it became an official club in November 1936.

Keen anglers from overseas started heading ‘down under’. One of these was world renown Sir Harry Lauder, singer and comedian from Scotland. A keen fisherman of Atlantic salmon, his description of catching a 260-pound striped marlin from the “Vida”, skippered by Ern Millican said it all: *‘it was like grapplin’ with a thousand golden sovereigns which ye think ye might lose any minute’*. He was so delighted with his catch that he gave a free concert, something unheard of before, inviting the whole population of Bermagui to the event. Sir Harry was one of many anglers coming from places overseas such as Nigeria and the United States of America.

Today it is hard to comprehend the fact that Bermagui



Marlin on tripod captured by Sir Harry Lauder. 1937


Image: Bermagui and District Historical Society

was playing a significant role on the world stage at that time, and that people such as Michael Lerner and his wife Helen, the world's leading big-game anglers and sponsors of the American Museum of Natural History Expedition to Australia, were keen enough to come halfway round the world to fish here and to use Bermagui as a base to further their practical research.

It was Lerner who introduced the use of ‘outriggers’ on the boats, the poles then were made of bamboo or spruce. He was also known for fighting two big-game fish at the one time, more than once. His wife Helen was an exceptional fisherwoman winning many gamefish trophies throughout the world even though she was dreadfully seasick each time.


All this international activity highlighted a need to open up the entrance to the harbour, especially after Bermagui was chosen to take part in Australia's 150th Anniversary

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celebrations to be held in 1938. The competition was for game fish caught in Australian waters within fifty miles (80km) of the coastline. Dredging of the Harbour and the construction of a fisherman's jetty took place in 1937/38.

The contest yielded some interesting results. Apart from one white shark caught off South Australia all the fish were caught off the New South Wales coastline and three out of four of the major trophies were won at Bermagui; more marlin were landed at Bermagui than the on whole remaining Australian coastline.

An interesting touch to this contest was reported in 1981 by Joe Janson in a BBGAC magazine. *'Organisers of Australia's first fishing contest held in 1938 to mark Australia's 150th anniversary were so convinced a man would win they ordered a trophy depicting two triumphant male anglers. They overlooked Jessica Sams of Milton, a keen amateur fisherwoman with no experience in game fishing. Faces were red when the trophy was handed over to Mrs Sams for her catch of a 330-pound (150 kg) striped marlin.'*

Forty years later Jessica could still recall the big win, taking her marlin to Ulladulla Harbour, hanging it up on the gantry and going home to bed, exhausted. But her brother had heard two men say that her fish had no hope of winning as the Ulladulla scales were not classed as official, and he hurried to Jessica with the bad news.

'I was so screaming mad,' Jessica said, *'I got my husband out of bed, went to Ulladulla, collected the fish in the middle of the night, put it on the roof of the family car and drove to*

Jervis Bay 40 miles (70km) away to have it officially weighed'. Fifty years later, Jessica Sams still held the record for the largest striped marlin ever caught by a woman in Australia. It was the only competition she ever entered!

While Bermagui was building a reputation as one of the best big-game angling centres of the world, the rest of the world was heading into the horror of World War II. Subsequently big-game competitions ceased for the next eight years, until a revival in the 1950s.

Amongst some of the well-known fishers to come to the town at this time were the American radio personalities, Bob and Dolly Dyer from Sydney. They mainly fished for sharks, both in Sydney and around Bermagui, sailing to the southern town in their own boat on which they stayed when here. Arthur Upfield a renowned Australian author also lived here for a time and chased and captured the elusive "Marlin".

Today, when there are more fishermen than ever going down to sea in boats, Bermagui is still one of the great angling destinations and probably one of the finest ports anywhere for the trailer-boat fishermen. The BBGAC has helped to promote the catch-and-release ethic of today that has grown in popularity both in Australia and around the world.

In the past few seasons, the population of marlin has increased dramatically with some boats tagging and releasing up to eight fish per day's outing. **R**

Sources: *'Big Game Fishing at Bermagui: Bermagui Big Game Anglers Club, A History from 1936 - 1996'* by Judi Hearn; Bermagui Historical Society records and photographic collection



Arthur W. Upfield with swordfish, at Bermagui 1938
Image: Bermagui and District Historical Society

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This article is the second of three about the Murrah Hall and its importance to the local community (the first was in Recollections 29 available at www.bit.ly/Recollections29). The articles are based extensively on the 'Murrah Archive', a valuable collection of local historical material relating to the Hall that was assembled by Robyn Levy of Bermagui. The author is grateful to Robyn for access to this significant collection. A more detailed description of the 'Archive' will accompany article three.

... the dances would go till daylight

Murrah Hall, 1903–1972

Dr Richard Reid

When do the people of a small, isolated 'community' feel themselves to be a 'community'? Perhaps when faced with common challenges and problems that coming together can help solve.

By the 1890s the European settler farmers and workers and their families, in the lower reaches of the Murrah River, in the land division known as the Parish of Murrah, faced many issues in common – the state of the roads, the provision of education for their children, the problem of floods and tides isolating them from local towns, how to provide facilities and organize occasions for entertainment, relaxation, and other public requirements. At the Murrah much initially revolved around the provision of a school, the building of a bridge and, finally, the erection of a public hall like others that were going up around the Bega area before World War I.

The school came first. In 1891 a Department of Education Inspector recommended the dedication of four acres of 'Crown Land' on 'a line running along the edge of the Bega to Bermagui Road' to the south, and to the north just south of 'Gowing's freehold', for a 'half-time' school and horse paddock. By 1899 teacher Arthur Lake was instructing 15

local children at Murrah Half-Time School on some days, and on other days another 11 pupils further north across the Murrah River at Cuttagee Half-Time School. A letter to a local school inspector in 1922 stated that the 'residents' of the Murrah 'built' the school.

Next came the bridge over the Murrah River. In 1902, according to the Editor of the *Cobargo Chronicle*, the bridge was built as a result of communal pressure by the people along the coast from Bermagui to Wapengo, following 'many years of agitation' and local politicking. Without the bridge, the effects of water, and particularly salt water, at the river crossing at high tides and during frequent floods caused much loss and damage to horse harnesses.

There is a surviving written record of Murrah community activity from this time. A meeting of local residents was held to 'consider the advisability of holding sports to celebrate the bridge opening'. The eleven gentlemen at that meeting resolved sports should be held and that they would form themselves into a committee to bring this about. The minutes of the committee meeting on 31 May 1902, the day the bridge was declared open, outlined the nature of the sports and highlighted those three areas of particular community

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concern – education, the river crossing and a hall. A motion to devote some of the financial proceeds from the sports to the school failed when it was decided to devote that money ‘to the building of a hall at the Murrah’. Perhaps they felt that their taxes, which supported government responsibilities like education, should pay for schools; money generated by local events should help provide facilities outside government provision.

After the bridge opening, administrative requirements regarding hall construction proceeded apace, a new committee being formed to oversee the project. There was an obvious place for such a building, a parcel of land already dedicated for a Mechanics Institute further along the road from the school towards Bermagui. Application was made to relevant authorities in Sydney for this site, although a decision was taken, given government regulations, not to construct a ‘Mechanic’s Institute’ but a ‘public hall ... independent of the govt’. Murrah seemingly wanted somewhere for general recreational and communal activities, not a building for adult education. On 1st September 1902 the committee was informed that official permission to ‘build a hall on the Mechanic’s Institute site’ had arrived. But this meeting was also significant for another reason – the committee formed itself into the grander sounding ‘Murrah Progress Association’, signalling their remit would be wider than matters that simply pertained to the proposed hall.

Murrah Progress Association members quickly rolled up their collective sleeves and on Saturday 25th October 1902 turned out to ‘clear the site for the hall’. Others surely must have joined them, the Murrah community coming together for a common purpose.

Site clearing, however, was one thing. Devoting time to

actual building another. Tenders to build, for labour only, went to the press and separate negotiations were entered into with timber suppliers. In August 1903 a reporter with a Bega footy team, proceeding in a leisurely fashion along the road to Bermagui and noticing everything, wrote:

Mr T D’Arcy and Mr John Gowing’s farms abut on the road while Mr Ritchie’s lies to the sea board. The Murrah Hall, now being erected for religious and other purposes, is on the roadside, and is now almost completed ... The drive along the coast road is one of the prettiest imaginable.

The hall was, indeed, nearly finished and the Progress Association was already busy planning a gala opening sports, concert and ball, asking musicians from Bega, Central Tilba and as far afield as Moruya to assist with the entertainment. At this late stage, local women began to make an appearance in committee minutes, predictably in



Murrah Public School, c.1950s. The Murrah Hall is in the background. (Murrah Archive, Robyn Levy)

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relation to providing catering. Interestingly, however, it was a woman, referred to simply as Mrs Ritchie, who was asked to perform the official opening of the hall. She declined. Mrs Phillips of Bermagui, possibly the wife of the contractor for the hall, Mr W. Phillips, secured the catering contract for one shilling a head provided there was a guaranteed attendance of 25 couples at the ball.

The great day was Friday 11 September 1903. The *Cobargo Chronicle* waxed lyrical:

It was little wonder that a goodly number rolled up for the day's enjoyment as the weather was simply perfect – one of those beautiful spring mornings when one can breathe the pure air of Heaven and thank his Creator for the simple luxury of physical existence.

The 'goodly number' were entertained by the competitive sports held on Mrs Ritchie's paddock beside the bridge – wood chopping, hop, stepping and jumping, foot races, an obstacle race, and a ladies' 'nail driving competition in which a three-inch nail was to be driven into a seasoned piece of box wood'. This nail driving 'caused much amusement' with only three ladies 'getting the nail home'. A heifer, donated by Mrs Ritchie, was successfully auctioned, Mr Benny's home-made beer sold well, and behind the hubbub was the playing of the Bermagui Band which 'did much to enliven the proceedings'.

Sports over, the hall – finally – came into its own with the concert and the ball. But before all that came the official opening, with master of ceremonies and Honorary Secretary of the Progress Association, Mr E. C. Bluett, in the chair. Bluett revealed that the movement to build the hall actually went back 'some ten years ago', suggesting the community push for education, a bridge and a hall had

begun in the early 1890s. Then, suddenly, there was Mrs Ritchie, who must have changed her mind, giving a 'brief' speech and declaring the building open. After the concert 30 couples took the floor, which must have pleased caterer Mrs Phillips, and dancing went on to three next morning.

The general verdict was that 'it was the most successful function ever held at the Murrah'. What would have pleased the Progress Association even more was that the day's takings cleared all debt on the construction and even left a healthy profit.

What happened in the 'Hall' soon became part of everyday life at the Murrah. In later years what would most likely have stuck in the minds of locals would have been the get-togethers for fun and amusement. One of the first which made the press was a 'social' on 1 August 1905, although no details were forthcoming as to what actually went on at this event. There was a serious intent to all the fun at a concert and dance in December 1907, with the proceeds going to local labourer John Madden 'who had been laid up for some months' with rheumatic fever. Thirty couples, some from Tanja, Bermagui and Wapengo, took the floor and Ten Pounds, a not inconsiderable sum for the period, was raised for Madden. In June 1911, the 'Progress Committee' organized a 'gathering' to farewell local residents Mr and Mrs Robert Moore, who were leaving the district. The hall reverberated to Scottish favourites: Mrs Ritchie's rendition of 'Annie Laurie' and Mr Carr the schoolteacher's version of 'Ye Banks and Braes of Bonnie Doon'. Then followed a speech by the evening's chairman, Mr Jones, which captured the drama of Robert Moore's arrival in the district at Bermagui in 1885:

... Mr L Bennie had to get his things up over the rocks to

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cart to the Murrah in Mr John Gowing's bullock wagon, there being no roads and bridges to travel on in those days, but they had to get across the lakes and creeks the best way they could.

This was a shared communal memory, a settler memory, to which many at that 'gathering' could relate. Mrs Ritchie, on behalf of 'the ladies of the Murrah' presented Mrs Moore with a large marble clock and hoped when it struck the hours it would remind her 'of the many friends she left behind'.

What was to become a much-recalled feature at the hall was the playing of a card game that became all the rage in Australia from the late 19th century onwards – euchre. In one of a series of interviews conducted by Murrah Hall archivist Robyn Levy in 1993 for the Murrah Hall's 90th anniversary, Murray Douch recalled the fortnightly card parties:

Just before the war they put a supper room on the hall, that would be about 1938, and that was used as the euchre room ... those days we had no lights and one of the guys used to make it his business to get up there early, before the tournament started, and get all the lights working and put all the lamps out on the bench for the cakes.

Between 30 to 40 people, according to Murray, would turn up in their sulkies and on their horses for cards and those who didn't play would dance in the main hall. One New Year's Eve they played till sunrise.

On some evenings, cards and dances were disturbed by fights. A keg would be broken out on a stump outside near

the toilet, to which men would repair between dances, and intoxication led to brawls.

On one evening in 1942 a more dramatic brawl may have interrupted the cards. It was a time when Japanese submarines were operating on the Australian east coast and a number of Australian and American ships were sunk off the NSW south coast. Murray remembered explosions:

About 1942 we were out there one night at the euchre, and we just set up all the tables and the next thing there were three terrific loud explosions that rattled all the windows of the hall. So that was the end of the euchre playing that night, 'cause the war was well on then, so we all tore up to Wrens [a coastal farm] where they had a lookout up at Bunga ...

It's virtually impossible to capture in words on the page the enjoyment and fun of those dances, and other entertainments, at the Murrah Hall. In 1993 Barbara Behrans, Mary Blacka, Margo and Murray Douch and the Wilton sisters, all of whom grew up around the Murrah, remembered so many things in Robyn Levy's interviews for the hall's 90th anniversary. These are a few recollections in their own words:

Sometimes the dances would go till daylight – the men would have to [go] straight home to milk;

Kids were reared at the Murrah Hall. You'd ... give them a blanket and they'd be no trouble at all;

We used to put sawdust on the floor and kerosene and sand and the eyes would sting and then the kids would hop on a



Children's Christmas party at the Murrah Hall, late 1930s, with Santa on horseback in the background. In the middle of the front row, standing to the left of the girl in the dress holding a box, is bare-footed Murray Douch holding his first musical instrument, a harmonica. Murray became famous throughout the region as a musician and band leader playing his accordion, and he performed at the Murrah Hall's 100th anniversary celebrations in 2003. (Murrah Archive, Robyn Levy)

bag and get pulled around the hall;

Remember the night we wanted The Lancers [a square dance, a variant of the Quadrille] and the band didn't know how to play them so we said play anything, we'll dance to it;

Everybody watched everybody else very closely in those days – who sat with who, who sat on who's knee or if anyone else went outside it was all bush then;

The ladies who didn't dance spent time watching everyone;

Burrawangs and streamers were put up to decorate the hall. There were possums in the roof and the more the square dancers got going, the possums would come out and watch;

Mainly square dancing. There were side doors and sometimes when the dancing got wild her partner would let her go and she would go flying out the side door ... nobody would stop.

Well, I said I can sing 'Red Sails in the Sunset' so he said you've got to get up and do it. Well, I got up and sang it and Mick Gael – he didn't know I could sing – so he grabbed me and ran me round the hall on his shoulder, everyone clapping.

The sheer energy of those dances and concerts leaps off the pages of interview transcripts. Those who provided the music were more-often-than-not locals; people knew how to make their own entertainment.

Of all the festive communal occasions in Murrah Hall one was remembered with particular affection – Christmas. The Wilton sisters recalled Santa's arrival:

What happened at Christmas? There used to be a great big noise – car horns and yelling and shouting when Santa Claus put in an appearance. Every child got a present – they'd run dances to pay for those. We'd decorate the hall for Christmas

– burrawangs.

Christmas features in a remarkable record of the Murrah in the 1930s in articles submitted to *The Farmer and Settler's 'Junior Page'* by Phyllis Smith. Phyllis was 14 in 1932 when she wrote her first piece and the titles of her articles conjure up a picture of life for a teenager growing up on a Murrah farm: 'A Large Fish', 'The First Watermelon', 'Filling the Silo', 'A Huge Prawn', 'Empire Day Rejoicings', 'Hand-Feeding the Cows', 'Stripping Bark', 'A Bucking Horse', 'A Terrible Flood', 'Another Flood', 'Three Floods since Christmas'. These last three titles certainly show how a bridge at the Murrah was needed back in 1902.

Phyllis' second article, published in February 1932, paints a picture of Murrah Hall at Christmas 1931:

On Saturday 11th December there was a Christmas Tree up at the hall. The stage was separated from the hall with long green bushes which hung from the rafters and then the Christmas tree was placed near the stage. This Christmas Tree was decorated with streamers and balloons. There were about thirty presents on the tree and, as they were not wrapped up, they looked very pretty.

There were games until the magic moment, Santa's arrival about 8 pm. Phyllis and her friend Olive Douch each got a pair of silk stockings from Santa. Other girls received handkerchiefs, brooches, books and tea sets while the 'little boys', predictably, got motor cars, trains and aeroplanes. After presents, the girls enjoyed more games while the boys played with their toys on the stage. Tea was taken at 10 pm and off they all went home, farm life quickly reasserting itself for Phyllis:

Dad bought two half-grown sheep and we have to poddy



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them with a bottle. One chap is very rough, knocks the bottle out of our hands, although he is quiet enough not to go away.

At the hall the wider world impinged on local life. As in thousands of similar venues all over Australia during World War One, women came together to knit socks and pack parcels for soldiers overseas: Mary Blacka remembers string being saved at home to tie up the parcels:

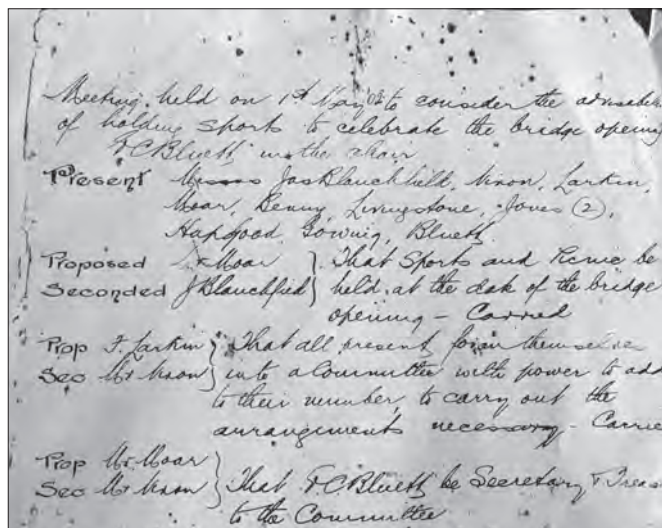
... a busy lot of women driving their sulky and horses to the Murrah Hall with lots of material, wool and knitting needles. Brown paper and string saved up for wrapping the parcels – a machine in the hall, and everyone very busy making pyjamas, knitting socks, and making smaller clothes too for the Belgian children we were told.

Mary also recalls 'some of our soldiers in their uniforms coming to bid us a sad farewell' and when a 'local war hero returned in the Second World War they would lay out the red carpet literally for him at the hall'. In World War II you went to the hall for your ration book. Votes were cast on polling day for local, state and federal elections and aspirants for election came to give speeches and answer questions. Visiting clergymen held church services. And in the early days the Progress Association met to propose approaches to local government:

'That the secretary be instructed to write to the Council regarding the cutting, clearing of scrub and timber; also grubbing a few trees off the road between Mr Thornton's mill and the Yellow Pinch.'

Surprisingly, in the early decades of its existence the most consistent use of the hall, holidays aside, was as a public school. By 1918, according to one parent who wrote to the local inspector – 'The Murrah District is in trouble with education'. A short piece in the *Southern Star* (Bega) in August 1918 carried a stark announcement that 'the public school at the Murrah has been closed owing to lack of attendance'. For a few years Murrah children were taken to the Cuttagee school but this was never an ideal solution. Signing himself 'a parent of 9 children', local farmer John Blanchfield wrote 'A note on behalf of the children' to the local inspector in 1922:

They have to go to the Cuttagee school a distance of six



Minutes of a meeting held at the Murrah in 1902 to determine whether sports should be held to mark the upcoming opening of the Murrah Bridge. The participants at this meeting soon became the Murrah Progress Association responsible for the erection of the Murrah Hall in 1903. (Murrah Archive, Robyn Levy)

miles. In a cramped coach on hilly road 2 have to walk up hills 12 children [and] driver. In a one-horse trap on hard boards which makes their hips ache ... there are small children here who cannot go the distance who would go to a closer school.

A key point for Blanchfield was the fact that in the absence of a school it was difficult to get farm labourers into the area. Things got worse. A letter to the Minister for Education in 1925 from local resident O. W. Hinde, spoke of 20 children at the Murrah who were unable to get to a school as the parents had no means to transport them. Moreover, by that point the old school building had been removed to another location. Hinde was undoubtedly connected to those responsible for the Murrah Hall:

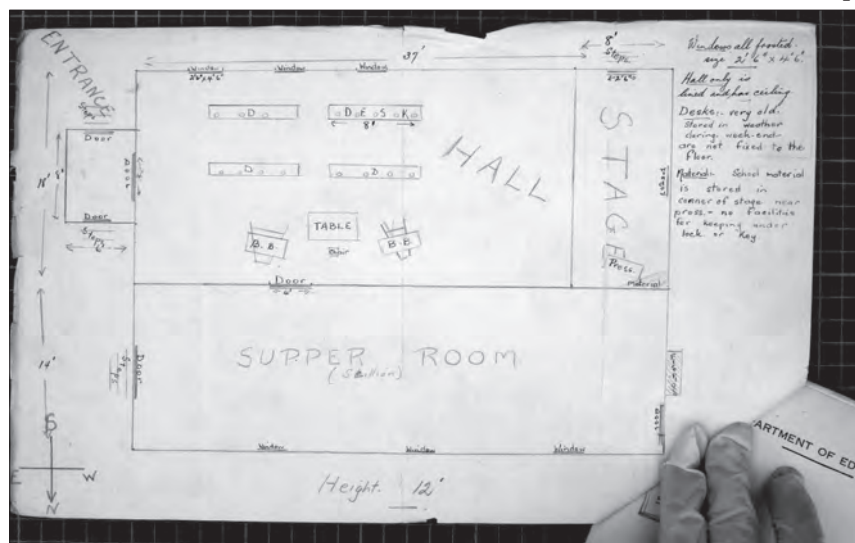
But there is a Hall near the site of the old school ... which your department could use as a school for a very nominal rent ... treat the matter as one of urgency ... former correspondence was addressed to your Department but no acknowledgement received.

Hinde's appended a full list, with ages, of the twenty children unable to go to school. Among them was the future article writer for the *Farmer and Settler*, Phyllis Smith, then aged seven. Nina Phillips, the Cuttagee teacher, confirmed Hinde's list to the extent of 16 children and stated that two more children from the Murrah on Hinde's list actually went to Cuttagee, boarding there during the week, while another went on into Bermagui to school. After a fair bit more toing-and-froing over a number of issues, on 9th July 1925 Christopher Geraghty, Teacher-in Charge, Murrah Provisional School could write to W. M. West Esq, Inspector at Cooma:

I have to report that I entered into occupation of the Murrah Hall on 9 July 1925.

Murray Douch started school in the hall in 1931 with a teacher called 'Bert':

There were six kids at a desk and six inkwells in each desk and you sat near your



Sketch, by the teacher for a report, of the positioning of benches, teacher's desk and blackboards at the public school inside Murrah Hall, 1940. (Item No 14/7723, Administrative File, School: Murrah, post 1939, NSW State Archives)

inkwell and we used to have these old pens and often the nib would break and you'd let fly with the pen at the ceiling and the pen would stick in the ceiling. We had pens stuck in the ceiling quite often ...

A sketch of the arrangement of the school in the hall in the 1930s shows these long desks with seating for 16 children and with the largest desk having five seating positions.

By 1936 relations between the hall committee and the department had deteriorated. A petition, signed by 47 Murrah residents, declared the hall unsuitable having moving desks, 'slippery floor', 'coldness in wet weather and winter - no heating apparatus', and 'inconvenience to both teacher and pupils in packing and unpacking equipment before and after dances'. An inspector reported that the desks could not be screwed down so shook and moved when the children wrote causing frequent ink spills. In winter many children walked over four miles to school and then had to sit in a cold hall. The hall committee also complained:

... we are holding regular dances in the Hall ... after these dances it is necessary to wash the floor to make it safe for the children and we have no end of trouble to get it right to dance on ...

Four years later, despite departmental efforts, and the survey of a new site for a school next to the hall, little had improved. A. E. Hemmings, Teacher-in-Charge, painted a dramatic picture of conditions:

The rats are attracted by food which is scattered when socials are held in the Hall.

A brand new, purpose-built school finally appeared, ending a more than 15-year occupation of the hall providing primary education for the children of the Murrah.

In the 1960s the public school closed. Times were changing: increasing car ownership allowed for entertainment to be sought out in larger local centres and the advent of television in virtually every home was undoubtedly a challenge to local attractions such as small dances, card evenings and raffles at the hall. Minutes of a hall committee survive for the period 1955 to 1970 and the names of those on the committee are largely, though perhaps not exclusively, those of the old settler families. Activities centred around dances, euchre nights and celebrations for Christmas and the arrival of electricity in 1957. There is no indication of how many people turned up for these events. Is a decline in attendance hinted at in a proposal in the minutes for 4th January 1967?:

That we cut only two loaves in place of usual three - carried.

By November 1968 the minutes were referring to the holding of euchre evenings simply 'for those who wish it'. Santa was still arriving for Christmas 1969 and the last entry in surviving minutes, that for 7th November 1970, looks forward to the holding of another Christmas tree event on 11th December. At some point, an unrecorded occasion, the door was shut and the building abandoned. A submission to the NSW Premier's Department in 1980 stated the hall had been 'lying disused for eight years': an era at the Murrah came to an end in the early 1970s. **R**

Dr Richard Reid is a Canberra-based historian. He was Irish-born and educated, and then worked for more than 40 years as a high school teacher, museum educator, historian and museum curator. Thirty of those years were spent in Canberra in institutions including the Australian War Memorial, the National Museum of Australia, the Senate, and the Department of Veterans' Affairs. He is Vice President of Canberra & District Historical Society and is a frequent visitor to Tathra.

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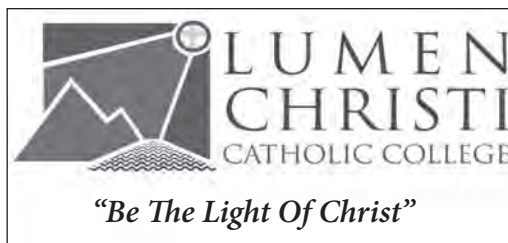
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History – As It Is Writ

Events become history as they occur. And the first ‘historians’ – those initially recording the events and the circumstances surrounding the events – are often reporters whose job it is to present history (or, as it is more often called, ‘news’) to a general public.

In times past, news was presented, almost exclusively, through newspapers, and reports of events often included very much more detail than they do today. Over time, these ‘histories’ are rewritten and rewritten, so much of that initial detail disappears – effectively consigned to a ‘dustbin of history’ by successive historians when they compile new histories aimed at new audiences. So, it’s always interesting to venture back in time to read original ‘histories’. Here are some examples relating to the wreck of the S.S. *Merimbula*. Other first histories will feature in future issues of ‘*Recollections*’.

S.S. MERIMBULA A South Coast Wreck

(By Jack Hopkins in “*The Eden Magnet*”)

In 1908–09 one more vessel was added to this world of wonders. With a crash, the champagne bottle broke upon her bows; then, with a gradual increase of speed, this newly christened boat slid proudly down the slippery ways into the element in which she was to sail for nineteen years – in which, indeed, she was to meet her end at the terminus of this short time. Thus the *Merimbula* was born to the world. This event took place in Trevor, Scotland.

The ss. *Merimbula*, a finely proportioned ship, was 209ft in length, 32ft in breadth, 21ft in depth, was built of steel and was equipped with twin screws. She came to Australia about the year 1910, having been built for the I. & S.C.S.N. Co., and was placed upon the South Coast run as the company’s principal boat in succession to the ss. *Bega*, which had gone down near Tathra on the night of April 5, 1900. On this run she called at Bermagui, Tathra, *Merimbula* and Eden. The ss. *Merimbula* was a vessel of 1,111 tons and was set up in every way to suit the travelling public. Following the death of Captain Swanston, Captain O’Connor took command in 1919 or thereabouts.

THE WRECK

On March 27, 1928, the *Merimbula* went ashore at Beecroft Head, 10 miles north of Jervis Bay and 80 miles south of Sydney. On the morning of the 26th, she took on in Sydney a big cargo, which included £200 worth of furniture and 100 tanks of benzine. Leaving the wharf at 3 p.m., she went to Balmain for coal. At 5.15 p.m. she cleared the heads, with thirteen adults and one child as the total number of passengers. My mother (Mrs. James Hopkins) remarked to another passenger that the ship was hugging the shore very closely. The seas were very high and the fact of being so close inshore was put down to that; indeed, they were so heavy that they washed right up over the decks into the cabins, making it impossible for any doors to be left open for any length of time.

However, things quietened down until four minutes past 1 a.m., when there was a tremendous crash, the shock of which threw my father out of his bunk. Instantly was heard a rushing of men upon the decks, with exclamations of “On with your life belts!” “Take to the boats!” “She’s on a rock!” However, the captain decided to wait on board until daybreak, as he was not too sure where he was, and as a fine rain was falling making the night impenetrable. Upon hearing this decision, the stewards set-to to make coffee and

other hot drinks.

As everybody was feeling rather miserable the ladies were asked if any of their number could play. Several (my mother among them) responded, and took turns at the piano. About 5.30 a.m., tables were laid as though everything was as usual, but just as the passengers were about to sit down to breakfast the captain said they had better take to the boats, as there was no saying when the ship would slip off the rocks and go down into the 40 fathoms of water which lay at her stern.

The topic of conversation among the passengers was that so large a ship was allowed to sail without a “wireless”, as such would have enabled help to be secured within half an hour. As it was, the captain threw up rockets, which might have been crackers for all the help they secured. With “wireless”, hours of anxiety might have been saved, as Jervis Bay lighthouse could have been notified, or some passing ship might have picked up a message and come to the rescue. About 6 a.m., in heavy rain, the passengers took to the boats and eventually landed upon the beach, all wet and cold, but, thanks to the crew, fires were lit in three deserted shacks and everybody was very comfortable under the conditions.

CAPTAIN’S ROUGH WALK

In the meantime, Captain O’Connor set out on a ten mile walk in teeming rain to Jervis Bay lighthouse to secure assistance. The crew returned to the ship and procured provisions for the passengers. All sat down later to a meal composed of bread, butter, tinned-fish, etc.

At three p.m. Captain O’Connor returned after arranging for a fleet of cars to be sent for the passengers. Half an hour later the driver of a Nowra car arrived and said that the cars were awaiting them on the opposite side of the bay. It then became necessary to proceed thither in the lifeboats, and the women were very frightened, as the seas were very high.

Upon reaching land, a quarter of a mile walk had to be made over sand and tussocks, and the carrying of one’s own luggage in the wet made the trip more disagreeable. However, the cars were reached, and the trip was made over 30 miles of rough bush track to Nowra. At the Prince of Wales Hotel a dry change was effected and a greatly appreciated hot dinner was served. Retiring for the night, the weary-worn passengers enjoyed a well-earned rest.

Next morning a special car took passengers for Bega, which was reached at 9 p.m. Some of the 13 had gone to Sydney from Nowra. Others left at Bermagui, others said

good-bye at Bega, and thus were parted the companions on that fateful trip – I wonder if for ever! My mother, father and brother arrived home next day, coming out of their dangerous experience with little worse than the effects of a severe shock and the thoughts of “what might have been” still fresh in their memories.

The ss. *Merimbula* became a total wreck, and on April 2 was sold by public auction to a Melbourne man for £300. She had been insured for £30,250, and a few years ago was valued at £60,000.

It was a singular thing that Captain Morris, Superintendent of Navigation, who was a passenger on the *Merimbula*, was harbour pilot when that steamer first came to Australia and that it was he who piloted her into Sydney Harbour.

—*Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, 11.5.1928

FOOTNOTES TO THIS STORY:

LOOTING THE MERIMBULA.

Perambulators, sewing machines, rubber tyres, cabin fittings, cutlery, toys and fancy goods, to say nothing of large quantities of beer and spirits, have all been pilfered from the *Merimbula* since she went aground at Whale Point, last week (writes the “*South Coast Register*”).

Large numbers of plunderers, like vultures round a carcass, have removed a large quantity of movable cargo, launches and motor lorries being freely used to remove the goods.

The last members of the crew left Currarong on Sunday afternoon, and from then until Tuesday morning the looters

made merry.

One of the ship's boats was left at the scene of the wreck, and eye witnesses affirm that this was in use throughout Monday night to remove large quantities of cargo.

The excuse has been advanced that an abandoned ship became fair game for all and sundry, but this is not the case. The goods remain the property of the consignee until they relinquish all claims to them.

One of the conditions of the sale of the *Merimbula* was that one week should be allowed by the purchaser to allow the goods to be removed, the ship and its contents then to become his property.

On Tuesday morning last, police intervention in the matter was requisitioned, and Constable Cook from Nowra proceeded to the scene to make investigations.

What the outcome of this action might be, is not yet known, but several of the plunderers are wishing that they resisted the temptation.

—*The Kyogle Examiner*, 13.4.1928

COURT MYSTIFIED MERIMBULA WRECK

JUDGE SCHOLLES said in the Marine Court to-day that after Thursday's adjournment of the inquiry into the stranding of the *Merimbula* on March 27 he became aware that the Court's report did not contain an adequate statement of the facts adduced in evidence. He had, therefore, written the report again, and amplified it.

His Honour referred in detail to the evidence, remarking that between Kiama and Fisherman's Point the ship was three miles inside her alleged set course. No one on board



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could account for that.

QUESTION OF DRIFT

It had been suggested that the set of the sea had caused the *Merimbula* to drift, but it was admitted that such a motion of the sea had never been experienced on the N.S.W. coast.

The evidence and contention the Court considered to be unconvincing.

On the evidence adduced the Court found itself unable to state with any degree of confidence what was the cause of the casualty, and the captain's certificate was returned.

—*Evening News*, 30.4.1928



The *Merimbula* on the rocks at Whale Point. Image: National Library of Australia, nla.obj-163244894

Who Are We?

South Coast History Society Inc.

'*Recollections*' is published by the South Coast History Society - a bunch of locals committed to sharing the fascinating history of the NSW South Coast with anyone and everyone who is interested...bringing many of the dramatic old photographs of the area to the public's attention...learning what we can about the region's history...helping uncover things from our past that we didn't previously know...and, along the way, hoping to enthuse others who have similar interests.

'*Recollections*' is published every second month. It's free. It's available on-line (this issue is at www.bit.ly/Recollections31) or in paper format from local libraries and around 80 retail outlets between Surfside and Eden.

We undertake other projects (the *Bega Shire's Hidden Heritage* being one example) and organize appealing activities from time to time – things like *South Coast History Day* seminars, a '*Back to the Swinging 1960s*' concert, bus tours of Bega, walking tours of Bega...and we have many more other activities still to come!

We are a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organisation that is totally dependent on community support.

You can help us most by:

- Telling your family, friends and neighbours about us and what we do
- Becoming a member of the South Coast History Society
- Contributing – ideas...articles for '*Recollections*'...by joining our Committee...with a donation...by advertising in '*Recollections*'

Contact us at southcoasthistory@yahoo.com or by phoning 0448 160 852

William Montague Clarence Campbell, Schoolteacher

Between 1868 and 1874 William Montague Clarence Campbell was the schoolmaster at the small South Coast schools at Eurobodalla and Runnymede (now Runnyford). Following this, for a short time, he was in charge of Mogo School.

Campbell died near Runnymede on 25th April 1878. His death certificate indicated his father was 'George IV' and his father's occupation was 'King of England'.

So, who was this 'William Montague Clarence Campbell'?

He definitely was not the bastard son of King George IV...but his life was interesting, and its story is certainly worth relating – if only as a minor footnote to our local history:

William Montague Clarence Campbell started life in 1808 in New York as William Martin Leggett. His parents were school teachers and he received his early education from them. He was raised in Canada, became a teacher and then a missionary in the Wesleyan Church, married Mary Anne Stevens in 1839, and received considerable praise for some early poetic works. He left Canada in 1845.

He joined the British army as William Alonzo Campbell and, in 1848, sailed to Australia as part of a detachment acting as a convict guard. In January 1851, at Bowenfels near Lithgow, he married Charlotte Crawford, a schoolteacher and governess, who had arrived in Sydney in 1849 as matron to a shipload of Irish Famine orphan girls. It seems likely that this marriage was bigamous as there is no record of him having divorced Mary Anne.

In 1852 'William A. Montague Leggett M.A.' (there is no evidence he ever received, or even studied for, that degree) applied for a teaching position with the National School in Bowenfels but was unsuccessful. Apparently, he was reluctant to face the usual formal examination at the Model National School at Fort Street in Sydney and was branded as a character of "irregular habits" (i.e. he was a drinker). So, in 1853, William and Charlotte Campbell opened a 'People's Own School' in Bowenfels that successfully attracted pupils. Whilst at Bowenfels, William started calling himself both 'Montague Clarence Campbell' and 'William Montague Clarence Campbell'.

The family then lived in what has been described as 'genteel poverty' with William working variously as a journalist, gold-digger, manager of a sheep and cattle station, kitchen attendant at a soup kitchen in the slums of Sydney, and as a police spy. In 1864 they opened the 'Woollahra Academy' in Sydney – 'a grand name for what was a modest affair'. The following year they moved 'to a little Church of England school at Sackville Reach on the Hawkesbury before, as William later complained, he was "thrown out of employment by my conscientious resistance of puseyism [the High Church and Catholic principles of the Oxford Movement of the followers of Dr E B Pusey] and intolerance." The family left just in time. Within four days the flood of June 1867 had swept away both school and schoolmaster's house.'

Historian Chris Vening continues the story: '*Towards the end of 1868, after William had been unemployed for seven months and with Charlotte ill, his begging letters to officialdom were finally answered. [This may have been the result of a letter to Premier Henry Parkes from an Equerry to the Duke of Edinburgh, who was then touring Australia, which read 'His Royal Highness has desired me to ask you to enter on the list of applicants for Government Employment here, the name of a man, for whom His Royal Highness would like to hear that something had been done, viz: Mr. William Montague Clarence Campbell, Dixon Street, Sydney.] The family embarked in December for distant Eurobodalla on the south coast of New South Wales where he had been given charge of the little public school. There, on the banks of the Tuross River, in a hut ("a rookery quite unfit to be a dwelling-place") rented from the widow of the poet Charles Harpur [see Recollections 24, available at www.bit.ly/Recollections24] the family struggled for a year on a rural teacher's stipend.*

In debt and with his enrolments falling, William desperately sought a transfer. Then, in a bizarre twist, he wrote a long letter to the Council of Education accusing the chief member of the local school board, prominent landowner and publican Michael Manusu, of open adultery and complicity in two cases of child murder – one by means of "steel filings" – and secret burial. "Even an imaginary cry of innocent blood in the land," William wrote, "is too horrible to think of." Manusu took the allegations to the police and, when the Attorney General declined to prosecute for libel, instituted civil proceedings. He won £10 damages and, said the judge, would have been awarded ten times the amount had he sought it.

With the school closed up, the Campbells – near starvation, if his letters can be credited – somehow held on at Eurobodalla. William reported for the Sydney press on the savage Tuross floods of May 1870, describing how he and [his son] Rodolph fought through the waters to the aid of Mary Harpur at "Euroma" next door. It was some of his best journalism. He wrote a lament over the recent grave of Charles Harpur (who had died on his farm a few months before the Campbells arrived), and nature verse such as "A Night-Visit to the Oaks at Eurobodalla." Then in August he found what he sought so fervently: a new start, up the coast at the little settlement of Runnymede on the Buckenbowra River. In that part of the world he would spend his remaining years...

William swept in, dazzled the locals, and opened a little provisional school, his modest fees augmented by a salary of £48 from the Council of Education in Sydney. It was a struggle: he had to purchase with his own money a boat to ferry his pupils over the river. The only teacher's residence was a hut three miles up the river, along a bush road with creeks and gullies to cross and the often-flooded Reedy Swamp to wade through. In time enrolments dwindled and, as at Sackville Reach and Eurobodalla, William fell out with school patrons and parents. "I endure great hardships," he lamented. "Six miles trudging per day, to & from school, – no fire there all winter for the want of a chimney! Always at my post at proper

hours! All for £48 per ann. Bland cheating me out of my hard earnings. I can get nothing from him. Yahoos getting into my schoolhouse through the aperture for a chimney, writing obscenities in my girls' books, and all manner of stuff on my very blackboard. Three years and a half among so uncivilized a people have almost wearied me out but, as I began the school, I am willing to try again," he complained in January 1874, but with insufficient enrolments the Council closed the school...

At least some of William's contemporaries thought him crazy. Parkes, for example, in his blunt directive to the Inspector General of Police wrote "I think this man is mad but you may as well see what he means." School inspector McIntyre, in his recommendation that William be appointed to Runnymede, added "I do so with great reluctance, because I am of opinion he suffers from aberration of intellect," and he was later reported as remarking, to William's great distress, "Mr. Campbell is a madman, & nobody would give him any kind of employment but madmen!"

Campbell's poetry has been described as 'well crafted', but he is not ranked highly among Australia's poets. Here's an example of one piece with a local subject:

NIGHT SCENE IN EUROBODALLA.

Eurobodalla! euphoniously named,
 Why are thy flora and fauna unfamed?
 Wherefore in silence still reigning among
 Charms that but wait for a wooer of song?
 Wild is the westwind and wilder the weird
 Flutter of leaflets where wild men were speared;
 Murmuring voices too, seem to bemoan
 The midnight disturber in language unknown;
 Or are the sounds simply intoned by the breeze
 Brushing its way through the native oak trees?
 Who were the many that moulder beneath
 Mounds now encumbered with mazes of heath?
 Fled are their spirits from mortals – but where?
 Point with the finger, who can, and say, there!
 Secrets, enwombed in the ages to come
 Leave all our boasted philosophy dumb!
 If there be spectre-like visitants seen
 Where aboriginal battles have been,
 Oh! that they would to my vision unfold
 What through the cloud-rifts saw Ossian of old!
 (Ossian: Gaelic ballads)
 This is the field where dark warriors encamped,
 Stolid self-will on each visage enstamped;
 Here, where their forefathers quietly slept,
 They fought and they feasted, they laughed and they wept
 Sweetly the wattle trees shed their perfume

Over old mysteries mantled in gloom:
 Wherefore attempt to unveil them? 'Tis knaves
 Only who gloat o'er the opening of graves!
 I am no pansophist: nor would I seem
 (pansophist: someone possessing universal knowledge)
 More than I am in my own mystic dream.
 Thread we our way through the thickets to gain
 Glimpses enchanting of moonlight's domain.
 With visions of beauty our senses are fraught
 Ever expanding and filling with thought!
 Cottage-lights beaming from regions around –
 Tell where the settlers' new clearings abound –
 Culture of soils is extending across
 Valleys enrich'd by the teeming Tuross.
 Sweetest of scenes, as if meant to allure
 Waters so peacefully flowing and pure, –
 Carpets of verdure, as if to sustain
 The brightest and best – yet must I with pain
 Tell of dark spots on the picture? Oh can
 Blots from my pen fall alone upon man?
 Party strife rages – profanities roll
 Where but love's image should shine in the soul!
 Fierce animosities often enflame
 Neighbours who neighbours are only in name!
 Wherefore do nominal Christians surpass
 Heathens in heathenish feelings? Alas!
 Eurobodalla! To mourn o'er the change
 The white man has wrought – is as painful as strange;
 But ere he distracted thy beautiful dream,
 Savages knew of no God to blaspheme!

August, 1870.

W. M. C. C.

in *Australian Town & Country Journal*, 20.8.1870


Sources: Wikipedia; 'William Martin Leggett: The "Bard of New Brunswick" in Australia' by Chris Vening, in *Script & Print*, available at www.mdhs.org.au/pdfs/Campbell.pdf (supplied, with many thanks, by Wendy Simes of MDHS)

This feature has been made possible through the Essential Energy Community Choices program.



Australia's Founding Fathers

(see Book Review, page 17)

Everald Compton's list includes Henry Parkes, Edmund Barton, Alfred Deakin, Samuel Griffith, George Reid, John Forrest, Charles Kingston, William Lyne, Andrew Fisher, John Watson, Andrew Clark and James Dickson, among others. 

DINNER WITH THE FOUNDING FATHERS

by Everald Compton

'*Dinner With the Founding Fathers*' is a historical novel 'loyal to the facts of history and in keeping with the known character traits and political beliefs of those who made it (the creation of the Commonwealth of Australia) happen'. It's an account of a (fictitious) dinner held ten years after Australian Federation in which the founding fathers relive the political and legal battles they fought and the parochial attitudes they overcame to create the Australian nation.

But, before we join that dinner, here's a challenge to you: name as many of those 'founding fathers' as you can.

Having trouble? Well, here's a clue: many of them have Canberra inner suburbs named after them.

Still having trouble? Turn to page 16 to be reminded of them, and to simultaneously be introduced to Everald Compton's (non-fictitious) main characters.

I'd suggest Australians (you and I included!) should know much more about these men and the events surrounding Federation. Reading '*Dinner With the Founding Fathers*' is an entertaining and informative way of achieving exactly that goal.

But simply suggesting this is why the book is worth reading, seriously undersells it because, in reality, it is an absolutely fabulous book – a book that I submit should be included among the 'must reads' of Australian histories... sorry, among the 'must reads' of Australian historical novels! For example, it includes some wonderfully-challenging perspectives about the strengths and weaknesses of

Australia's system of government and of the Australian Constitution in particular.

It's obvious that Everald Compton, a Professor of History at the University of Queensland, has an extensive knowledge about Australian Federation and thoroughly enjoyed transferring much of that knowledge to this work. He, undoubtedly, would have been exceptionally pleased with some of the extraordinarily funny repartee he assigns to those attending the dinner (the top political and legal minds of their day, many of whom were bitter political foes who still had past scores to settle).

The following excerpt provides a taste of what supposedly occurred at that dinner and some examples of the repartee. Edmund Barton, the first Prime Minister of Australia and the evening's host, had at this point invited one speaker from each state to tell the story of how they achieved a 'Yes' vote for Federation in their State, despite highly effective opposition to it and considerable apathy among voters in voting:

'John Forrest [the first Premier of Western Australia] knew that he would be called upon to be the last speaker so he waded right in without waiting for a call from Barton.

"Every one of us should be grateful to the voters out in the Goldfields of Kalgoorlie. They carried the day for the Federation cause in Western Australia.

"Perth voted No. This further incensed the miners as they believed they were carrying the entire economy of Western



Batteries

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Australia on their backs and wanted a new state with Kalgoorlie as its capital, free from Perth whose residents they regarded as privileged freeloaders.

"They believed that, by achieving Federation, they would have a better chance of carrying out a breakaway from Perth as the constitution of the new nation provided for the creation of new states. They were determined that the Goldfields would be the first new state to be created.

"We would not be sitting here today were it not for them. People over in the East ignored the fact that Western Australia only became a state in 1890. We had a lot to learn about governing ourselves and uniting our people when Federation was almost immediately thrust upon us. Our sense of identity was very fragile. We had an embarrassing inferiority complex which you found to be obvious in your discussions with us. But, thanks to Kalgoorlie, we made the right decision about joining with you.

"As a result, one day, Western Australia will be the dominant State of Australia. None of us will live to see it, but it will happen, just as sure as the sun will rise tomorrow morning. It is our undeniable destiny. Just remember that you were the first Australians to hear this great news here in this eminent club tonight."

Barton had more speakers in mind, but George Reid [a former Premier of NSW and the first Leader of the Opposition in the Australian Parliament] was feeling yet another enormous need to be loquacious. He felt a call from the Almighty to humble just a trifle what he perceived to be a bit of arrogance from Forrest.

So, he intervened, "Why have you not yet founded a new state based on Kalgoorlie, John. As I see it, the locals over there are demanding that their passion for a separate state should be realized. As you have said, it was their sole reason for voting for Federation and must be honoured. It is a long overdue debt that cannot be written off, especially as there is

now no legal impediment to their statehood. As you know, it can be achieved quite easily, so why are you delaying the matter?"

A need for honesty consumed Forrest at this moment. With a humility that was absolutely out of character he responded, "You well know, George, that Perth, for financial reasons, cannot afford to let the Goldfields go. Without them, we are financially unviable. Separation from them just can't be allowed to happen. But let me deftly change the debate and ask Chris Watson [the third Prime Minister of Australia] a significant question."

George could not be dispensed with quite so quickly.

"Just hold on for a moment old chap before you verbally assault my left-wing, but honourable, colleague, Chris.

"This Goldfields matter must be fixed right now. It seems to me that they have been let down by outrageous negligence. I will travel with you to the Goldfields and we will tour the whole region, including places like Esperance for the purpose of promising them the new state to which they are entitled. It is a disgrace that they were conned. It gives politics a bad name. They must think that our Federal Government is composed of bushrangers."

Rubbing his massive gut, which was a regular habit, Reid added, "If I am wrong, John, in my staunch advocacy of this, then may I be damned."

Forrest also rubbed his substantial gut and then responded amiably, "Well, George, if I am there with you in Kalgoorlie, the fat will well and truly be in the fire."

Then Forrest went on to deliver a king hit.

"Okay, George. I take up your offer. You and I will go together to the Goldfields at the earliest date we can arrange. But with one proviso. You must promise me that you will travel with me to the Riverina and New England in your home state. There, we will promise each of these prosperous regions that they will henceforth be new states. Both regions



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have never ever wanted to be part of New South Wales. They are sick to death of being bled dry by Sydney. You know it but you ignore it."

William Lyne [the Premier of NSW at the time of Federation] joined the fray with unexpected fervour that seemed to be almost out of character.

"I will strongly back any movement to give Riverina the right to be a new state. I own a large property down there. Invite me to the meetings and I will lead the charge. We will get a huge vote in favour of the privilege of saying goodbye to Sydney."

"Now, now, gentlemen! Let peace and calm return to our brotherly ranks," intervened Barton.

"I am sure, George and John, what we can safely leave it to you both to organize visits to the Goldfields, Riverina and New England but, in the meantime, please go ahead, John, and ask Chris the interesting question you mentioned a little earlier before George became carried away by his obvious love of the Goldfields."

Anxious to avoid any further discussion about Kalgoorlie, Forrest quickly took up the invitation.

"Chris, can you remind us all why the Labor Party opposed Federation and do so in such a very aggressive manner?"...

But wait... Compton serves up even more!

In a second, equally-interesting, section to the book, he imagines that Gough Whitlam hosts a similar meal, this time at the Australian Club in Sydney, with Malcolm Fraser and Zelman Cowen. Manning Clark and Garfield Barwick drop in at various times and briefly join the conversation. The topic: 'the damage that was done to the Constitution of Australia by the Senate and Governor General in November 1975, when their actions caused Whitlam to be sacked as Prime Minister.' It provides some interesting perspectives on the mistakes made by Whitlam that day, as well as presenting some radical, but seemingly-worthwhile, changes that could now be made to the way

Australia is governed at all levels.

Just one thing puzzles me about this book, though – its cover. The designer obviously never read this fabulous book because the dinner depicted is quite unlike how the 1911 dinner in the Private Dining Room of the Melbourne Club would have looked...a quite formal, very business-like, all male event.

'Dinner With the Founding Fathers' is available in paperback from around \$17.

Review by Peter Lacey



FINALLY, This book made me wonder how familiar the history of Federation is to Australians (I know little of it; I can't recall ever learning about it at school and I never studied Australian history at university) and whether it is a topic taught in school today. I suspected that Americans know more about their Founding Fathers than do Australians about theirs – but perhaps that's not the case, as a US Mint survey recently revealed 'only' 7% of Americans could name the first four American Presidents in order (Washington, Adams, Jefferson and Madison; I wonder what that percentage is for Australians knowing their first four Prime Ministers – and, in case you're unsure of who they were, they were, in

order, Barton, Deakin, Watson and Reid).

Rod Fish, a History Teacher at Lumen Christi Catholic College, kindly informed me that 'Making a Nation' is an optional topic for Years 9 and 10 History, and the topic is covered at Lumen Christi. However, 'the story of Federation is not well-received by students. They find it all a bit dry.' That school's solution is to have their students conceptually create their own nations from colonies, and then the students' nations are compared with the actual Australian Federation experience. Oh, history was never presented in such an interesting way in my school days! **R**

Coincidentally, shortly after reading Everal Compton's book, an article about 'Australia With 10 States' (a topic akin to one discussed at the dinner) was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*. We thought it was worth including in *Recollections*, so have done so, with the kind permission of its author, Shane Wright. ('*The South Wants a New State*', also about the possible formation of a new Australian state, was included in *Recollections 4*, available at www.bit.ly/Recollections4)

Vetch's vexing sketch all over the map

A proposed carve-up a century ago would have created a nation much different to what we got, writes **Shane Wright**.

As voters watch state and federal leaders bicker over the handling of the pandemic, they should take some solace: it could have been worse.

In 1838, when the four colonies – NSW, Van Diemen's Land, Western Australia and South Australia – were still grappling to survive, a paper appeared in the august pages of the Royal Geographical Society in London.

Scottish civil engineer, army officer and author James Vetch unveiled his plan entitled "Considerations on the Political Geography and Geographical Nomenclature of Australia".

Gone were the three mainland states, replaced with nine new entities (with vastly different titles) while the isle of Van Diemen's Land would remain.

Instead of a single, massive Western Australia (which as a country would be among the 10 largest in the world), Vetch sought to have relatively equal-sized colonies to absorb what he thought could ultimately be a land with 153 million residents.

It meant a map that would drive modern-day Australians to distraction.

So what would Vetch's vision of Australia mean?

Despite documenting his dislike of the English names given to much of Australia, none of Vetch's proposed names

for the states were taken from Indigenous groups.

There is no NSW or Victoria (in its present location). The Victoria that Vetch planned sat in the southwest in an area taking in Perth and Albany.

WA would no longer crow about its contribution of wealth to the nation via its iron ore and natural gas deposits as they would sit in the new state of Dampiera. And Dampiera would abut a colony called Tasmania.

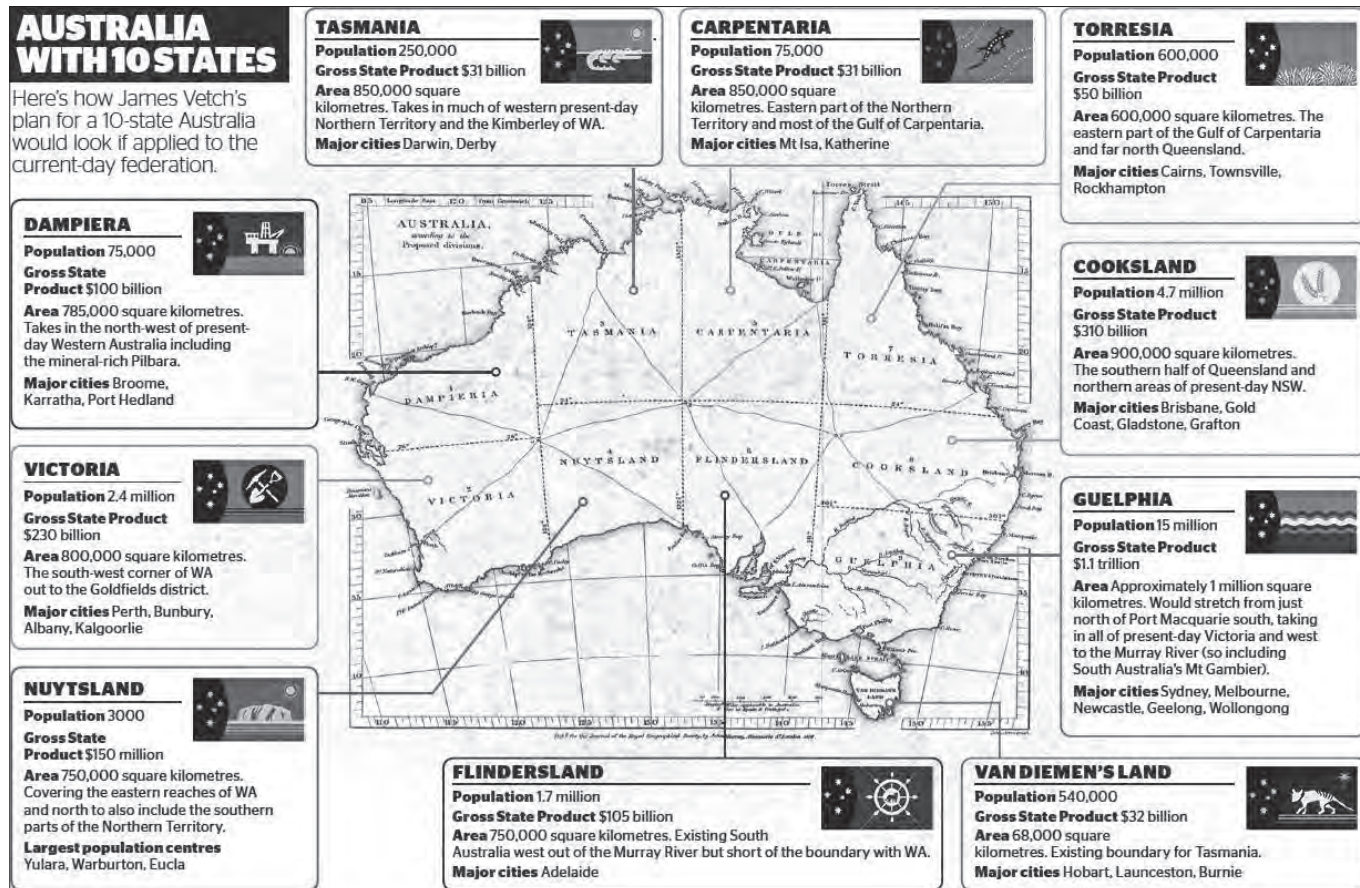
The ongoing campaign by some for a north Queensland colony would be rewarded with Torresia while Uluru would sit in the sparsely populated Nuytsland.

Guelphia, encompassing much of present-day NSW and Victoria, would be home to about 15 million residents and would have an economy that would rank it among the 20 largest in the world. It would be Australia's answer to California as an economic powerhouse.

Dr Andre Brett from Wollongong University, an expert in the territorial separation movements of the 1800s, says there was a string of campaigns across the continent for new colonies through the period.

The Riverina movement proposed a separate colony between the Murrumbidgee and Murray rivers in southern NSW.

So confident were people in central Queensland that a mansion was established in Rockhampton in 1894 for the expected governor of the new colony. Today it forms part of a hospital.



But Dr Brett says they all failed, however narrowly. Just three movements – Van Diemen’s Land, the Port Phillip District and the Moreton Bay area – succeeded in separating from NSW.

“Our original boundaries were just arbitrary lines and they were consistently contested on the ground by people who had different political or economic reasons for change,” he says.

The constitution contains a chapter on the creation of states, as the writers of the document expected parts of the country to demand their representation in the new federal Parliament. It also allows for existing states to form a union.

But since 1901, efforts to create these states or even leave the Federation have failed.

West Australians in 1933 voted to secede at a referendum.

At the same election, they voted in a Labor government opposed to secession.

In 1967, the Askin government in NSW ran a referendum for the creation of a state covering New England. Only Labor voters around Newcastle prevented the referendum’s success.

More recently, Senator Matt Canavan has openly backed a referendum to split Queensland between north and south.

Dr Brett, who says north Queensland probably deserved to be a state, believes most campaigns for separation failed because they lacked broad support in their communities or they were unable to win over the London-based Colonial Office which did not understand what was happening on the ground.

“That just three separation movements succeed shows how difficult it was to get that broad political and economic

support needed to get interest from the Colonial Office,” he said.

Vetch, apart from his idea for the colonies, also had some strong views about their names.

He described the term New South Wales as “a name consisting of a sentence” which required “designating the inhabitants by the names of New South Welsh men and New South Welsh women”.

Vetch was more strident about the terms South Australia and West Australia. Australia was derived from the Latin term “australis” which means southern.

“These names consist of two words in two different languages, and if put entirely into English would imply in one case a repetition, and in the other a contradiction, viz., South Southland and West Southland,” he wrote.

Vetch’s tirade against place names was not just focused on colonies. He bemoaned the English names given to much of Australia, noting the way explorers affixed their own names or those of patrons to places that already had names.

“Wherever native names exist, and where these names may have existed for a number of ages, it appears something like sacrilege to disturb or change; such names, besides the sacredness of antiquity, are often significant, and contain in themselves useful information as to the migrations of the human race and the former connexion which existed between tribes now far separated,” he wrote.

Vetch’s plan, and others like it, never eventuated. The constitution today only notes NSW, Victoria, SA, Queensland and Tasmania agreeing to unite to form “one indissoluble Federal Commonwealth”. WA’s agreement came too late and New Zealand is still open to join. **R**

Walking the Street

South Coast History Society’s Carp Street (Bega) Walk has proven to be just as popular as our Bega Town Bus Tour, with four groups of walkers having already joined us to learn something of the fascinating history of this historically-important street.

We limit groups to 25 participants and the tour takes 90 minutes after which we enjoy a cup of tea or coffee at a local café. The walk is free but we ask those who join us for a donation to help fund Society activities.

The next walking tour will be on Thursday morning January 15th. If you are interested in joining us, phone 0448 160 852 to reserve your place.

* * *

Preserving and sharing our important local history and heritage is (regrettably) not a high priority by local Councils, even though Councils are the level of government primarily responsible for it.

Council elections provide an ideal opportunity to suggest to potential Councillors that they should be more mindful of our history and heritage, so before you vote we suggest you ask candidates one question: ‘What do YOU plan to do to advance the interests of our

local history and heritage?’

* * *

The local history/heritage/museum sector comprises numerous small, volunteer-run organisations (for example, there are 14 [yes, 14!!] museums/genealogical societies/history societies along the South Coast between Batemans



Bay and Eden [the South Coast History Society being the largest, the most active, and the one that regularly reaches the greatest number of people]) each largely ‘doing their own thing’ and rarely working together to promote the sector. It’s very pleasing, therefore, that Kristy McBain (the Member for Eden Monaro in the Australian Parliament) has recognized the need for greater dialogue between local museums/genealogical and history societies and has initiated a series of on-line discussions with and between these organisations in her electorate. We’re hoping these will provide tangible benefits to the individual organisations and, particularly, will ultimately benefit the entire sector. (State Members and Councils are encouraged to

take note of Kristy’s valuable lead, even if just to become participants in the discussions.) **R**

More Than Just a Bridge

In March 2021 funding was approved, under the NSW Government's Fixing Country Bridges program, to demolish and replace the one-lane timber bridge that crosses the entrance to Cuttagee Lake, just south of Bermagui. The replacement was to be a concrete, two-lane bridge.

The reason given for this decision was a need to remove the expense of its continued maintenance from the local community (i.e. Bega Valley Shire Council), while providing improved road services for residents, freight and tourism. Following strong community objections, and attention being drawn to the heritage status of the bridge, the offer of funding was withdrawn.

Bega Valley Shire Council then voted to continue with their plan to demolish the bridge, and to seek other funding for its replacement.

THE BRIDGE

The bridge was constructed initially as a four-span bridge in 1892 and has been in its current ten-span form since 1903, albeit with significance pier and abutment replacements in 1934 and 1974 following flood damage. It is a single lane, ten-span bridge of approximate length 110m, with timber deck running boards and cross planks. The southern shorter six spans are of traditional timber log girder construction supported on six steel and timber piers comprising a combination of driven timber and steel piles. The northern, longer, four spans are of steel girder construction, supported onto three concrete piers with concrete piles.

A Veritable Encyclopædia

If you want to know more about the South Coast's fascinating history, 'Recollections' is a good place to start. It has become a veritable encyclopædia of the history of the NSW South Coast, with 300 articles having been included in the past 30 issues.

www.bit.ly/Recollectionsindex is your key to finding the stories of greatest interest to you.

If what you're looking for is not there, try www.bit.ly/101objectsbooklet – it includes comprehensive details about 101 historically-interesting objects from the Bega Shire.

Or to access our history of Bega township, visit www.bit.ly/Begahistory.

If you have any suggestions about interesting South Coast history-related stories that should be included in future issues of 'Recollections', we'd be delighted to hear from you. After all, 'Recollections' is YOUR local history.

Cuttagee Bridge was listed on the Bega Valley Shire's Local Environmental Plan in 2013 as an item of local heritage significance. Its Statement of Significance in the State Heritage Register is:

'The bridge has historic significance for its association with development of the region in the post-depression period of 1935. It has some technical interest for its use of traditional timber bridge construction, and it has high aesthetic value for its timber character. These aesthetic values are held by many members of the local community who have expressed concern at the potential demolition of the timber bridges between Bermagui and Tanja. This and the other timber bridges contribute to the very high aesthetic values of the "Scenic Route" between Bermagui and Tathra and are considered to be components of the cultural landscape...On Tourist Drive 9, the bridge is close to the sea and has a highly evocative character. It therefore has high aesthetic and social value. Notwithstanding the modifications to the structural support, the overall integrity is good, especially above the deck...Its degree of significance: very high.'

COMMUNITY REACTION

Prior to the announcement of the funding in March 2021, no community consultation was undertaken regarding the de-listing of the bridge as a heritage item and its demolition.

The announcement resulted in an immediate community response opposing the demolition and a petition of over 13,000 signatures calling for the retention of the bridge. This failed to stop Council voting to continue with its proposal for demolition.

Council did agree, however, to set up an advisory group as a platform for community consultation. The terms of reference for this group have yet to be determined. Initially it was intended that the group would assist in retaining 'some heritage character' in the new two-lane concrete replacement. It is likely that this role may be broadened.

THE BRIDGE'S SIGNIFICANCE

The decision to replace the Cuttagee bridge has implications far wider than for the bridge itself.

It is located in a zone of coastal land between Wallaga Lake and Tathra that is characterised by its striking natural beauty: coastal wetlands and estuarine lagoons, wild beaches, native forests and majestic mountains. Unlike most coastal areas of NSW, this area remains relatively undeveloped, due in large part to its remoteness from Melbourne and Sydney and due to the prescience of earlier State governments having included extensive tracts of this area in national parks and nature reserves.

Preserved within these parks is a unique history of Aboriginal social and cultural heritage inextricably tied to the natural environment. The cultural landscape, therefore, combines a history of Aboriginal and non-indigenous settlement and a relatively untouched natural landscape.

The exceptionality of this coastal landscape is recognised at both local and federal levels of government. The southern part of the zone is described in the Bega Valley Shire Council Development Control Plan as 'significant Rural

Landscapes (Murrah and Tanja), forming the Bermagui to Tanja Cultural Landscape'. The bridge at Cuttagee Lake, a critical component of the Bermagui to Tanja Cultural Landscape, allows the road users to enjoy the view of the estuarine lagoon and its ocean beach. For a viewer on the shores of the estuary and beach, the bridge and its road provide a visual frame for the estuary that it traverses.

At the federal level, this area forms part of a broader coastal zone, extending from Narooma in the north to Orbost, Victoria, in the south, designated 'Australia's Coastal Wilderness' in the Australian Tourist Board's National Landscapes Plan. These designations recognise this coastal zone as worthy of protection and preservation. They also recognise its value for the local economy through its potential for environmental and cultural tourism.

The road through from the Princes Highway at Tilba via Wallaga Lake and along the Tathra-Bermagui Road, is linked by a series of bridges, five of which still survive in their original timber form. Three of them (Wallaga Lake Bridge to the north of Bermagui, and the Cuttagee and Murrah Bridges in the south) are classified as heritage items in the Bega Valley Council Local Environment Plan. The others are at Wapengo Creek and Sandy Creek (Tanja). All of these bridges are single lane structures, requiring motorists to give way, a system that still operates effectively today. Considered by many as the historical markers that highlight and complete the magnificence of the natural

landscape, these timber bridges not only have heritage value but they allow locals to live that experience when they go about their daily lives.

Council's website currently lists the four southern timber bridges on this road for replacement, including the local heritage-listed Murrah Bridge. The local heritage-listed bridge at Wallaga Lake is under the control of Transport for NSW and its future is unknown. If Cuttagee Bridge were demolished, it would only be a matter of time before these other timber bridges would also be lost.

It is of critical importance that the significance of these bridges as important elements in the cultural landscape is recognised and they are protected, as the loss of these historical markers would diminish the high value of this unique coastal environment. The importance of Cuttagee Bridge and the other bridges in this unique cultural landscape was acknowledged in the initial decision by Bega Valley Shire Council to list them as local heritage items in 2013.

The future of Cuttagee Bridge is yet to be finally determined. The community is actively lobbying to save it from demolition and is making the case that it is possible to reinforce and revitalise the timber bridge'. A community forum was held in Bermagui to express its opposition to the demolition and to discuss possibilities for retaining the timber bridge. Councillors and Council staff attended, and community-Council discussions continue. **R**



Photo courtesy David Rogers

and finally...

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