South Coast History Society Inc.

Recollections

Issue 35

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The intersection of the two bridges in Cobargo, the preferred position for the District's Soldiers Memorial – see story page 12. Image courtesy of Bermagui Historical Society.

A Brief History of Pambula

Pambula has been described as 'a quiet town on a bend in the Princes Highway'.

But that seriously undersells Pambula, if only because it's a town with a still clearly-evident and interesting history.

Enormous middens along the banks of the Pambula and Yowaka Rivers and fish traps across the Yowaka River are current-day reminders that Djiringani and Thaua Aboriginal communities inhabited the area for millenia before it was settled by Europeans in the 1830s. The Aboriginals' name for the area, 'Panboola' or 'Pamboola', meaning 'twin waters', was subsequently taken as the name of the town and the locality.

Peter, George and Alexander Imlay acquired vast swathes of lands between Broulee and Twofold Bay in the 1830s when the area was 'beyond the limits of location' (i.e. when the area was crown land, outside a roughly-400km circle from Sydney beyond which no one could legally graze their herds or stock. Unsurprisingly, these bureaucratic 'limits' were ignored). Their land included the extremely fertile flats along the Pambula River where the brothers decided to establish their head station.

In 1839, their Pambula Station was described by John Lambie, the Commissioner for Lands, as being 17 square miles in area, having four slab huts, a stockyards, 150 acres of wheat and barley under cultivation, and having 12 people living on the property.

In the early 1840s, when the Imlay brothers experienced

Fantastic Reads

financial difficulties, William, Edward and James Walker acquired the title to the Imlay brothers' land and in 1847 commenced building 'Oaklands', a then-typical Australian homestead.

The Grange in South Pambula

In 1843 the Government Surveyor Thomas Townsend laid out the proposed township of Pambula (which included the 'Oaklands' homestead site) on the river flats, and the sale of land started.

In 1844 Captain John Lloyd R.N. was granted 300 acres on the southern side of the Pambula River in lieu of a pension. He built **The Grange** on this land using stone that was ship's ballast from Devon in England. (This substantial house survives and today is in Northview Drive in South Pambula). At that time the Pambula River flowed around the bottom of the hill below The Grange and was navigable to this point, so Captain Lloyd was able to moor small vessels that he had navigated up the river at the bottom of his garden.

In 1845 a road was built connecting Eden with the Monaro. It passed near to Pambula. To cater for the needs of travellers, the Walker brothers had a hotel, named the Governor Fitzroy, constructed on the river flats between 'Oaklands' and the Pambula River. It seems to have survived until the 1880s when it was demolished.

By the late 1840s the Pambula township was starting to acquire characteristics of a permanent settlement. Anglican and Roman Catholic priests were starting to visit the area, if infrequently initially, and, in 1849, Pambula became one of the first towns in the state to have a National School. Classes were initially conducted in a single room hut provided by the Walker brothers before a 'permanent' brick and shingle school was erected the following year consisting of two small rooms for the teacher and two separate classrooms for the pupils.

However, a major flood in 1851 swept away sections of the developing township which had a population approaching 200 at the time, prompting settlers to move to nearby higher ground. Further significant flooding of the river flats occurred in 1860, 1864, 1866 and 1870.

By 1856 Pambula had five licensed hotels. Then, in 1860, the foundation stone was laid for a Courthouse on the corner of Toallo and Monaro Streets, providing status to town development that was taking place at the northern end of town.

About the same time, gold was discovered at Kiandra. Prospectors travelling through Pambula provided it with a further substantial economic boost.

From the late 1860s large areas of the Pambula river flats were given over to the cultivation of maize. This was taken to nearby Merimbula where it was processed into cornflour at Matthew Munn's Maizena Works that had been established there in 1867.

Dairying also became an important local industry (a Pambula Co-operative Creamery and Dairy Company Limited factory, producing 'Pambula Butter', was established in 1897 and operated until 1974; the factory building can still be seen several kilometers up Mt Darragh Road), as was timber-getting (principally supplying railway sleepers that were shipped from Yellow Point on Pambula Lake to Sydney), potato growing, and a wattle bark industry that supplied tanneries, including two that operated in Pambula. Oyster leases in the area were being established by 1885.

The Pambula Courthouse

In 1888 gold was discovered on the Yowaka and Pipeclay Rivers. (This has been foreseen as early as 1851 when Rev. W. B. Clarke, a clergyman and geologist, visited the area and

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Toad Hall

reported 'I have reason to believe that gold will be found in creeks running north-east from Jingery Range, which is about 13 miles south-west of Pambula, as in Greig's Creek …') This discovery led to a goldrush and provided a further impetus to the town. By 1891 there were 11 mining companies operating in the Mount Gahan area to the south-west and by 1892 the town was supporting its own newspaper, *The Pambula Voice,* which was introduced when *The Moruya Advance* was shut down and its printing press transferred to Pambula.

Regular gold mining declined in the area from 1915 and virtually ceased in early World War II. The population of the area and the town similarly declined.

Pambula, however, remained the dominant town in the area and the hub of the surrounding rich rural district (being the site of the district hospital, courthouse and police station, four churches, a bank, butter factory, racecourse and jockey club) until the 1950s when Merimbula expanded and the town of Pambula gradually declined in importance.

A number of authentic Colonial buildings in Pambula now provide the town with much of its charm. These include:

The complex of **Courthouse, Police Station, Lockup and Police Residence** on the cnr Toallo St and Monaro St. Now the oldest surviving public building in Pambula. The current building was erected in 1860–61, although it has been extended and modified since. Now the home of the Bega Valley Genealogical Society. **Chinese market gardens** occupied the land to the west of the Courthouse until the 1920s.

Opposite is the **Pambula Public School** building, completed in 1872 which was used until 1907. In 1912 the building was purchased to become a Masonic Lodge. The extension on the back was added in 1957.

In Monaro St, below the Pambula Public School building is the **Schoolmaster's Residence**, erected in early 1877, replacing a small hospital that had operated on the site for some years from 1856.

And below the Courthouse is the **Baddeley Family Home.** Part of this building dates to before 1865 (before it was acquired by the Baddeleys) and possibly as early as 1858, with additions being added in 1881 with the intention of it housing the town's Post Office. However, this never occurred and it became the Baddeley family home, remaining so until 2004. A tannery operated at the rear of the house for most of the time from 1866 to 1926.

The **Commercial Hotel** on the corner of Toallo St and Quondola St was built in 1878 using materials from Pambula's National School. Extensions were added in 1887 and 1906.

Opposite, in Toallo St is **Toad Hall** which was erected in 1884 to provide accommodation for hotel patrons. It has been since been used for a variety of purposes, including as a general store, boarding house, saddlery shop, Fisheries Inspector's residence, private residence, craft shop and antique store. It is now a B & B.

Just up Quondola St is a late Victorian **timber**

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cottage with a characteristic external chimney.

The **Town Hall**, opposite, was originally a School of Arts, built in 1883 next to Toad Hall across the street. It was dismantled in 1922 and re-erected, with additions, on its present site.

Around the corner in Toallo St., at No 47A, is **McKells** (not visible from the street). It was rented by the McKell family probably from the late 1880s and was the home of William McKell who was to become the NSW Premier from 1941 to 1947 and Governor General of Australia from 1947 to 1953. 47 Toallo St (currently occupied by Artessence Gallery) was built as a butchers shop in the late 1880s. The shops next door at 45 Toallo Street were built in the 1980s.

Just down from the hardware store in Merimbola Street is a **well and standpipe**, sunk in 1901 that provided the original water supply to the town.

The Royal Willows Hotel


Mrs Mac's Emporium Building

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- And join us at our next **South Coast History Day** – a full-day event in early 2023 that will focus on the history of the Batemans Bay area. Look for details in future issues of 'Recollections'.

At the bottom end of Merimbola Street is **Panboola Wetlands** which is an amalgamation of the area once occupied by the Old Pambula Racecourse which ceased operating in 1997 and larger area donated to the community by a local benefactor.

There are a number of historic buildings at the bottom end of Quondola St. On the western side is **Christ Church Anglican Church** which was built between 1953 and 1956. It is the third Christ Church building to stand on this site.

Next door is **Covingtons**. It was built by Syms Covington probably around 1855. Covington had previously been Charles Darwin's assistant on the *Beagle* in the 1830s and became Pambula's Postmaster in 1854. He also owned two blocks in the area now occupied by Panboola Wetlands. Originally this building was the Forest Oak Inn, but has also been used as a general store, post office, court room, police barracks, doctors' surgeries and residence, and as a restaurant.

Further uphill, behind the War Memorial, is a **weatherboard building** constructed in 1903 which was rented, then purchased and later extended by the CBC Bank. The site was originally occupied by Doherty's Commercial Stores that were built around 1883 but were burnt down in 1894.

On the opposite side of the road, currently (it is slated for demolition), is the **Royal Willows Hotel**. It was built in 1885 and licensed in 1886, but was later renovated and extended in 1923, in the 1960s and in 1993.

Adjacent is what was known as **'Mrs Mac's Emporium'** building, after Bridget McPherson who ran a shop here for many years from the mid-1960s. It was built in 1891 and was originally known as the Federal Stores.

The **Pambula Post Office**, further up the street, was constructed in 1937 and was renovated in 1990. The building replaced an earlier Post Office constructed in 1905 that was burned down in June 1936.

Sources: www.aussietowns.com.au; www.panboola.com; 'Pambula's Colonial Days' by Jule Higgins; 'Notes on early settlement of the Pambula River' by Joan Weeks; 'Discover Pambula: Walk in the Pioneers' Footsteps' by Pambula Area Progress and Planning Association Inc.; 'Historic Pambula: A Small Town with a Big History' by Pambula Traders' Association, and information provided by respected local historian Pat Raymond.

Local Heroes

Many local museums have a selection of World War I artefacts in their collections – commonly medals, perhaps shell cases, examples of trench art, uniforms, Dead Man's Pennies.

The Bega Pioneers' Museum has an unusually large collection of World War I memorabilia and, as is often the case with objects in museums, many have very interesting back stories.

When World War I broke out, there was enormous local enthusiasm for it. On the South Coast many men (particularly young men) tried to enlist, and they were widely feted as 'heroes'.

This is hardly surprising: they were supporting a worthwhile cause (fighting the German 'huns'); they were patriotically serving King, Country and Empire; they were likely to be away from home for a considerable period of time (initially assumed to be months, but in reality it was anything up to five years); they were selflessly placing their own lives in danger; they were to be separated from family and friends.

Typifying community support for and the esteem showed to those who enlisted are locally-issued 'war medals' that were presented to residents who enlisted in the army. The Bega Pioneers' Museum has three of these in its collection – those presented to C Warburton and A W Plumb by the Cobargo community and one presented to V Murray by the Bermagui community.

So what is the story behind these?

First, the recipients. C Warburton was Charles Warburton a 36½ year old, single, labourer when he enlisted in mid-1916. In August 1917 he was posted to the front in France where, in early July 1918, he received a gunshot wound to his head and right shoulder. He was invalided back to Australia in October 1918 and was discharged from the army in January 1920.

AW Plumb was Albert William Plumb, also a labourer and unmarried, who was almost 21 years of age when he enlisted in June 1916. He received a gunshot wound to his right buttocks and forearm in France in September 1917 and was gassed in April 1918. He returned to Australia in June 1919.

V Murray was William Victor Murray who was known as Victor to avoid confusion with his father, William. He enlisted in September 1915 when age 25 and was single. He served at Gallipoli and then as a driver in France. On 29th December 1916 he was killed by 'shrapnel fire' whilst packing ammunition. (The residents of Bermagui later organized for a framed memorial to be presented to his mother, Eva. This is also now on display in the Bega Pioneers' Museum – one of a number of examples in their collection of personalized World War I memorial tributes.)

And what exactly are these 'war medals'?

They are small (25mm in diameter) simple tokens given to those who enlisted in World War I. The recipient's name is engraved on one side and the reverse side records that it is, for example, the 'Cobargo War Medal, 1916'. They were produced by a company or companies that actively promoted and sold them to local recruiting committees.

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Three unpretentious local 'War Medals' – symbols of the pride felt by local communities towards those who enlisted in the army in World War I

Further information about these 'war medals' can be gleaned from the numerous references to them in the *Cobargo Chronicle* newspaper.

'Cobargo War Medals' were issued by the Cobargo Recruiting Committee and one was presented to every local who voluntarily enlisted for war service. They were clearly an aid to recruiting that was also promoted as 'a distinctive decoration from their own district' that was 'destined to become a valued heirloom in many families in this district'. By the war's end they were being promoted as 'an exclusive distinction' – perhaps with some justification if the *Cobargo Chronicle*'s response is any indication to an enquiry about whether recruits from Bermagui should also be presented with them: '*Answer to correspondent, Bermagui. War medals are issued from Cobargo only to recruits who enlist at Cobargo. A recruit enlisting from Bermagui would naturally be entitled to the Bermagui war medal, if souvenirs are still being issued there*'. (Nine months earlier the *Cobargo Chronicle* had seen it newsworthy enough to note that '*Bermagui Recruiting Association has ordered through Mr E Chegwidden for presentation to recruits a number of war medals, the design being a facsimile of that presented to Cobargo volunteers.*')

The local community obviously considered these medals to have special value, announcing within days of the Armistice being signed in 1918 that '*every volunteer from Cobargo now in camp, will receive the District War Medal*' (they were usually presented when soldiers were on final leave before departing overseas) – so no local volunteer who was willing to 'do his bit' for the war effort missed out on receiving one.

And when it looked likely that conscription would be

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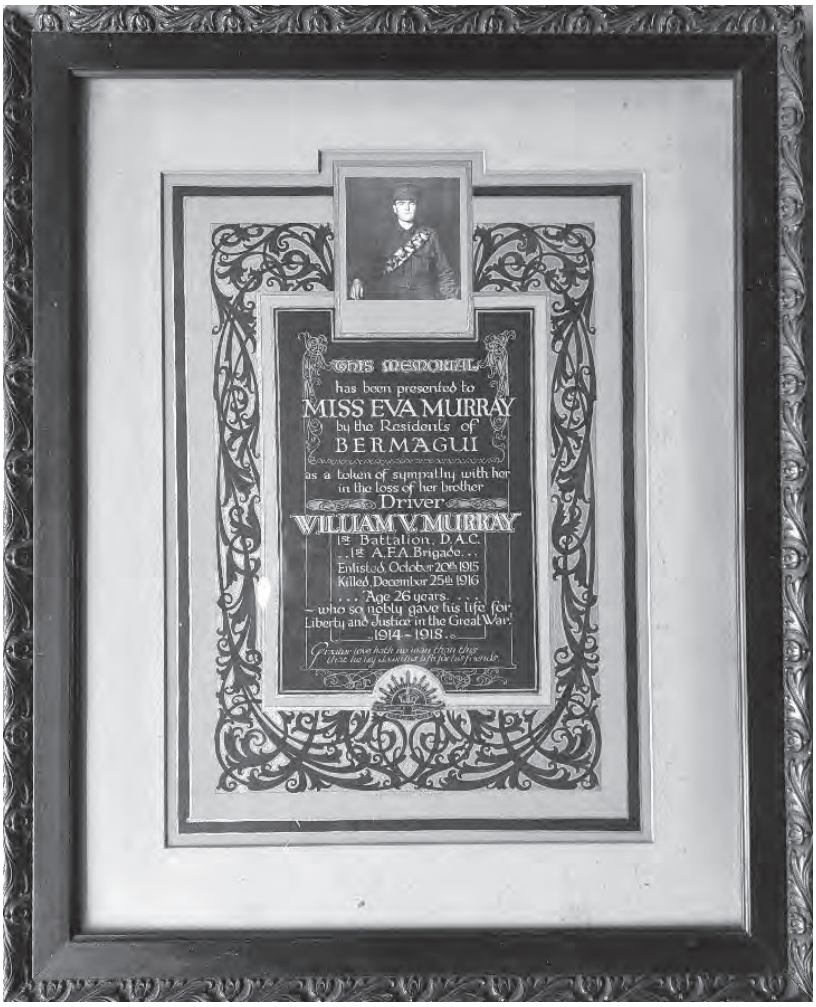
introduced in late 1916, moves were made to restrict their issue only to those who volunteered for service: '*With the coming of conscription, the issue of the War Medal will automatically cease, except in the cases where men above or below the ages called up volunteer*'.

The price paid for these medals by the Cobargo Recruiting Association was clearly significant with frequent references in the *Cobargo Chronicle* to events being held with the profits benefitting a Cobargo War Medal Fund. And obviously the Association held little stock in reserve: '*Cobargo Recruiting Association has just received a further dozen war medals for distribution to wearers of the khaki who have enlisted at the local police office*' (12th February 1916); '*A further supply of district war medals were ordered this week, bringing the number up to 36 for distribution among those who have volunteered through Cobargo office*' (15th April 1916); '*Cobargo Recruiting Association has ordered a further 16 war medals for distribution among lads from this district who are in khaki. The fund is now exhausted—but so apparently is recruiting here*' (19th August 1916); '*The chairman* (at a farewell function) *wished to explain that he had hoped that night to present to the recruits the now historic Cobargo District War Medal, but the medals ordered had not arrived on time. Later on, they would, however, be handed over to the families of the volunteers. While on the subject he might say that about £40 had been expended on war medals and the fund was just*



The tribute to Victor Murray, presented to his mother by the Bermagui community

'The local Methodist Church was filled at last Sunday night's service when a Roll of Honor (see above) was unveiled as a tribute to the men who have enlisted from the Methodist churches of the circuit…It was a matter for regret that the memorial on view did not represent the wishes of the generous donor, Mrs. Rogers, nor the plans of the Church officers. Those to whom the work was entrusted failed to accomplish what was intended, and instead of a substantial memorial worthy of a permanent place in the church, a tribute to the men whose names it would perpetuate, a flimsy bit of lithographic work in a frame was opened up, to the keen disappointment of everybody. We understand that this is to be immediately replaced by a memorial in keeping with the original intention.' – (Candelo) Southern Record and Advertiser, 30th September 1916

exhausted. He hoped that before the gathering dispersed the fund would benefit by voluntary subscriptions from those present. Cobargo was pledged to present every recruit from this centre with a medal and that would be done, come what may' (13th January 1917); '*Cobargo District War Medals arrived a day too late for presentation to Ptes Crouch and C and G Jessop at the Quaama sendoff, but are being forwarded to Secretary Kennedy for presentation to friends or relatives on the soldiers' behalf*' (9th February 1918).

The medals were commonly presented at 'farewell' functions for those about to leave for overseas. These were usually dances that were well-attended by the local community. Speeches (many speeches!) praising the departing serviceman or servicemen were given, musical items were performed, elaborate suppers were provided … and the opportunity was not missed to call for other local men to 'do their duty'.

And often some of those present would follow the departing soldier(s) down to the wharf where they were to embark on a steamer to Sydney – the soldiers, of course, being transported from town to the wharf in what was then (at least for a town like Cobargo) a still-novel motor car!

The admiration shown to local 'heroes' who enlisted was maintained throughout the war with their names being displayed on Rolls of Honour that were produced by many organisations. The Bega Pioneers' Museum has four in its collection, two honouring local masonic lodge members, one from Springvale Public School and a particularly interesting one from the Candelo Methodist Church. A Roll of Honour that was displayed outside the Bega Post Office included the names of 150 locals who enlisted. (Again, these Rolls of Honour had a secondary recruiting function, making locals very aware of those who had not enlisted, as well as of those who had enlisted.)

Above are some local 'Returned Soldiers Medals' – top left, Cobargo's tribute to Pvt. A W Plumb; top right, Cobargo's tribute to Pvt. C Warburton; bottom left, Quaama's tribute to W N McGregor; bottom right, Brogo's tribute to W N McGregor. As an example, the inscription on the back of Pvt. Warburton's medal reads: 'Presented to Pvt C Warburton by the residents of Cobargo on his return from the Front. WAR SERVICE 1916 – 1918. Fought at Polygon Wood and Hamel'

When local soldiers returned home from the war, they were again feted as heroes – being met at the steamer wharf, driven to elaborate 'welcome home' functions, and being presented with local 'Returned Soldiers Medals'. Bega Pioneers' Museum has four of these in its collection – those presented to A W Plumb (whose Cobargo War Medal is, as indicated above, also in the museum's collection) by Cobargo, to W N McGregor by Quaama and also Brogo, and Pvt C Warburton (whose Cobargo War Medal is also in the museum's collection) by Cobargo.

Eventually more permanent 'Soldiers' Memorials' were erected in towns throughout the area to honour their local servicemen – and that's a whole equally interesting story, with the following being an edited extract from an address given by Dr Richard Reid at South Coast History Day in 2018:

Remembering the Great War … communities, families and memorials, 1918–1935

One of the most poignant war related graves – you could call it a memorial – in Australia is surely that of Annie Whitelaw in Briagolong Cemetery, Victoria. Annie died in 1927 and the local Maffra Repatriation Committee erected her headstone with this inscription:

Annie Whitelaw
The Mother of Six Sons
Who Served in The
Great War 1914-1919
Four of whom
Bob, Ken, Ivan and Angus
Paid the Supreme Sacrifice
Happy is she who can die
With the thought that in
The hour of her country's
Greatest need she gave
her utmost.

When asked what was, in his opinion, the single biggest impact of WWI on Australia, well-known war historian Dr Michael McKernan replied simply – grief.

How could one begin to measure the grief implied in Annie Whitelaw's inscription?

We can get a little closer to the ongoing dimensions of that emotion by realising that Ken Whitelaw, mentioned on the grave, actually returned from the war but died at home of war wounds. Annie's other two sons, Lionel and John, both suffered long-term war-related illness.

Local knowledge, however, adds to the Whitelaw story. Briagolong's honour board, put up in 1917, is in the Mechanics Institute, a magnificent building. The six Whitelaw enlistees are shown on the board. There are also two wood and metal fixtures above the board. Local historian, Linda Barralough, explained to me that Annie was never able to participate too closely in an Anzac commemorative ceremony but would 'sit crying in her horse and jinker watching the Anzac Day march from a distance because she could not bear to go any closer'.

But there is an equally poignant explanation relating to the honour board. Those two wall fittings above the board held up a blind which was discretely pulled down over the board when Annie visited, so she would not have to see her sons' names.

Stories like this help us to realise the sorts of emotion that must have been present at local Anazc and Remembrance ceremonies all over Australia in those immediate post war years as families stood around memorials and patiently listened to all the rhetoric, and often cliché-ridden speeches, commonly delivered on such occasions.

But Annie's story gives shape and definition to Michael

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The Briagolong Honor Roll with the fitting above it that held the blind to cover it whenever Annie Whitelaw visited the Mechanics Institute

McKernan's claim that grief was the major outcome of the war.

There are other, also significant, local stories behind the construction and dedication of local memorials.

In the mid-1990s local historian Cheryl Mongan and I researched the story of Yass' war memorials and discovered a group called the Honour Roll Committee. It was allied to the decision made in 1921 to erect not just a war memorial in Yass but an elaborate soldier's hall with function rooms and a major performance space with a large stage. Rooms above the proposed hall would be available to veterans and their organisations to use.

To the Honour Roll Committee also fell the task of collecting the names that should be 'inscribed in letters of gold' (as a local Red Cross worker had expressed it in a letter to the local newspaper) on marble slabs to be erected in the vestibule of the new hall. These would be lists of everyone in the district who had volunteered and served overseas, as well as the list of the war dead.

The Committee was also to collect 'general information required for the preparation of the roll'. One wonders now what that extra information was. What has happened to it? Were proposed names checked for connection with Yass and District? Sadly, those records have not survived.

We do know, as this was published in the *Yass Courier* on 14 August 1922, the following information was required for consideration by the committee:

> *'Full name; residence at time of enlistment; rank and decoration (if any); year of discharge or actual date of death of fallen soldier and name of unit.'*

Asking for 'residence at time of enlistment' was a clear attempt to keep the list local and possibly exclude a soldier who had come to live in Yass and district after the war. By 14 August 1922, the committee had 365 possible names and published these under the banner – 'Lest we forget: Yass District Soldiers' Memorial: Honor Roll'. This was split into two lists – the fallen and the returned men. These names, it was stated, had been 'finally dealt with', with the committee satisfied that they had earned inclusion on the roll.

The family of Reg L Kenny, however, approached the committee to ensure that on the final list this would be properly amended to Kenny R C. So, the community was asked if there were any further names for consideration. This was a fruitful approach as within two weeks they had an additional 129 names bringing the total to 507.

A final list was published on 30 November 1922 with the warning that it would be impossible to include any more once the masons engraving the marble roll started work. The whole process had taken four months to complete.

Most large town memorials, one suspects, must have had similar processes for compiling their honour rolls. And local memorials almost certainly have interesting back stories concerning their development and elements such as the way names were presented for remembrance can provoke questions and call for comment. Take, for example, the memorial at Central Tilba. A fascinating feature of that memorial is that it displays two lists of names – those of ex-pupils of the local school, who were clearly felt to be more intimately connected with the locality because they went to school there, grew up there, were real locals, and the 'exiled sons of Tilba', so to speak, who had actually left the district but nevertheless were felt should not to be forgotten by the community.

Another noticeable feature of the Tilba memorial is its reference to the only local woman who seems to have served with the AIF – Sister Pearl Corkhill. She achieved lasting fame by becoming one of a very small handful of Australian

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Staff Sister Pearl Corkhill MM
Image: Australian War Memorial A04728

women, nurses all, to be awarded a Military Medal for her 'Bravery in the Field'. She was greatly feted when she returned to Tilba after the war and spent time during the last years of her life locally organising the donation to the National Library in 1975 of her father's famous glass plate negatives of Tilba people and place. This resulted in the publication by the Library, in 1983, of the magnificent *Taken at Tilba*.

But what is really noticeable about Pearl Corkhill's appearance 'in letters of gold' on the Central Tilba memorial is the fact that it records her rank within the AIF – 'Sister' - but also showed that she had been the recipient of the medal by engraving 'MM' after her name. No one else on the memorial received that treatment and, given the number of Military Medals awarded to Australians during that war, it's quite possible there is an MM to be found somewhere among the other names. It's rare to see rank and bravery awards placed on an Australian memorial. The special acknowledgement of Pearl Corkhill speaks volumes about the esteem and honour in which she was held in the immediate aftermath of the war and there is a deal of newspaper evidence to substantiate this.

A very different story, a local saga in itself, lies behind the development and location of Cobargo's memorial, at No 43 Princes Highway, beside the Soldiers' Memorial Hall. This was not a WWI building: it was put up in 1949 when a new cadre of WW2 veterans would have swelled local veteran ranks. The Cobargo Soldiers' Memorial was dedicated by the State Governor, Lord Gowrie, on 16 November 1935. What is startling here is the date – November 1935 – so long after the war and also long after the vast number of similar memorials all over Australia, and the world for that matter, had been erected. The Tilba memorial was up by 1919, and both Bega and Candelo had theirs in place by 1924. So, what was going on in Cobargo?

Let's begin in 1923 when a letter from 'Dinkum' appeared in the *Cobargo Chronicle*:

'*Repeated references in your paper to a public matter apparently abandoned seems to have little effect. I refer to the erection of a Soldier's Memorial for the whole recruiting district of which Cobargo was the centre. I do not think we are acting up to our promises to the boys responsible for the freedom and liberty we enjoy. When they went overseas to fight for us, we made many promises as to how we would stick to them when they returned. Where do they stand today? In many cases the poor Digger is buffeted about and comfortably forgotten by the bulk of the community. It is up to the Mayor of Cobargo, the Laird of Yourie, Squire of Quaama, and leading men of the district to arouse public feeling and see that the Roll of Honour is an accomplished*

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fact. Or must we again appeal to the ladies to do the bulk of the work, as they did in the anxious war years?'

There is a bite in those words – 'Laird of Yourie, Squire of Quaama' – a hint surely at the social divisions in Cobargo and district of the time.

The letter is illustrative of the impasse which seems to have been reached locally over construction of a suitable memorial, something that calls for explanation as well as how it now took virtually another decade before the memorial was finally built. On 11 October 1924 this brief, but punchy and to the point piece, appeared in the 'Local and General News' section of the *Chronicle*:

'*We'll soon have to erect a Memorial to the defunct movement to erect a Cobargo District Soldiers' Memorial.*'

The two Rolls of Honour from on the Central Tilba Great War memorial – names 'inscribed in letters of gold' of ex-pupils of the local school and of other enlistees from the Tiba district

The movement to erect a permanent Cobargo memorial began very shortly after war's end. On Monday 2 December 1918 a public meeting endorsed the idea of building a memorial and it was emphasised that Cobargo had, wisely, held off erecting honour boards during the war in order that a more complete recording of names on granite could be undertaken, something that would survive, unlike a wooden board. So, the actual names of those who had fought and returned, as well as those who had died overseas, would be kept evergreen, an emphasis that this was a soldiers' memorial not a memorial to the war itself.

A voice was raised, possibly at the meeting, enquiring why cash should be spent on a heap of masonry rather donating it to needy diggers. This was rebuffed by reference to the existence of a local fund for returned soldiers where such munificence, from those who had little interest in a memorial, would be most welcome.

Another short report on 7 December stated that the Cobargo people had decided to erect a memorial 'in the centre of the town' and, at the public meeting, a location at the apex of Cobargo's two bridges was suggested. This was a very visible and dramatic location. The point of this site was well made at the meeting by Councillor Kennelly:

'*It was right in the centre of the town, no traveller could pass without seeing it, the children going to or coming from school would have it constantly before them, and it would be in a place where every member of the public would be its caretaker.*'

This idea of public visibility is important when considering why any particular memorial ended up where it now is.

At Cobargo it took another six months from the December 1918 meeting until the idea of a memorial fund was mooted to pay for construction. But nothing moved at any speed in Cobargo on this issue: six months later, in January 1920, they were still talking about an appropriate moment to launch the fund and then, abruptly, did so at the end of January. Over the next few months a short list of donors, the same list, appeared week by week in the *Chronicle* with a slight increase in names and cash after May. The published list inched forward, gradually, until October when a couple of eager local collectors 'livened' it up (the description is the *Chronicle*'s) with small donations from the rural districts and the memorial organisers hoped that by year's end sufficient monies would have been collected to build the memorial.

By late November the *Chronicle* was convinced the required figure would not be reached and condemned the town's 'lassitude' and 'drowsiness' on this issue. January 1921 saw the memorial committee still arguing that the end was in sight and turning their thoughts to who might unveil the memorial and what sort of ceremony might be held. Then virtual silence until October 1922 when the paper declared that the 'Soldiers' Memorial is still only a project'. And so on to 'Dinkum's' remarks in 1923 and the *Chronicle*'s tart conclusion in 1924 that they should erect a memorial to the memorial project itself.

A full account of the development of the Cobargo memorial needs further research. When the memorial was finally unveiled by Lord Gowrie in 1935 a newspaper article spoke of how the movement to erect the memorial had 'hung fire' for a considerable time and that the money raised had sat in a bank account earning interest for many years. Part of the problem, apparently, was the Main Roads Board which would not agree to the chosen site on the highway, presumably the site at the bridges mentioned above. What the specific objections were could, perhaps, be found in Main Roads files from the period in the State Archives of NSW.

To the rescue came a member of a well know local family, Mr W D Tarlinton, who donated a suitable piece of land on the highway, on the eastern side of the main street 'above the Post Office'. Main Roads clearly had no objection to that site.

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So, there is a fascinating story at Cobargo relating to what we might call the immediate post-World War One history of commemorative activity on the NSW south coast. There are enough memorials of all sorts in this large district to suggest they are worth a look to see how they came into being, who might have been the leading players in having them built and what stories and issues attach to them. Moreover, what has happened to the memorials since their construction is important in providing a perspective on changing attitudes to commemoration. And that's before we even get to the whole complex investigation of the development of ceremonial around these memorials, style and content of speeches, what gets said, and importantly what doesn't get said. All this awaits a full and properly researched history of the development of the commemoration of war along the south coast communities of New South Wales.

The Cobargo & District Soldiers Memorial – some distance from where it was originally intended to be sited

To finish off where we started, with 'grief'. Annie Whitlaw's story is a reminder of the emotional power of 'war' memorials to evoke a range of personal emotions relating to the individuals commemorated there. The delicacy shown by the local community in sparing Annie too close a contemplation of the names of her dead sons on the Mechanic's Institute Honor board, suggests the level of feeling that simply looking at the names of the distant dead might bring about. There must be dozens of similar personal stories connected with memorials all along the south coast and they deserve to be uncovered and collected in addition to telling the story of how communities went about funding, building and siting their memorials. Only then can the real impact of those silent witnesses in stone to the tragedy of war be felt and understood. Such research could reveal the enduring impact of loss on many who stood silently watching the normal Anzac Day or Remembrance Day marches and ceremonies. For them it was never just about that 'one day in the year'. As that well-respected Australian history, Sir Keith Hancock, said when asked many years later about his brother who went 'missing' in the Great War – 'he is still missing'. R

Dr Richard Reid is a Canberra-based historian who has worked as a high school teacher, museum educator, historian and museum curator. He is Vice President of Canberra & District Historical Society.

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HISTORY HORNETS

History can be very controversial. When it is, it's usually much more engaging than history that's simply presented from a NPOV (neutral point of view). So, this occasional column has been added to 'Recollections' – giving those with a 'different point of view', or those wanting to pursue a 'hot' history topic, the chance to stir up a history hornet's nest. Contributions will be very welcome – to which we will probably prudently add 'these views do not necessarily reflect the views of the South Coast History Society'!

We start with a view on 'Welcomes to Country'. This is a controversial subject; some see Welcomes as a sign of respect for people who have been in Australia for more than 30,000 years, others – such as Tony Abbott when Leader of the Opposition in 2010 – see them as 'out-of-place tokenism'. The Victorian government's changing requirements reflect just how controversial the topic can be. In 2011 it dropped a requirement to include a 'welcome to country' at official events; its current view is 'it is important they occur only when appropriate'.

This piece by Lincoln Brown first appeared in *The Australian Spectator* on 8th May 2022:

I don't need to be 'welcomed' to my country

The notion that Australians must be welcomed or invited to their own country by Indigenous leaders – as occurs at the opening of state and federal parliaments, conferences, and school assemblies – is a divisive and destructive one.

This practice, while it may appear reasonable or harmless, is a manifestation of the ongoing assault on Australia's Western heritage and implies that non-Indigenous Australians, whose families have called Australia home for many generations, do not really belong here.

I recently attended an event where the audience (mostly comprised of Australians with European heritage) were 'welcomed' by an Indigenous speaker. It was a pitiful display of bitterness, resentment, and even hatred towards white Australians. Indeed, it was little more than a scolding for the colour of their skin.

The speaker bluntly stated that Australia still belongs to 'First Nations' people (a nonsensical and ahistorical term lifted from Canada's debates about colonialism) and does not belong to so-called 'white people' (or presumably any other migrant families). He then asserted that the audience needed to learn Australia's 'true history'. This, even though ignorance of Australia's British heritage has never been more apparent than it is now.

It was an overtly adversarial presentation – devoid of hope or a positive vision for Australians. Not a trace of recognition for the fact that Indigenous people enjoy the same fundamental rights that all Australians enjoy, or the tremendous efforts that governments, charities, and individuals have put into improving life for Indigenous Australians over many decades. Instead, the speaker aggressively asserted that Indigenous people are still colonised and that white people must continue to be reminded of this until colonialism ends.

The belief that all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, have a right to call the country in which we were born home is now openly attacked. The desired outcome for such activists is unclear. How, exactly, will we know when enough has been done to overcome racism? What measurable goals must be achieved? When will we be able to congratulate ourselves for elevating Indigenous voices and dismantling colonialism enough? Will it be when all references to Christianity are removed from the national curriculum, as was attempted (and, thankfully, negated) last year? Or when we abolish the Australian flag? At what point will we have made enough progress?

Ironically, as I flew home on a Qantas jet, the pilot acknowledged the traditional custodians of the state I was returning home to. It is a strange form of colonialism in which major corporations, from airlines to the AFL, feel the need to constantly remind everyone that the land belongs to Indigenous people. One would think that if racism were the ubiquitous problem that we are told it is then major corporations would not bother with such sentiments. White people, as nebulous as that concept is, are not guests in Australia. My ancestors were also born and raised here many generations ago. No one should be made to feel guilty for the colour of their skin or blamed for the actions of people who have long since died. This attribution of historical, collective guilt to an entire group of people due to their ethnicity is not only racist but is a symptom of a dying Australia. It is a direct, ideological assault on Western values based on selective distortions of history and the Marxist idea of class guilt, now applied to race, which divides humanity into 'oppressed' and 'oppressor' classes and ascribes sinfulness or virtue based on whatever group one happens to belong to.

If you are Indigenous, you are a victim, and therefore virtuous. If you are white, you are an oppressor, and therefore sinful. If you disagree, this demonstrates that you are entrenched in your oppressor privilege, which makes you more of a racist.

This is a dangerous fiction.

The reality that nobody is allowed to acknowledge, but everyone knows, is that Indigenous Australians not only enjoy the same basic rights as everyone else but are now viewed by mainstream institutions such as government, media, and education as having a kind of culturally protected status thanks to policies concerned with promoting 'equity'. Such policies mean that Indigenous people have access to a range of opportunities, from scholarships to employment, that non-Indigenous people do not. Welfare policies for Indigenous people abound, yet so do high rates of alcoholism, abuse, imprisonment, and early deaths in Indigenous communities. Is this because of racism? How many more apologies, more welcomes to country,

more equity programs, are needed to remedy these issues and undo the supposed harms of our colonial heritage? Or could it be that these policies, which negate personal responsibility (that nasty colonial idea), do more harm than good? People are afraid to suggest these things because they will be accused of racism. To call someone a racist is one of the most destructive slurs available. It destroys careers and reputations. This constant threat of ostracism for saying 'the wrong thing' is a cudgel the Left wields to shut down debate and discussion about how to view Australian history and how issues in Indigenous communities can be addressed. The tragic irony is that 'welcome' ceremonies, apologies, and other pointless gestures do nothing whatsoever to address the real and serious problems faced by Indigenous communities (especially those who live in remote areas). The virtue-signalling activists do not care about helping them, only about getting revenge on white people, and promoting themselves as victims.

None of this is likely to be new to most readers. We know that Western values are under attack and that Australian history is more complex than being entirely good or entirely bad.

What is needed is the courage to say the unsayable: it is not right for white people to be chastised for their skin colour, nor is it right to blame every problem that Indigenous people face on so-called racism. This assault on Western values only ends when cancel culture is countered with courage culture, and name-calling stops being a weapon that can be used against people who see through the pernicious cultural-Marxist worldview. R

Who Said That?

(the answers are on page 19)

a. 'Eureka!'
b. 'You can't build a reputation on what you are going to do.'
c. 'I am a singularly plain Australian.'

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'Granny' Sproats

'*Making do with the basic provisions of life was the lot of pioneering women who survived isolation, hardships and the risks of childbirth to be homemaker, wife, mother, grandmother, cook, baker, butcher, garment maker, gardener, poultry farmer, etc..*

Pioneering women were the glue that held the family together and, as their families grew, so too did the number of helping hands – there being no alternative to usefulness, with everyone having their job to do, no matter how young.'

Elizabeth 'Granny' Sproats was a '*well-known goat farmer in the Wapengo district*' who earned a well-deserved reputation as the local midwife and bush nurse, and who was renowned for the hospitality she provided at a boarding house she ran on her property. Her story is not unlike that of countless other, generally unlauded, South Coast pioneering women.

Elizabeth's birth was recorded (as 'Betsy') in Stockbeckdown, West Yorkshire in late 1834. She married Christopher Sproats in North Yorkshire when she was age 22. Both she and Christopher were working as servants.

The pair emigrated to Australia under a Government Assisted Emigration Scheme less than a year later. Their first born, Ann, died on the voyage on their first wedding anniversary.

They initially became tenant farmers at Five Islands (Port Kembla) before Christopher, a pregnant Elizabeth, and their son Obadiah trekked '*overland … blazing their own track*' to the Bega area. They had been '*engaged for a term of six months by the late Dr King* (presumably of 'Kingswood' south of Bega)*; the six months had expired before they arrived.*' So, the journey apparently took them more than six months.

They arrived in Bega in time for Elizabeth to give birth to son, William, in February 1861.

In 1863 the family moved to Frog's Hollow (between Bega and Wolumla) and built a slab house on their property that, very much later, was to become the site of the Frog's Hollow (Bega) aerodrome. In May 1875 Elizabeth gave birth here to her tenth and last child, Mary Ann.

Elizabeth ran the household but also produced butter, eggs and vegetables for sale. She would walk with this from the farm into Bega.

In August 1875 the family left Frog's Hollow and moved

'Granny' Sproats. Image courtesy Bega Pioneers' Museum

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to Wapengo (to land now occupied by the Ivy Hill Gallery) to what was considered an 'ever progressing property'. Christopher and two sons, Obadiah and William who had both reached the school leaving age of 14, felled timber on their land and built a homestead and other buildings on the property.

A 'birthing room' or 'stay-in' room for local women needing nursing care provided by Elizabeth was part of the building … with birth certificates of her grandchildren indicating that Elizabeth acted as midwife at most of their births.

One birth that Elizabeth attended was that of Eva Way. Just over a year later, Eva's mother died from severe burns after her dress caught alight from an open fire. So Elizabeth, then age 54, took Eva in and raised her as part of the Sproats family

The first Wapengo School that opened in August 1881 was built and furnished '*at his sole cost*' by Christopher on two acres of land that he had owned. The younger Sproats children received their education at this school.

A newspaper report from 1884 dramatically illustrates the challenges that Elizabeth (and other remote pioneer women) faced in providing basic medical care to the local community at that time:

'*What may happen to the solitary workman, who plods along in the bush remote from neighbour or companion, was shown on Sunday last. A man named Joseph Downs was by himself in a hut on the land of Fred Hansen at the Murrah.*

A moderate fire burned in the usual large open fireplace, a bucket of water stood simmering on one side of the fire and Downs, about to eat his dinner, sat on a stool before the fire. Suddenly he was caught by a fit and fell face forward into the embers. As he fell, he upset the pail of hot water which quenched the hottest part of the fire, but his head went into the mixture of scalding water and hot ashes, and there he lay for about two hours before he recovered consciousness.

As soon as he came to his senses he managed to rise, and walked over to James Bird's place, about two miles away. Bird hastily soaked some calico in oil and applied it to poor Downs who, by this time, had gone blind, and Bird hurried off to get assistance. With all possible speed Downs was conveyed to Wapengo where Mrs Sproats attended to the severe injuries upon the sufferer's face, tongue, arm and hands. We believe Dr Evershed went out twice to Wapengo, and on Wednesday the patient was conveyed by Mr Kilian Koellner to his residence at Tarraganda [just east of Bega], *where Downs will be nearer to medical aid.*' (It is believed that Downs survived the trauma and died in 1901.)

Elizabeth died at her home on 1st August 1912, age 78. She was '*universally respected, being truly one of the good old sort.*'

Source: '*They Made This Valley Home*' by Sandra Florance and Diane Pryor

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HISTORIES

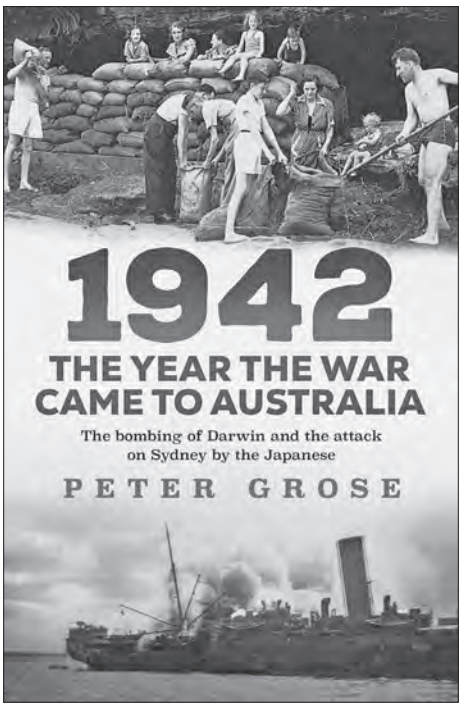
1942: The Year the War Came to Australia

by Peter Grose

Peter Grose, quite correctly, is astonished how little Australians know about the bombings of Darwin on 19th February 1942 and of the attack by three Japanese midget submarines on Sydney Harbour on 31st May 1942. So, he wrote comprehensive histories about both events; these are republished together in this new book, '*1942: The Year the War Came to Australia*.'

Peter was a journalist, so he knows how to present histories in a readable, engaging, instructive yet enjoyable manner. And, whilst there is a lot of serious factual information in this book, it also contains a lot that is quirky and at times quite hilarious:

'*Nobody has accepted credit for starting the Adelaide River Stakes, as the mass exodus from Darwin* [after its bombings] *came to be known. The dunny truck is, however, a serious claimant for line honours. In 1942 Darwin had no sewerage, and very few houses had septic tanks. Instead sanitary carts toured the town twice a week and emptied the back-yard lavatories. Each dunny cart began its run with a load of empty lavatory pans, and worked its way around the houses removing the full pan and replacing it with an empty. It was not exactly a glamour job.*



One cart had arrived in Smith Street, in the heart of town, when the first bombs fell. The driver, Ludo Dalby, sensibly dumped the pan he was carrying and dived into a trench in a back yard. When the first raid ended, both Dalby and the truck had moved on. History does not record the exact progress of the stately vehicle, but a few facts are known. By the time it left Darwin, it was under the command of a junior government official and had acquired a passenger load of eight prominent Darwin citizens, seated on the roof. It then set off down 'the Track' south towards Adelaide River township, about 120 kilometers away. According to legend, on its way it failed to negotiate a particularly tricky bend and shed its entire load of full and empty lavatory pans. This may be true, or it may just be part of a good story. Nevertheless, the sanitary cart is generally credited with being the first vehicle to arrive that afternoon in Adelaide River from Darwin. It was far from the last. The Adelaide River Stakes had begun.'

Peter's histories of both the bombing of Darwin and the mini submarine attacks on Sydney Harbour paint a frightening

picture of Australia's wartime defences and the utterly incompetent responses to the raids and the aftermath of the raids. Details of the devastation in Darwin were completely withheld from the Australian public (wartime censorship restrictions enabled this to occur) and the Sydney fiasco, unbelievably, was presented as an Australian victory and an example of how well Australia's defences had been planned and then operated when put to the test.

As I read this book, I couldn't help thinking it should be a 'must read' to anyone (if there is anyone) who is now responsible for Australia's coastal defences because, in reality, it describes how not to plan and how not to operate a defences network. But, for anybody else, it is simply (to quote the *Sydney Morning Herald* review of the original book on the Sydney submarines raid) '*about as good as any Aussie yarn can get … a great retelling of a great story*'.

So, what are these histories that most Australians know so little about? First, Darwin:

'*The raid on Darwin is often described as Australia's Pearl Harbor. The parallels are obvious. But there were differences. Pearl Harbor came as a complete surprise. The Darwin attack was widely anticipated. America's leaders used Pearl Harbor to galvanise a wary and isolationist nation into willing mobilization. Australia's leaders chose to play down the bombing of Darwin for fear of its impact on national morale.*

The numbers are striking. More bombs fell on Darwin than on Pearl Harbor. More aircraft attacked Darwin in the first wave than attacked Pearl Harbor in the first wave. In Darwin eight ships were sunk. In Pearl Harbor four went to the bottom, with two more capsized. The Japanese attacked civilian targets in the town of Darwin, killing 61 civilians. They left Honolulu alone – the 68 civilians who died there were killed by fallout from American guns. Of course, the tonnage of shipping sunk in Darwin was far less than in Pearl Harbor, because the larger ships in Pearl Harbor had bigger crews. And the bombs used in Darwin were lighter anti-personnel bombs rather than the 800-kg torpedoes used against the battleships. So while more bombs fell on Darwin, the weight of bombs was greater at Pearl Harbor.

The Japanese assault on Darwin did not end with the two raids of 19 February. Over the next 21 months, the town faced no fewer than 64 attacks by Japanese bombers. The onslaught ended with a final raid on 12 November 1943. The attacks were part of a largely forgotten air war in northern Australia that involved no fewer than 97 attacks on Darwin, Broome, Wyndham, Derby, Katherine, Horn Island, Townsville, Mossman, Port Hedland, Noonamah, Exmouth Gulf, Onslow, Drysdale River Mission and Coomalie Creek.

The attacks grew less frequent as time wore on. The Australian and American fighter pilots and anti-aircraft gunners gradually got the upper hand. Jack Mulholland [an Anti-aircraft Gunner] *remembers one raid of nine bombers arriving over Darwin. By then the gunners on the ground were hardened by experience and problems with fuse settings had been overcome. The gun sections' routine first salvo of four rounds certainly worked this time. It sent four of the nine bombers to the ground in flames. The* [Australian] *fighter pilots then radioed to ask the gunners to hold fire while they attacked. They quickly saw off the remaining five bombers. With such losses as this, the Japanese were paying too high a price for attacking Darwin, and they backed off.*'

Now Sydney:

A mini-submarine raid on Sydney Harbour was anticipated; Japanese mini-submarines had been previously employed against Pearl Harbor and Diego Suarez harbour on the island of Madagascar. So a boom net was installed at the entrance of the Harbour and other anti-submarine measures were put in place. A not inconsiderable fleet of vessels was deployed to (in theory) detect and destroy any intruders.

The Japanese signalled their intentions before the raids – Peter Grose lists six 'serious warnings' by the Japanese that should have alerted the Australians – including having two of their reconnaissance aircraft fly at low level over Sydney Harbour just prior to the raid. One of these flights was in broad daylight. All these indications of a likely raid were simply ignored.

On 31st May 1942 three miniature submarines successfully penetrated the boom net without being challenged. One immediately reversed into the net, became entangled, and was scuttled by its two-man crew. Even after inspecting the wreckage, the Australian authorities were not convinced that it was an enemy submarine!

The other two submarines could have inflicted considerable damage on any of more than 30 naval vessels in Sydney Harbour at the time – most of them at moorings. It was only pure luck that the greatest damage was to HMAS Kuttabul, a converted ferry that was tied up at Garden Island and was being used as a dormitory for junior seamen, which was blown to bits and sank after being hit by one of two torpedoes launched by the Japanese. 21 sailors who were on board were killed.

The Australian response to enemy submarines in the harbour – once it was ultimately accepted that submarines were in the harbour – was nothing short of farcical. As Peter Gross suggests: '*Some of the command decisions were plain barmy*'. The misinformation then issued about the raids, and the whitewash of the incompetence of the handling of the whole affair, are simply 'unbelievable'.

The Japanese 'mother' submarines that had waited off the coast while the raid was in progress gave Sydney's Eastern Suburbs a parting shelling. They then proceeded to harass shipping along the NSW coast and torpedoed the 4,800-ton *Iron Chieftain* east of Sydney and the 100-metre long *Iron Crown* off Gabo Island on the NSW South Coast.

'*1942: The Year the War Came to Australia*' is, to put it simply, a fantastic read. It is available in paperback from around $22.00

They Said That

(see questions page 15)

a. **Archimedes** has gone down in history as the guy who ran naked through the streets of Syracuse shouting "Eureka!" - or "I have it!" in Greek. The story is that Archimedes was charged with proving that a new crown made for Hieron, the king of Syracuse in Sicily from 478BC to 467BC, was not pure gold as its goldsmith had claimed. So, Archimedes thought long and hard but could not find a method for proving that the crown was not solid gold. Soon after, he filled a bathtub and noticed that water spilled over the edge as he got in and he realized that the water displaced by his body was equal to the weight of his body. Knowing that gold was heavier than other metals, Archimedes had found his method to determine whether the crown was pure gold. Forgetting that he was undressed, he went running naked down the streets from his home to the king shouting "Eureka!"

b. **Henry Ford** is remembered not just for his successes that started from developing and manufacturing the Model T Ford (over 15-million were produced), but also for his pithy and insightful one-liners about business and leadership, including 'You can't build a reputation on what you are going to do'. Of the Model-T he famously said 'Any customer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it is black'; of banking he observed 'It is well enough that people of the nation do not understand our banking and monetary system, for if they did, I believe there would be a revolution before tomorrow morning'; and on life in general, 'hard knocks have a place and value, but hard thinking goes farther in less time'.

c. **Robert Menzies** told the Australian people that he was a 'singularly plain Australian' when he first became Prime Minister in April 1939. He was, however, as Manning Clark observed, also 'dyed in the wool British'. He has the distinction of being – by far – the longest serving Australian Prime Minister (for almost 18½ years) perhaps because (to quote 'Jo' Gullett, a Liberal MHR when Menzies was Prime Minister) 'he shared the tastes of the people he led. At the same time none was more able than he to touch chords of loyalty and pride in the traditions and history of the British people, especially that section of them who had settled in Australia. He made us proud of ourselves. We associated him with this pride.'

and finally...

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