South Coast History Society Inc.

RecollectionS

Issue 41

Bega Marching Girls — see story page 2

'Tis Now Just a Memory

Part 1

Many South Coast businesses and activities, once common, have long gone – their presence now just memories or recorded in old photographs or surviving newspaper accounts. Here are several examples.

We'd greatly appreciate any suggestions you may have for additions to this list – our only criteria being that they have some specific link to the NSW South Coast. (So, for example, inkwells may now be a thing of the past, but to include a story in *Recollections*, we'd need some story/some history specifically about South Coast inkwells.)

Part 2 of '*Tis Now Just a Memory* will be included in next month's *Mini Recollections* (see page 3 for details).

The Currowan Starch Factory

Burrawangs (Macrozamia communis) are abundant in the Nelligan-Batemans Bay area.

According to the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 23rd November 1920, '*years ago Mr. Thomson, of Nelligen, discovered their* [the Burrawang seeds'] *starchy nature. He noticed a cart had run over one of these bulbs, and when the sun had dried the pulp a starchy matter remained. He investigated further, with the result that he and his family for years have been manufacturing starch for local use, which analysts have declared to be of a high quality.*' This was probably little more than reporting of local folklore because in 1871 a Nowra resident, Henry Moore, had documented a process he used to remove toxicity from the seeds of the Burrawang, and between 1913 and 1919 a factory producing starch from Burrawangs operated in Nowra.

In 1920, a syndicate of Sydney businessmen established the Austral Starch Company Limited to extract starch from the Burrawang plant. They acquired a ten-year lease over 31,000 acres of State Forest at Currowan (upstream from Nelligan) and a licence to 'exploit the Burrawang industry in the Nelligen district'. They then erected a factory near the mouth of Currowan Creek along with a tramway that ran along Mimosa Street linking the factory to the town's wharf.

Production of Burrawang starch at Currowan began in January 1921. Initially it seems to have been very successful,

Continued on page 2

Fantastic Reads

with over 25 employees soon producing 2 tons of starch per week. This even led to plans to expand the factory.

However, by April 1923, the company had gone into liquidation and it was finally wound up in November of that year.

All that remains of the Currowan starch factory today is a listing of the site of the factory on River Road, Currowan, on the NSW Heritage Register.

Burrawang (Macrozamia communis)

The Township of Currowan

Currowan, on the upper reaches of the Clyde River and adjacent to Currowan Creek, was a planned township. The site of the village was fixed in 1844 and a village plan laid out by then colonial surveyor and later ill-fated explorer, Edmund Kennedy. It was proclaimed a town on 20 March 1885.

Town allotments were offered for sale in 1859. The town had a stone wharf, plenty of flat land and a good water supply.

In 1893 land was reserved for a Public School, perhaps reflecting an optimism for the town's future, because at that time only a 'half-time school' was operating in the village.

However, the town never prospered. The absence of a road connection from the Braidwood district to Currowan remained an obstacle to its growth as a port (Nelligen becoming the area's preferred port village), and floods in 1860 revealed that the town's site was flood-prone. Even so, Currowan remained a minor landing place that allowed easier access than Nelligen to gold mines in the district that were worked until 1915.

The town held a race meeting in 1901, at which time it seems the 'town' then consisted only of the school, some farms and a sawmill. The establishment of the Currowan Starch Factory in 1921 provided a renewed impetus to the town, but this was to be short-lived.

Currowan became a locality, under the Geographical Names Act of 1966 and nothing remains of the 'town' of Currowan today, even though some of its street names and details of town allotments still appear on modern-day maps.

On the opposite bank of Currowan Creek to the town site, "about 60 acres" of land was set aside, in April 1893, as an Aboriginal reserve. This became the Currowan Creek Aboriginal Reserve, which survived until 1956.

In June 1910, there were just three huts, with two adults and five children - three of school age - living there. They were employed at times cutting sleepers and stripping wattle bark, and three acres of land were also being cultivated for maize and vegetables.

(More details about South Coast half-time schools, and more information about South Coast towns like Currowan that have disappeared over time, will be included in next month's *Mini Recollections.*)

Bega's Marching Girls

In June 1966 the *Australian Women's Weekly* had an eight-page spread about marching girls:

'*Every weekend thousands of girls in every Australian State don jaunty caps, short skirts, and high white boots - and march.*

They march through the streets, in parks, in playing fields. They march at football matches, carnivals, Mardi Gras, and fetes. A festive occasion in Australia isn't complete without a team of marching girls these days.

The marching idea was brought to Australia from New Zealand in the late 1930s.

Briefly, the general rules state that marching girls should swing their arms waist-high, back and front, and, while the fingers are cupped, they should extend with knuckles parallel to the ground. Head is held high, while the team always marches 120 beats to the minute, following a plan based on military precision marching.

Originally the main aim of the marching movement was to give girls something to do with their spare time. But with so many competitions and the necessary two to three nights a week training, it has become a full-time hobby. Teams compete against each other in local and interstate competitions for medals and trophies, as well as the right to contest the Australian championships held every Easter. A team must have won a certain number of local championships before it is eligible to enter the Australian titles.

In Australia, girls can start marching from the age of seven. They join the Midget section for girls from seven to 12 years, later move to the Juniors (12 to 15) and Seniors (15 to 99!)'.

But, reflecting the way of life as it was in the '50s and '60s, the *Australian Women's Weekly* also noted: '*Most girls only keep marching 'till their early twenties, when they find that husbands and families are a full-time job.*

But we have quite a few young mothers in our teams', the *Weekly* hastened to add!

'Teams must have at least ten marchers, plus four reserves. Each group (i.e. club) *must have at least one instructor, one chaperon, and several non-marching committee members.*

Each team designs its own uniform. The only real regulation – a very strict one – is that the minimum length of skirt in a kneeling position should be 8in. from the ground. And, of course, no lace or frills are allowed.'

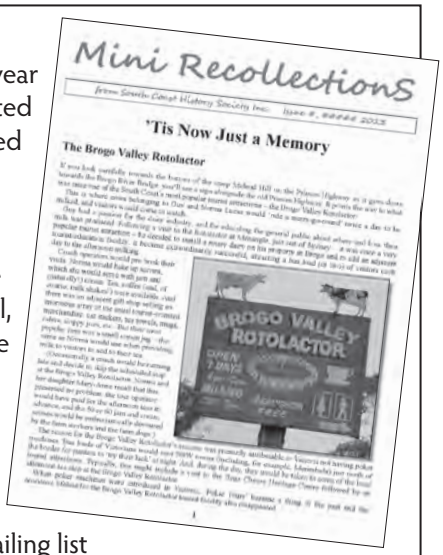
The *Weekly* then went on to suggest: '*Parents of Australia's marching girls really approve of the sport because they find it gives their daughters something worthwhile and interesting*

You Asked For More!

Many *Recollections* readers have asked for 'more' – more of the South Coast's fascinating history to be shared through *Recollections*.

We're happy to oblige, so starting next month we're launching ***Mini Recollections***. It will be a slimmed down version of *Recollections*, will include numerous short (but extremely interesting) articles, and – initially at least – will mainly concentrate on objects and activities that are now just a memory (a sample of these is presented in this issue of *Recollections*), and some of the more unusual and intriguing objects that can be found in local museums. It will be issued every second month, in those months when *Recollections* are not released. And, like *Recollections*, ***Mini Recollections* will be FREE**.

BUT, BUT, BUT, it will NOT be produced in a print version. The only people who will receive a printed copy will be those who are having *Recollections* posted to them (that's $24 per year – so if you are interested in having copies posted to you, call 0448 160 852 and we'll take your credit card details). If you receive *Recollections* by email, you'll now also receive emailed copies of *Mini Recollections*. So, now there is an additional incentive for you to be on our *Recollections* emailing list – and you can organize this by simply emailing **'Send Recollections'** to **southcoasthistory@yahoo.com**


Mini Recollections

'Tis Now Just a Memory

The Bregs Valley Rotolactor

BREGO VALLEY ROTOLACTOR

to do in their spare time, while teaching them deportment, discipline, and confidence.'

Bega had three teams of Marching Girls from 1955 to 1967 (roughly coinciding with the period when Marching Girls activity was at its peak in Australia) – the Bandoliers, the Robins and the Georgettes (the Georgettes were all girls age under 12). An article in 1999 in the *Bega District News* recorded that the Bandoliers were '*working girls, they did not have much money in their pockets after meeting weekly commitments so they made their own uniforms. Their colours were green and white. No stockings were worn so they had to apply leg tan to give the impression they were outdoor types… They all prayed it wouldn't rain while on parade, otherwise they would have streaky legs.*'

The Bega Marching Girls also had a set of 'Golden Rules', many of which clearly reflected a 'marching comes first, boyfriends come second' club ethos. These rules included, '*No girl shall smoke or swear whilst practice is on, or at any time whilst in uniform*', '*Girls shall remember that whilst on trips to contests or in uniform anywhere, that the Team and also the town are in disgrace if she does anything wrong. Do nothing whilst away that you would not be prepared to let your parents see*', '*At no time while away travelling to contests or in uniform will a Marching Girl enter a hotel, unless accompanied by a chaperon or Instructor, nor will she take a alcoholic drink*', '*No boys to travel in cars with Marching Girls*', '*No girl to allow any other person to remove or wear her cap or blazer*', '*Boys are not allowed on the ground while teams are training*', '*Girls are requested to address their Instructor as Mister at all times*' and '*Girls are requested not to ask boys to accompany them to displays or contests*'!!

The rise in popularity of sports for girls and young women such as netball and hockey, and more recently Drilldance (in which both males and females can participate), ultimately led to the demise in Australia of the Marching Girls' movement.

Whaling in Twofold Bay

For a century, from 1828 to 1929, whaling in Twofold Bay was a significant industry.

Whaling in Twofold Bay. A five-oared whaling boat is depicted, with the captain, George Davidson, standing and holding the rudder. A killer whale is next to the boat.

Whaling in Australia had become a financially attractive proposition from 1823 when heavy duties in Britain on colonial oils (e.g. whale oil) were removed – actually resulting, a decade later, in whale products briefly becoming the largest grossing Australian export!

And Twofold Bay was 'tailor made' for the exploitation of this commercial opportunity – the Bay provided good shelter to ships, whales were abundantly available and came in close to the shore on their annual migrations, and a method of easy harvest had already been established by the local Yuin Indigenous people.

A unique, mutually beneficial relationship had been forged over centuries in Twofold Bay between the Yuin people and pods of orcas (or 'Killer Whales' – although they are not whales but oceanic dolphins). The orcas would regularly herd passing whales into the Bay, resulting in those whales beaching themselves and thereby providing welcome food to the Yuin. The orcas were rewarded by the Indigenes with the tongues and lips (which weighed many tons) from these whales. The Yuin were alerted to the presence of whales in the Bay by the orcas breaching and 'flop-tailing' (slapping their tails on the surface of the water); and the Yuin would also 'call' the orcas by water-slapping and by chanting.

In 1828 Thomas Raine, a mariner and merchant, established the first shore-based whaling station on the Australian mainland on the shores of Twofold Bay. The Imlay brothers and Ben Boyd followed in the 1830s and 1840s, also setting up whaling enterprises in the Bay.

From 1857 Alexander Davidson, who had been a cabinet maker for Benjamin Boyd, settled in the area and established the best-known and longest-surviving Twofold Bay whaling enterprise. He did so by purchasing heavily-discounted whaling equipment left behind by Benjamin Boyd after his financial empire collapsed in the late 1840s.

Davidson rebuilt an old whaling station at the mouth of the Kiah River, adding boatsheds and tryworks (furnaces used for heating the blubber from whales to recover the whale oil) that allowed the catch to be hauled up the beach for processing.

Indigenous whalers became a vital and valued part of Davidson's workforce. Through a friendly and lengthy association with the local Aboriginal people, the Davidsons developed the same mutually-beneficial relationship with the pods of orcas as the Yuin people had enjoyed. When whaling was at its peak, up to 30 whaling boats operated in the area and the Davidsons were reportedly the only ones who would be alerted by the orcas to the presence of whales.

In the early years of the twentieth century, 10 to 15 whales were caught each year and processed through the Davidson's whaling station.

21 male members of the Davidson clan, spanning four generations, were involved in Twofold Bay whaling until 1929. By that time, however, demand for whale products had declined significantly, with alternatives to whale products having been developed. But the number of whales in the area had also declined dramatically, with just one or two whales being caught per year in the final years of the whaling station's operation.

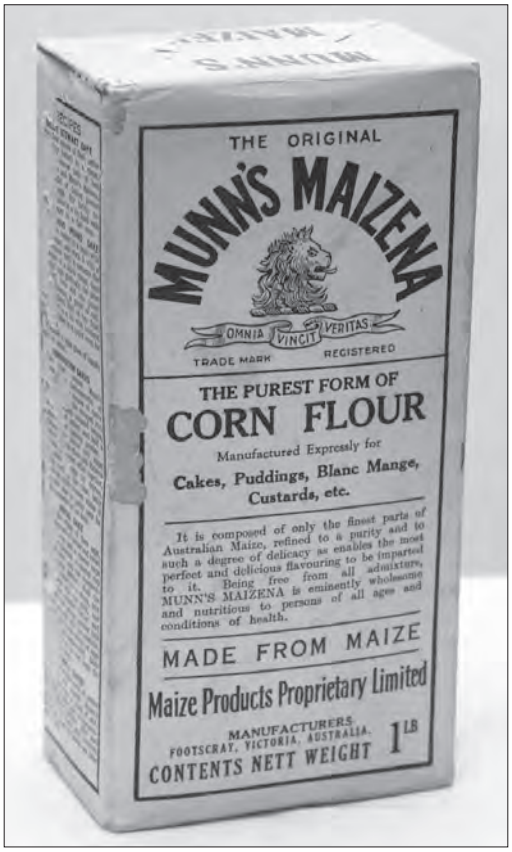
The Davidson Whaling Station was added to the State Heritage Register in 1999. Artefacts from the once-significant whaling era are scattered around the site. Others are now part of historical displays in the Killer Whale Museum in nearby Eden.

Hauling a whale ashore for processing at the Davidson Whaling Station on Twofold Bay

Munn's Maizena

A mill was erected by David Kirkwood in Merimbula in 1858 to produce flour from wheat. When it was discovered that the local area was not suitable for growing wheat, Kirkwood's mill ceased production.

Matthew Munn, an experienced miller from Melbourne, purchased the old mill in 1865 with support from Thomas Mort and Twofold Pastoral Association member Sir William Montagu Manning (Merimbula was originally a privately owned township built by the Twofold Bay Association). He converted it to mill corn that grew in abundance in surrounding areas. By the time production started in 1867, Munn had spent £10,000 on the mill and other impressive associated buildings that ran along the Merimbula waterfront.



Initially 3 tons of Munn's 'Maizena' (cornflour) were produced per week. This ultimately increased to a ton per day, with Munns Maizena Works employing 40 to 50 people. Waste 'corn bran' was fed to pigs, 500 of which were penned in a yard behind the mill for fattening, prior to being turned into bacon or ham.

The factory became one of the most commercially important establishments on the NSW South Coast.

Prior to the establishment of Munn's Maizena Works, most of the cornflour used in Australia was supplied from overseas. But '*by virtue of its own excellence and the advantages of a home market, it [Munn's Maizena] has superseded imported maizena, and in addition to that, the price of the article now used in the Australian colonies, and manufactured at Merimbula, is much lower than it was when colonial-made maizena was first offered to the public.*'

Matthew Munn died in 1873 with the *Bega Gazette* noting he '*belonged to a class the colony can ill afford to lose. Shrewd and enterprising he made a fine business by the manufacture of the article 'Maizena', which has not only stood its ground by the side of the English and American manufacture of a similar sort, but has almost driven both these from the market*'.

The business was continued by his son, Armstrong, for whom Matthew Munn was building 'Courunga' as a wedding gift at the time of his death. (Courunga, or Munn's Tower House as it is locally known, was extended in 1882. Today it is a distinctive feature on Merimbula's skyline.)

In 1903 it was reported that '*Mr. Munn has decided to double his plant...in order to increase the output* [and] *has found business so brisk that he is compelled to enlarge his premises and work double shifts*'. A year later, the factory was reportedly '*going day and night to fulfill demands which come from all parts of Australia and New Zealand*'.

In 1913 the business changed hands. Almost immediately, the new proprietor, a Mr. James Channon, closed the factory down to enable extensions to be added. The business appears to have never recovered from this and in 1918 it was announced that Merimbula's Maizena Works had ceased operations.

And (unlike Arnott's biscuits and Kirks soft drinks that were also first produced in 1865, and have survived), the once-popular Munn's Maziena brand was simply consigned to a grocery store graveyard.

Munn's Maizena Works, 1869. *Image courtesy of the State Library of Victoria.*

Nurturing Landscapes

Trevor King

"In November last year I flew the full length of the New South Wales south coast. I flew down to Tuross, with its beautiful river and estuary, and the next day helicoptered down to the Victorian border to the Nadgee Nature Reserve (our last coastal wilderness in New South Wales) and then flew back up to Tuross and the day after right up the coast on a beautiful clear day over Jervis Bay, the last natural harbour on the east coast. It was gloriously beautiful. There were countless coastal lakes and, as I said, right down to the Victorian border a coastal wilderness. There are no roads and it was as wild as it was when Cook first sighted it.

This is special. This is a jewel. It does not exist anywhere else in the world. There is no equivalent stretch of relatively unspoilt coast in the United States. It is rare and special. I believe we ought to have policies to continue to confer on Australians that privileged sense of being in a special land…"[1]

Bob Carr 2002

It's a common experience. Changing borders of vegetation flashing by as we head for home. Returning to the south-east region, across well-loved landscapes, re-touching favourite vistas and rounding familiar corners, we may feel again that `privileged sense of being in a special land' alluded to by Bob Carr. This sensibility appears widely felt, inspiring the vision of artists and those planning a sustainable future through nature-based tourism, along with the great many who simply wish to make a home and to live within a clean, relatively unspoilt and generally inspirational setting.

With its coastal dunes, drowned river valleys, densely forested foothills, hidden pockets of rainforest, misty sub-alpine reaches, expansive grassy tablelands and snowy peaks, the region is rich in landscape variability and this is reinforced by the fascinating variety of forest types found throughout.

Distinctive coastal plant communities and 'heaths' are found at ocean edge, Coast Banksia *(Banksia integrifolia)* having a ubiquitous range along the coast; rugged hills that either touch or lie inland from the coast display a variety of open-forest types. These include Grey She-oak *(Casuarina glauca)* and Swamp Mahogany *(Eucalyptus robusta)* growing in poorly drained flats; Rough-barked Angophora *(Angophora floribunda)* often in association with Forest Red Gum *(E. tereticornis)* in open granite country; lower slopes of valleys and alluvial flats containing Coast Grey Box *(E. bosistoana)*, Blue Box *(E. bauerana)*, Woolly-butt *(E. longifolia)* and Bangalay *(E. botryoides)*; while Spotted Gum *(Corymbia maculata)* forests commonly contain Grey Ironbark *(E. paniculata)* and Blackbutt *(E. pilularis)*. Ridges and slopes with well-drained shallow soils can host Silvertop Ash *(E. sieberi)* as the dominant species to various stringybarks and ironbarks.

Relic 'jungles' found as pockets in sheltered gullies, contain well-recognised species such as Lilly-pilly *(Acmena smithii)*, Blackwood *(Acacia melanoxylon)*, and Cabbage Fan-palm *(Livistona australis)*. Within the cool montane forests of the coastal range regular mists and winter snow keep temperatures lower than in other places. Here trees such as Shining Gum *(E. nitens)*, Brown Barrel (*E. fastigata)* and Alpine Ash *(E. delegatensis)* rise tall and straight above a mixed understorey.

The Snowy River country is much drier. White Sallee *(E. pauciflora)* and other eucalypts, notably gums and boxes, are found in open formations. The 'rainshadow' area of the Upper Snowy River valley system is alike, in both climate and geology, the western side of the Great Divide and here we find similar plants such as Cypress-pine *(Callitris* spp.*)*, White Box *(E. albens)*, and Kurrajong *(Brachychiton populneus)*.

Of small to medium height, the High Country dominants Snow Gum *(E. pauciflora)* and Spinning Gum *(E. perriniana)* are companion to numerous colourful shrub species.

Our region's roads traverse unseen geologies of very ancient volcanic, igneous and sedimentary origins, along with areas of sand-formed substrate of more recent provenance in coastal Victoria. Acid plutonic outcrops of granite, marine and non-marine sandstone and limestone, mudstones and shale all form the deep time natural heritage underpinning.

More immediate than the influence of topography, it's the changing vegetation groups that provide the most visually apparent means of differentiating between places. Within the confines of a travelling vehicle the muted greys of passing vegetation may appear homogenous – 'the forest' – but beyond that impression lies a region rich in environmental contrasts, containing its share of hidden treasures. Some years back I took time to explore one.

A short drive off the Princes Highway east of Orbost and separated 180 kilometres from its nearest relatives located north of Bega, the palms of the Cabbage Tree Creek Flora Reserve form the southernmost stand of this ancient species. *Livistona australis* is a descendent of some of earth's earliest flowering plants, having adapted to increasing desiccation as the continent drifted northwards. It is a privilege to walk amongst a magnificent deep time survivor whose duration is testament to its ability to respond to changing conditions over 60 million years.

Such diverse landscapes can make the gathering together of people into distinctive communities appear as a natural occurrence, the landscape integrating us in ways beyond our knowing. The Monaro and South Coast historical regions are understood as distinct, but the close proximity of the high country to the coastal plain has allowed an easy commerce between the two communities, reinforcing the interconnection and allowing an expanded sense of localness, belonging and regional identity to develop. Nurturing this sensibility is important to social and strategic planning. Community wellbeing doesn't just happen automatically, it requires continuing work and commitment in order to exist and it can be enhanced in many ways; protecting cherished natural heritage and landscape values will be centrally important in providing continuity to our ever-evolving senses of place, be they at the level of the individual or of the community.

Conserving the wild character of beaches, coastal forests, and coastal lakes, while ensuring mountain ranges remain places of ecological variety is an aspiration that will remain important to people. And while strategic land management decisions will continue to remain of the highest importance, we can find some reassurance in the thought that, beyond the seemingly insatiable grasp of Man, raw landscape can always be produced unaided.

1. *'Thoughtlines: Reflections of a Public Man'* ,Bob Carr, 2002. Pages 309–310.

Trevor King is a Dignams Creek-based architectural design, strategic planning and heritage consultant. He has an extensive and deep knowledge of South Coast history and its environment.

A Useful Resource

Soon after the first European settlers arrived in New South Wales, and facing the prospect of starvation, they realized the value of *Livistona australis* as a food source.

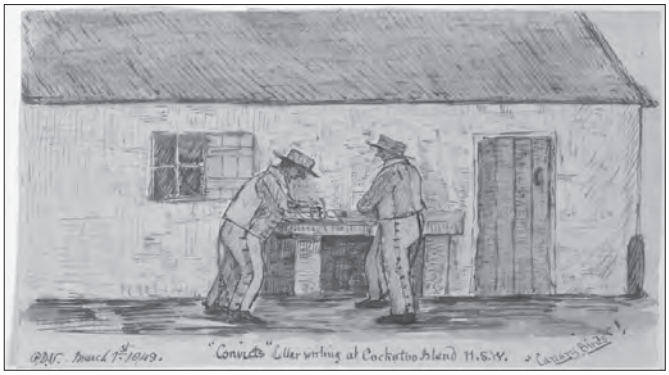
They had seen local Aboriginals climb the tree, remove the crown and eat it. They discovered it had a flavour resembling cabbage; hence *Livistona australis* became popularly known as the Cabbage Tree Palm or the Cabbage Fan Palm.

The Australian Aboriginals, however, used it as a food that was only consumed in emergencies, or on special occasions, because they knew that cutting out the edible terminal bud of the plant resulted in its death.

Aboriginal communities also used the tree's fibrous bark to make fishing lines, and its leaves for weaving and for thatched roofing.

The fronds of the palm, however, became more widely used – to make cabbage tree hats that were to become the first distinctively Australian headwear. The manufacturing process involved boiling, then drying, and finally bleaching the leaves. These were finely woven into a hat with a high tapering domed crown and a wide flat brim. Bands of coarser plaiting with zig-zag border edges were added to provide a decorative effect.

From the early 19th century cabbage tree hats became part of everyday life in the Colony. The hats were fashionable and functional and they were familiar items used by working

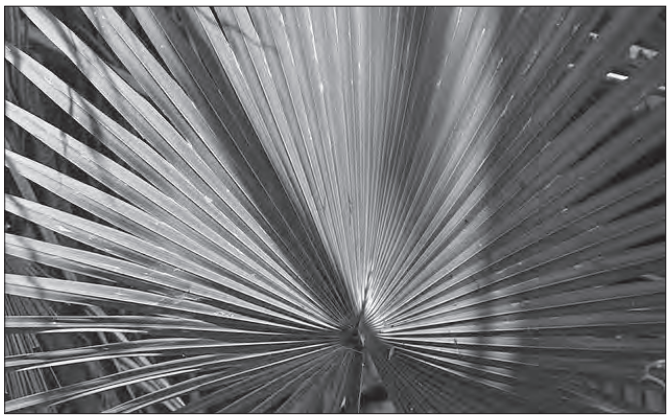


Convicts on Cockatoo Island wearing cabbage tree hats

men everywhere – from convicts, bushrangers, shepherds, drovers, coach drivers, bullockies and sawyers, to surveyors and explorers.

Prisoners on Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour are known to have earned money for tea, sugar and tobacco from making the hats in their spare time. And, in an article in the *Commercial Journal* in February 1840 about the private employment of stockade prisoners at Newcastle it was recorded that some of the soldiers stationed there were also profiting from the manufacture of the hats: '*if the barracks were but visited it would be found that it had been converted to a cabbage tree hat factory! Hundreds were being made there weekly. Any soldier engaged in hat making could earn as much as some tradesmen in the town; whilst others employed as guards or overseers over prisoners manage to get them to plait the grass for them instead of attending to their government labour*'.

In the late convict era, gangs of insolent youths formed in the cities and became known as 'cabbage tree mobs' because they would wear the hat, perhaps as a symbol of their unity.



One of their favourite pastimes was to crush the hats of men deemed 'too full of themselves'. These mobs are recognised as a predecessor of the 'Australian larrikins' who also thumbed their noses at the pretentions of the settler classes.

Changes in fashion, and the adoption of manufacturing techniques that made the cabbage tree hat less durable, ultimately led to its demise. By the end of the 19th century, the Australian cabbage tree hat had largely disappeared.

…and, incidentally, Palm Beach on Sydney's northern beaches received its name from the many Cabbage Tree Palms that once grew in abundance there.

The Cabbage Tree Hat
(An Australian Folk Song)

There's something neat in a cabbage-tree hat,
When it fits the wearer's crown;
There's in it a sort of jaunty look,
With its streamers hanging down.
Let others boast of the felt or brab,
I cannot with them agree,
For nobody looks so like a swell,
As a man with a cabbage-tree.

Let the roughs and the muffs talk as they will
Of the rowdy cabbage-tree mob;
It's no paltry tile that costs a pound,
And just to adorn your nob.
Roam as you will round Sydney town,
The lasses will all agree,
You're just the man to escort them out,
If you've got on a good cabbage-tree.

The (old) Old Bega Hospital, situated just off Newtown Road at the southern entrance to the town, opened in 1888 and functioned until 1956. In 2004 the main building was severely damaged by fire – but is now being restored.

Claire Lupton, a well-known Bega journalist, has recently compiled '*The Story of the Old Bega Hospital*'. It will be published later this year. The Hospital had an intriguing, and at times turbulent history. Claire's book is fascinating reading, as this extract – reproduced with Claire's kind permission – well illustrates:

The last years of the Old Bega Hospital

By 1950 Bega Hospital was deteriorating badly. Because the NSW Government had agreed to build a new hospital it had cut the subsidy for the present one, so there was little or no money for maintenance, plant or furnishings. What was very successful was the maternity ward in what had been the nurses' quarters. However, Matron Burke complained to the Board that staff had to walk along an uncovered pathway from the maternity wing to the main hospital for essentials, meals for the patients had to be brought that way, and what was very much needed was a covered walkway. This was in a year which had a number of floods and heavy rain.

In April a hospitals inspector, Miss Currie, was "horrified at the lack of facilities at the hospital". Particular reference was made to the unsuitable operating theatre because the sterile water tanks and the autoclaves fell far below the efficiency required. Matron told Miss Currie that at times the staff had been forced to do the sterilisation with jugs of hot water. Mr Dicker, the Board Secretary, said the engineer had found a certain amount of gravel in the pipes of the tanks, causing the blockage, and the faults had been righted. Matron Burke described the laundry as a complete fiasco and totally inadequate for a hospital laundry, especially the drying arrangements, and said she was tired of reporting these matters to the Board. She asked the Board to immediately telephone the Hospitals Commission telling it that a larger plant was necessary now the maternity unit had been added.

In June the boiler burst; depriving the hospital of all hot water; and the steam service. This put the operating theatre out of action. A female patient needed an urgent operation and was too sick to be moved to Pambula Hospital. Equipment was sent down to Pambula to be sterilised and the instruments were sterilised in the local doctors' surgeries. The operation was a success.

The Hospitals Commission sent a boiler expert down to Bega but before he arrived another patient, a male this time, needed an urgent operation and that was done again

with the help of the town's doctors and Pambula Hospital. The conditions caused by the burst boiler were so bad that Matron said "it was nightmare and we had to resort to the Soyer stove used by Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War". Matron and the operating doctor were not able to get to bed until after three o'clock in the morning after a full day's work and worry.

The boiler experts found out that the burst section of the boiler was caused through the hard water building up to such an extent that the water could only seep through in minute quantities, causing the metal to crack through heat build-up on the cast iron boiler. A new section was fitted and the existing sections cleaned out but water softener would be needed for future use.

A year later, after continuous rains, there were leaks in the isolation ward and at the entrance near the hospital and more laundry worries. Matron Burke said she could no longer cope with the totally inadequate laundry facilities at the hospital. The increased number of patients and the addition of the obstetric unit placed a tremendous strain on the hospital's drying equipment. "Even in dry weather, the task of providing clean linen is very difficult, but with the long spells of wet weather the problem of drying the laundry is nigh impossible", said Matron Burke.

The message was heard in Sydney and the Hospitals Commission agreed to install a tumbler drier. Even when the drier was delivered, it was just sitting there for a month. It had been inspected by a technician but the installation was not promised for another month. Mrs Mary Rogers, a member of the Board's house committee said "it was infuriating to see the laundry stacked with wet clothes and a large, new drier idle for a month".

Tenders had been called for the new hospital to be built on a large block south of the central business district. The successful contractor was Perc Rimington. The new hospital was said to be the biggest south of Wollongong with provision for 70 beds, two modern operating theatres, air conditioned and having the most modern facilities.

Meantime the present hospital was still falling apart. Dr Ted Blomfield, who worked at the hospital from 1949 to 1984, had described the terrible state of the operating theatres but he also remembers going into the "office to see telephonist Jill Stafford for something when the phone rang. She went to answer it and fell waist deep through the rotten, white ant eaten floor to the earth below. Jill was a bit surprised but stretched right up from the ground to answer the phone.

The old hospital was run down to the point where staff left and could not be replaced. There were no funds for new equipment and the story of putting new-born babies in cardboard boxes is quite true," said Dr Blomfield. "Two premature babies were born about three months apart in 1952. Both were so tiny they were not expected to live. There were no cribs and no money and Sister Crawford wrapped the babies in cotton wool and put them in cardboard beer boxes. She slept beside them and loved them. An absolutely dedicated nurse.

Matron Burke finally secured a humidicrib after the second birth, but it was Sister Crawford's devotion that saved the babies' lives. The first was a little boy, Baby Turnbull, who grew up to be a front row footballer. The second was a little girl, Baby Twyford, who was eight weeks premature and weighed only 2lb 10ozs. When Alwyn Twyford's

baby decided to be born two months early her husband, Noel, was away in the army doing compulsory National Service training. The district was flooded and Uncle Bob Twyford had to bring Alwyn from Candelo to Bega in his highwheeled Chevy across the low level bridge at Frogs Hollow, just before Bega became isolated.

The little girl arrived at 1pm, 17 June, 1952, and Sister Crawford wrapped the tiny bundle in cotton wool and placed her in a cardboard beer box. No names had yet been considered and when the Reverend Thomas Whiting was called to baptise the baby, and asked Alwyn to name her infant, Rosalie was the only thing she could think of.

Rosalie's plight made it to the city newspaper. A week later the Royal Hospital for Women at Camperdown supplied a humidicrib at a cost of £265, which was flown down and into which baby Rosalie was transferred from her beer box.

Sister Crawford's constant vigilance was rewarded when Rosalie went home on August 24, but she was not strong enough to hold a bottle until she was 14 months old, and was unable to walk until she was two." Despite her early setback, Rosalie became Mrs John Coman and Dr Ted later delivered her three healthy children.

Rotten floors and lack of equipment were not the only problem. Bert Rhodes was a yardman at the Old Bega Hospital during the early 1950s and one day the secretary

Dr John McKee surrounded by some of the staff at the entrance to Bega Hospital

noticed the swallows building under the eaves. Bert was instructed to knock the nest down, which he did on the Friday afternoon. Monday was a holiday. On Tuesday the secretary noticed that the swallows were still there, and what was worse, so was the nest and the resultant debris. Bert was called upon to explain himself. While Bert and most of the staff had a holiday weekend, the swallows hadn't taken it into account. They'd rebuilt their nest, working double time to restore it.

But swallows were nothing compared to the problem possums caused both in the hospital and the maternity ward. They were so noisy in the roof it was hard to sleep and they stole any food left on the bedside tables.

The condition of the operating theatre was brought before the Board constantly and it was particularly bad in summer when the heat and dampness made it oppressively uncomfortable to the doctors, nurses and their patients. The dampness was created by steam from the sterilisers and the moisture condensed down the walls so that considerable water pooled on the floor where the doctors and nurses stood.

The Board asked for a ventilation expert to inspect the operating theatre which resulted in a fan and a system of louvres being installed to disperse the hot air. The ceiling, which had started to disintegrate, had also been temporarily sealed. At much the same time blinds were installed for the verandah of the maternity unit as the hot summer caused a great deal of discomfort to those patients in that part of the unit.

On the 25th January, 1952, heatwave conditions had prevailed for some days, following a hot dry spell. At night the scrub fires could be seen from the Bemboka Peak to Belowra. At 10am a strong westerly wind was blowing and fire swept down from the peaks in all directions. Upper Brogo and Bemboka being the first attacked. The fire was seen to jump two miles at a time and by 11 o'clock the town of Bega was surrounded by a deep red glow and hot cinders. Pieces of burning twigs and bark were driven over the town by a strong wind. All business was suspended in the town and the Police quickly organised parties, which were sent out on lorries with drums of water and soaked bags.

The first fire swept down on to Bega from Mount Pleasant into the North Bega area, and from Daisy Hill and Kirby it jumped across the river and up into Newtown. Burning sticks were driven through the air as if shot by a catapult, and by midday the siren at the fire station was wailing. A new fire threatened the Hospital and was with difficulty turned into the common, where it did much damage. One patient, Mr Jim Preo, died from intense heat in the ward.

The foundation stone for the new hospital was laid in 1952 but after the initial start of the project, work halted when the NSW Government stopped the funding. It may have been the prospect of the new hospital fading in the foreseeable future that caused the hospital to experience a serious shortage of staff, with Matron Burke having to work as a sister, often 'till late at night. Sisters Monica Bateman and Joan Ball, the only double-certificated nurses available, endeavoured to maintain trained nursing in the obstetric unit by working shifts of a fortnight duration, but the strain was too great for them. Of the 22 trained sisters required, there are now only 10 made up of trainee and cadet nurses. Although there had been four male nursing orderlies, one had walked out without a word. The few signs of definite replacement of staff were of concern for the Board and Matron.

Matron Burke resigned in 1952 after four and half years and her work was highly praised in a round of farewells. Mr A T Cochrane, chairman of the Hospital Board, thanked Matron for her splendid work in caring for the sick people of this district under somewhat difficult conditions with staff shortages and an outmoded hospital building. "She never spared herself at any time during the last four and a half years, and made her first consideration the comfort of the patients. The people of Bega will never forget her work, especially those who at times received the gracious attention of Matron Burke when they had sick relatives in the hospital." Dr John McKee said the spirit of Matron Burke would always be admired in Bega for the self-sacrifice with which she served the patients of the Bega District Hospital. "That she is now experiencing physical ill effects, as a result,

The (old) Bega Hospital

will be regretted by many people in the district. She must have a good rest and we trust that she enjoys a long and revitalising vacation. Matron Burke was the patients' friend and champion, and I can assure her that she will be leaving Bega with a wealth of kind memories left behind with those who feel they owe her so much."

The *Bega District News* reported that Matron Burke's discipline, and desire to assist the nurses, was greatly appreciated by the girls who recognised her worthiness by making a presentation of a writing case. Matron Burke said that she felt that sick people must receive the very best of attention, and "if I cannot provide it I would feel that I had not done what my profession expects of me".

The new matron was Matron H H Kelsey, the sister of Mrs E C Blomfield who was the wife of Dr Ted Blomfield. She came to Bega from Griffith and had held matronships of the Hawkesbury, Grenfell and Deniliquin Hospitals. She stayed until August 1953 and then in 1953, Matron T E Caterson was appointed.

It was a very disgruntled Board that met in January, 1953, because the Health Commission was dropping a subsidy. Payment of accounts to trade creditors were three months behind. The deputy chairman, Mr Bush, said "It was a very serious situation and one fraught with unhappy possibilities. We are spending as little as possible but with maintenance costs so high, I don't know where it is going to end." Mr Beavan said "it was not fair to ask a body of reputable people to run a business already bankrupt, and try to build it up on the credit given by local trades people. With nursing staff not up to full strength and staff available, the board is faced with the problem of accommodation, the Nurses' Home not being large enough to house additional nurses. The crisis had been caused by the hospital not being able to charge intermediate and private ward fees as the layout could not be adapted for this.

In March, the *Bega District News* reported the Board had been told a new control box had to be ordered for the large washing machine, which had been unserviceable for some time. This had increased the task of doing the laundry and a replacement part was an urgent matter. The secretary said he had been unable to secure the services of a local plumber to undertake the replacement of the guttering and downpiping on the hospital building, which had been deteriorating over the years. Money was available for this but they were unable to secure tenders for the work. The verandah on the eastern end of the hospital, now used as a children's ward, would be fitted with black canvas blinds to overcome the heat of the sun.

Work had ceased on the new hospital through lack of money. It was the same problem with the present hospital which in April had a debit balance of £6,040. And the finances were slowly deteriorating. "Four months' accounts had yet to be met, and although local tradesmen were viewing the matter with extreme tolerance, the Sydney creditors are pressing for immediate remuneration", said the secretary, Mr Dickens.

In July the finances improved due to a record amount of fees collected from patients, and in August work started again on the new hospital.

In October the Board decided to spend money made available by the Hospitals Commission on painting the inside of the hospital, last done 17 years ago. The wards, maternity block and nurses quarters were painted. Once again the boiler broke and it was thoroughly overhauled. A section was found to be cracked, which happened regularly with this ancient piece of equipment. There was also tender approval for repair and reconstruction of the morgue.

The wards were finally painted in modern shades in May, 1954, and in the next month five additional nursing staff arrived, relieving the strained staff position at the hospital, and the prospects of retaining full staff for some months were high. Two of the nurses came from Western Australia and the other three from England. Finally, in September, the board showed a surplus of over £3,000 for the year. Creditors' accounts had all been met and the maintenance account was in credit. Patients' fees had risen by £2,477.

But the good times didn't last. A nursing shortage continued and, like her predecessors, Matron Caterson had problems with staffing. In March, 1955, due to an extreme shortage of trained sisters, there was a distinct possibility that admissions to the hospital would have to be restricted until the position improved. Matron also reported that there was a shortage of domestic staff. There were five full-time sisters and three working part-time, but two would be leaving shortly.

Advertisements were put in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane papers. In May there was an appeal to women with nursing experience to give assistance until additional sisters could be obtained. The situation was critical with only two full-time sisters and three others part-time.

Only urgent surgical cases were done, most of which had been booked in for six weeks. Other operations were postponed. Visiting hours were curtailed by half an hour to give sisters more time.

Meantime the Hospital Auxiliary was busy raising funds and helping out with street stalls, an American tea, and an egg week when 200 eggs were donated. In the annual report of the Board, presented in September, it was agreed that it was the most trying year in the history of the hospital, due to the acute shortage of both trained and trainee nursing staff, which had necessitated restriction of admissions. The chairman, Mr Bush, said, "Matron Caterson and her limited staff have maintained the best traditions of their profession by enduring, at times, almost impossible conditions, for which the Board, and the people of the district, should be most grateful. Every member of staff, including the domestic, laundry, maintenance and office staff, is playing an important part in the running of the hospital, and all helped to run it successfully." But perhaps not all the staff! In December Sergeant Sherlock examined a sugar bag carried from the hospital by the chef. Inside were two fillets of fish and a lettuce which the chef said were scraps for his fowls, but the Sergeant took them back to the hospital and the fish was used the next day for light diet patients and although the lettuce was limp, it was doused in water and also used for the patients' meals.

July 2, 1956, was the last day for the hospital and the *Bega District News* reported that it was a calm, efficient operation conducted by Matron Caterson and her staff and the Bega District Ambulance officers. Just before 11 o'clock the oldest patient, 91 year-old Mrs R Dawson, became the first patient to be taken to the new hospital, to a "bed near a window through which the bright winter sky streamed from a clear sky". Mrs Dawson had been a patient for some months. Rita Roberts' eldest daughter Mary, was to be the second last child born in the hospital.

The historic cycle was completed at 2pm, when Mr William McNamara was the last to go to the new hospital. Mr McNamara, 88, was present in 1888 when the hospital he was leaving was officially opened. "I was a young fellow of 20 then and I certainly didn't expect to be that last patient to leave the hospital that looked so grand 68 years ago."

Left behind was Mrs Mary Catherine Larkin, 85, of Tathra, who was dying and was too ill to be moved. Her sister, Mrs Preo, and her grand-niece, Mrs Betty Koellner, stayed with her, with only them in the building. Then Mrs Preo had to go home, leaving only Mrs Koellner there with the dying woman as dusk fell. It was dark, six pm, before Ms Larkin died and Mrs Koellner rang the new hospital to report it, so a staff member returned and Mrs Koellner was able to go home to Tathra, and Bega Hospital was a hospital no more.

The last issue of *Recollections* mentioned that Moruya is almost unique among Australian towns for not having erected a town war memorial immediately after World War I. Here's more of the background to that story, taken from *The Unreal Story of World War I and the NSW South Coast:*

Moruya – Patriotic ... but Unenthusiastic

> *Recently we mentioned that a caller at this office inquired as to the whereabouts of the local recruiting office, but as there was no such institution under the latest scheme, the inquirer had perforce to walk on to the next town. To which our Moruya contemporary fervently ejaculates: "It is to be hoped he does not come to Moruya, as he would be taken as a curiosity."*
>
> *– Cobargo Chronicle, 3.2.1917*

Local newspaper editors kept a close eye on what was happening in other towns - applauding initiatives elsewhere and, when appropriate, trumpeting outstanding efforts in their own town. This was probably just friendly rivalry between editors, but it does provide some interesting reading.

Moruya seems to have provided a particularly fertile source of stories in newspapers elsewhere during World War I. It was sometimes (perhaps a little unfairly) looked upon as a bit of an 'oddity':

Moruya Times speaks a piece. – 'On a population basis, the men of Moruya stand in the limelight as the biggest brigade of complete rotters, acknowledged cowards, and thorough wastrels at the present time using good oxygen under the Southern Cross.' (Candelo's *Southern Record and Advertiser*, 12.2.1916)

Four out of the five members of the special committee appointed at Moruya to deal with the replies to recruiting cards were men of eligible age for military service and had conscientious objections to acting. On the case being stated to Mr Catts (organising secretary), he regretted that there were not more men of mature age in Moruya with sufficient patriotism to induce them to fill this responsible position. Under the circumstances he would be pleased if the committee appointed would continue to act. (Cobargo Chronicle, 11.3.1916*)*

Sergeant Cross addressed a recruiting meeting at Moruya last week, and one volunteer answered his appeal for men! At the conclusion, however, the usual three cheers for the King were easily forthcoming, also three for our brave Allies. Also, the chap who volunteered was loudly cheered. Some mates to stand alongside him would have "cheered" him much more. (Cobargo Chronicle, 24.6.1916)

In May 1918, quite late in the war:

Moruya has declared war at last. One day during the week nine sturdy recruits in that centre offered themselves for active service. A good sign that "Australia will be there" when "trench fever" is spreading so generally. (Cobargo Chronicle, 11.5.1918*)*

The Moruya paper wipes the floor with people in that town who are 'utterly devoid of the least particle of patriotism, who are never to be found at public meetings convened in the public interest, whose names are never seen on charitable

or patriotic lists, nor even the local paper's subscription list.' The paper adds the rather 'personal' remark that 'among these undesirable residents are some of our highly-paid Government officials. (Southern Record and Advertiser, 14.9.1918)

Moruya is distinctive in the war period in two ways: the conscription referenda attracted particularly vehement opposition, and the town is almost unique for not having erected a war memorial immediately after the war.

Moruya, though, *was not a particularly unpatriotic town and its record both in the raising of recruits and money was probably average.*

When the war broke out the town had no military heritage. There were too few potential recruits to justify establishing an army reserve force in the town, as had been done in larger nearby towns, and the local rifle club (which would normally have been supported by the army) had been defunct for some decades.

It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that there was minimal support for a local Recruiting Association when it was established in 1915 and for the Eurobodalla Council War Service Committee that was set up in January 1916. Just 3 men volunteered for service when a recruiting effort was made in early 1916 and only 11 people attended a public meeting in December 1916 that aimed to provide a boost to recruiting.

In 1915 the Council also resolved to erect an Honor Roll of those who had enlisted [Honor Rolls were to be found everywhere during World War I] but, through disinterest, the proposal was never implemented.

Even a meeting, later in January 1917, to establish a local branch of the War Chest Fund (a fundraising appeal to support the war effort) failed to attract sufficient attendees.

This is not to suggest that the Moruya community was unsupportive of the war effort:

In August 1914 a Patriotic Society was established and a local branch of the Red Cross was formed. *The gallant fighting of the British lions has imbued our Moruyaites with the greatest enthusiasm*, the *Moruya Examiner* newspaper reported.

And *when the result of Moruya's Australia Day was seen, the residents of the whole district were astonished* with £615 being collected.

And men from the area did enlist, including (significantly – see below) a good number of Catholics. It has been suggested that many of those from the Moruya area who were eager to enlist may not have done so locally, either because the local population was less supportive than those in other areas of men wishing to join the army or because few facilities were provided in the Moruya area to make it possible for them to enlist locally.

The 1916 conscription referendum, though, became a significant turning point for the town.

The lack of enthusiasm that had been previously displayed towards the war effort was replaced by significant anti-government opposition.

In the lead-up to the referendum the local paper was suggesting:

In place of being conscripted and, consequently, disgraced we have been requested to state that an Enrolling Officer will visit Moruya on the 7th of next month and on the following day at 7pm will examine recruits…Now men, do save your district from everlasting reproach and yourselves from undying shame.

Moruya's Mayor, Thomas Flood, also called a meeting to support Federal Government calls to promote the referendum 'Yes' cause:

One of the most important public meetings ever called together in Moruya is convened by the President of Eurobodalla Shire Council for next Tuesday night … to deal with the matter of the forthcoming Referendum … We trust the public, realising the gravity of the present frightful war and the seriousness of our lovely country being brought under German domination, will crowd the hall to overflowing.

But, unfortunately for the meeting organisers, 18 inches of rain fell during the following week in Moruya.

After the meeting had been duly opened by the Shire President, Mr. Flood (an appropriate name in the circumstances!), *Mr. F C Dixon moved and the Rev. J A Walsh seconded 'That this meeting of citizens of Moruya form a committee to further the Referendum to be taken on the 26th of October.' The only other speaker to address the meeting was the Rev. Father Conaghan* [the Catholic Assistant Priest in 1916 and 1917 in Moruya, and the son of an Irish immigrant], *who delivered an impassioned address, at considerable length, in opposition to the motion. The chairman's solicitations having failed to bring any other speakers to their feet, he called for a show of hands for and against the motion, with the result that it was defeated by a large majority. The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to the chairman…carried by acclamation.*

The *Moruya Examiner* suggested:

The wet weather contingent who faced the elements in order to attend the public meeting on Tuesday night gave unmistakable evidence of their dislike to compulsory service. It would be interesting to hold another meeting for the convenience of fine weather patriots in order to ascertain how their pulse beats on the matter.

A fortnight later, the *Moruya Examiner* reported that an open-air anti-conscription meeting had been held the previous Wednesday night in Moruya and *a show of hands was taken which resulted in a unanimous vote being carried against conscription.*

Father Conaghan also subsequently held a 'highly entertaining' and 'edifying' two-hour debate in the town with a pro-conscriptionist, a Mr Holmes.

At the referendum, the Moruya electoral sub-division voted strongly against the referendum proposal: 184 votes were cast in favour, and 583 against.

The *Moruya Examiner* actually supported the 'Yes' vote, indicating it *strongly detests the term 'Conscription' but that seeing Mr Fisher* [the Australian Prime Minister from September 1914, but leader of the opposition Labor Party at the time he made this comment] *pledged this country to 'the last man and the last shilling' and the present government were returned on that pledge, we feel in duty bound to respect the pledge…by voting 'Yes'.*

The second conscription referendum debate, a year later – with the outspoken Father Conaghan having by now accepted a post elsewhere – was significantly more vitriolic … and (as was also a feature at conscription meetings in 1917 in Candelo and Cobargo) resulted in violence.

A pro-conscription meeting was convened in Moruya in late November 1917. It attracted a small attendance and might have gone unnoticed until *at the close … there was a disgraceful exhibition of disloyalty by some youths at the rear and in the lobby of the hall boobooing when the chairman asked for cheers for the King … and a number of youths, whose fathers should tie them up to the bed post and flail that portion of their anatomy upon which they are supposed to sit, followed the chairman of the conscriptionists meeting on Thursday night, and, we are told, pelted him with eggs … the action was a decidedly cruel one, more especially as the chairman is a person who would not hurt man, woman or child.*

A reconvened meeting, held a week later, attracted just twenty people – when *quite a posse of distinguished Police Officers honoured our proverbially orderly little township with their presence on Wednesday night, presumably to see that law and order were observed and the Conscriptionist and his supporters (would be saved) from molestation* … (the names of five visiting police officers were printed) … *The outcome of the whole regrettable official proceedings turned out to be a 'storm in a teacup' and the services of not a single guardian of the law was required … Thank goodness the residents of Moruya are not a lot of outlaws and desperados.*

Meanwhile, *Mr M Burke, M.L.A., addressed a great crowd at Irwin's corner against Mr Hughes' Referendum proposal, on Saturday night last. The speaker* [a Mr Whitmore], *who is a humorous Irishman, had a great reception and kept his audience entertained throughout the lengthy address. A vote was taken by a show of hands for and against conscription and was carried by a sea of hands being hoisted against conscription amidst loud applause.*

The *Moruya Examiner* did not support the referendum on this second occasion:

We cannot bring ourselves to force non-combatants to take up arms and fight against their will whilst it is possible they may do more towards winning the war by cultivating our broad acres and providing food for the millions already fighting for us.

The vote in the Moruya Sub-division at this referendum was again strongly opposed to the government's proposal: 150 were in favour, 492 were against, and 9 informal votes were recorded.

From then, to well after the war, significant disinterest seemed to set in – except when news of the Armistice reached the town and its residents celebrated enthusiastically:

Local men were only too glad to be home and many probably saw the war as a dark interlude to be forgotten as soon as possible. A branch of the RSL was formed with some difficulty in 1920 but failed to achieve the sort of immediate prestige that similar branches achieved elsewhere, H J Gibbney, the author of *Eurobodalla. History of the Moruya District* observed.

A German machine gun War Trophy was secured for the town in 1920, which then disappeared – as was also to happen with the War Trophies allocated to Bermagui. (It has been suggested Moruya's machine gun may have been donated to a World War II scrap metal drive.)

The local newspaper, however, kept something of an eye on what was happening elsewhere reporting *a machine gun trophy has been made available for Cobargo, Bemboka and Bermagui,* that *Pambula and Candelo have decided that their*

soldiers' memorials shall take the form of street monuments, and *Bega raised over £300 for their Soldiers' Memorial Fund by a big effort in the form of a procession and sports on Armistice Day.*

Some small local memorials were subsequently erected in Moruya. For example, the Methodist Church unveiled an Honor Roll and a Memorial Tablet to Lieut. H M Bishop and Private R C Bishop on January 9th, 1921.

The question of erecting an official town War Memorial lay dormant until late February 1923 when the local newspaper took the initiative and suggested *something be done to bring our town in line with others* that had erected soldiers' memorials. This prompted the Mayor to call a meeting.

Only eight people attended that meeting and only thirteen attended a subsequent meeting which decided *that an operating theatre be erected at the Moruya Hospital as a war memorial. The secretary was authorised (when funds were available) to open and operate upon an account in the Government Savings Bank to be called the Moruya Hospital War Memorial Fund.*

Perhaps this represented an appropriate conclusion to the war years in Moruya – some residents willing to provide some support, but never with any of the widespread community enthusiasm that was a conspicuous feature of the time in other south coast towns.

It's a tad ironic, therefore, that Moruya supplied the granite for the State's principal war memorial, the Cenotaph in Martin Place in Sydney.

HISTORY HORNETS

May 9 – The True Australia Day

by Honorary Professor Anna Howe, Macquarie University

We missed out on a holiday for the king's coronation.

But we get one for his birthday in most states of Australia, on a day that isn't actually his birthday.

That holiday was Australia's first, declared by NSW Governor Arthur Phillip in 1788 to mark the birthday of George III. It must have seemed as strange to the new arrivals as to the Australians on whose land they had arrived.

It didn't mark their safe arrival, it didn't mark the raising of the Union Jack on Australian shores and it didn't mark the founding of Sydney. Nor did it acknowledge the first peoples already on the continent.

These days the king's birthday is even less relevant than it was.

The king no longer has the power to enact laws governing Australia. That finished when his mother Queen Elizabeth signed the Australia Act 1986, which ended the ability of the United Kingdom to make laws with respect to Australian states and the ability of Australian states to take disputes to the UK Privy Council.

But hiding in plain sight, just a month before the king's birthday holiday, is a date most of us have a much better reason to celebrate – it's May 9.

May 9 is the real Australia Day

Australia's constitution was proclaimed on January 1 1901, but only had full effect when our first federal parliament met on May 9 1901, in the Exhibition Building in Melbourne.

When the parliament moved to Canberra in 1927, the new temporary parliament house was again opened on May 9.

'The Opening, Commonwealth Parliament' in Melbourne, 1901 by Charles Nuttall. *Image: Museums Victoria*

Six decades later, when the new and permanent parliament house was opened on Canberra's Capital Hill in 1988, the date chosen was again May 9.

It is not simply these events that make May 9 the real Australia Day.

In his speech on May 9, 1988, Prime Minister Bob Hawke said the new building would become for our nation both the forum for our differences and the instrument of our unity – a building for all Australians, a parliament reflecting the diversity of our entire society and responding to the needs of the whole community.

And it has. In parliament, our local members and Senators take up issues that concern us and debate and resolve them. The legislation they have created ranges from the everyday to the extraordinary.

The 1918 Electoral Act required all electors to vote. The 1973 Medicare Act gave us the healthcare card we take for granted. More exceptionally, the 2017 Marriage Amendment Act gave same-sex couples the right to marry, in accordance with the wishes of the majority of the population.

The 1967 referendum allowed the parliament to legislate for Indigenous Australians for the first time.

Our parliament is worth celebrating.

What legitimises decisions made in Australia is that they come from a process that involves the Australian people, through the Australian parliament, rather than a structure outside Australia or beyond the ability of Australians to control.

We have changed the political complexion of the parliament many times, yet through it all the parliament has become more representative of us over time.

The first two women were elected in 1943. By 2022, we had 58 women in the House of Representatives, including 19 elected for the first time, and a female majority in the Senate.

The first Indigenous senator, Neville Bonner, was elected in 1971. By 2022, eight senators and three members of the House of Representatives identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Ten of our members of parliament are first-generation migrants, including government ministers Tanya Plibersek and Penny Wong. Among the children of immigrants is Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

I was born a British subject in 1945, in Sydney, to Australian-born parents. The 1948 Citizenship Act made me an Australian citizen alongside all British subjects living in Australia.

The Act also opened the way for "aliens" – those born outside the Commonwealth – to become naturalised Australian citizens. The king's birthday can have little meaning for them or their locally born children.

Most migrants become citizens, and what has made this possible is an act of the Australian parliament.

How to make it happen

Making May 9 a public holiday is easy. It doesn't require legislation and doesn't require a referendum. January 26 was only proclaimed a national holiday in 1994.

May 9 has a much longer, more illustrious history. It is a date "made in Australia" and demonstrates our commitment to our democracy like no other day can.

By May 9, 2026, our parliament will have been in place for 125 years. That makes 2026 a good year to become a republic. Should a referendum to become a republic be successful, the first parliament of the Australian republic could meet on May 9, 2026.

If it takes another year, the first parliament of the Australian republic could meet on the centenary of the opening of the first parliament house in Canberra, on May 9, 2027.

I hope I live to celebrate that day. In the meantime, I'll forego this year's king's birthday holiday and instead celebrate on May 9. The weather in most places should be okay for a barbecue, so why not join me, before it becomes official?

—Reprinted from *The Conversation*, 9th May, 2023

But that would then leave a gap that is too long between public holidays for many Australians! So what appropriate or quintessentially Australian public holiday could we schedule in between Anzac Day and the October Long Weekend – a No Need for a Sickie (to)Day? R

The Journey to The Voice

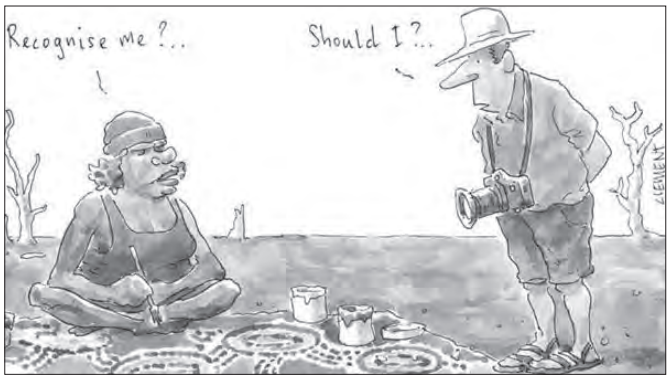
In June 2023 the Federal Parliament passed an Act for a referendum to change the Federal Constitution. This alteration to the Constitution is intended to reflect the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, presented to the Australian people in 2017. It will recognise First Nations people in the Constitution and establish a principle whereby Indigenous peoples will be able to contribute to the formulation of relevant laws and policies: '*The Voice will be a permanent body to make representations to the Australian parliament and the Executive Government on legislation and policies of significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, by giving them a greater say on matters that affect them.*' (Referendum Working Group) The detailed structure, functions and procedures of the Voice are to be determined by Parliament, in conjunction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The significance of this constitutional change must be viewed in the context of the communication over the past 200 years between Indigenous population and European colonisers.

The settlement of the various Australian colonies in the nineteenth century had profound effects on Indigenous communities. Little attention was paid by colonial authorities to the prior occupation by or the needs and desires of the Indigenous populations. Despite active resistance, the Indigenous populations effectively were killed, driven off or otherwise removed from traditional lands to allow urban and agricultural development by the European settlers.

By the time Australia became a nation in 1901, resistance to colonisation had been effectively defeated. The general attitude to the remaining Indigenous population was one of providing some limited protection by establishing reserves. There was a clear expectation then that the Aboriginal population would eventually die-out or be assimilated into white communities. Indigenous people were not involved in the policies and decisions determining their fate.

Federation in 1901 and the adoption of a Constitution did nothing to change these circumstances. The Australian Constitution defines the structures and powers by which the nation is governed, and it contained few references to Indigenous peoples. The Constitution, though, did specify that Aboriginal people were not to be counted in any determination of population numbers (Section 127), and special laws were not to be made for people of the 'Aboriginal race' (Section 51).



A 2014 cartoon in the *Australian Financial Review* [utilising entrenched cultural stereotypes in the depiction of Indigenous people] which appeared when plans to hold a referendum recognizing Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples were shelved for the second time in as many years.

The exclusion of Aboriginals (as a race) from being considered citizens, and the Commonwealth's inability to make laws relating to Aboriginals meant that, by default, the States continued to be responsible for laws related to Indigenous persons.

So Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders found themselves forced into reserves and missions, for their 'protection' from the effects of European contact and for the management of their welfare. In reality they were controlled and their lives were regulated.

State laws enacted during the early twentieth century included the legal removal of Indigenous children from their families, especially when they were considered to have a non-Indigenous parent. This practice ceased by the 1970s, but considerable legacies remained that were outlined in the Human Rights Commission's *Bringing Them Home* Report in 1997. Eventually, an apology to the 'stolen generations' for State and Commonwealth practices was given in Federal Parliament by the Rudd government in 2008.

Activism by or on behalf of Indigenous peoples during the early twentieth century included the establishment of organisations such as the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) in 1924 to advocate for citizenship, land rights and other social rights such as health and education, and the Australian Aborigines' League (AAL), formed in 1936 to lobby state and federal governments on Indigenous rights. The Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders provided a petition in 1962 proposing constitutional changes on behalf of Indigenous peoples. Other petitions followed, eventually leading to the successful referendum in 1967 to amend the Constitution to allow the Commonwealth to take control of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs.

This 1967 referendum also removed Section 127 from the Constitution, allowing Indigenous peoples to be counted as part of the population and become citizens of their own country. It also changed Section 51 of the Constitution to allow the Commonwealth the make laws for the 'Aboriginal race'.

Despite the overwhelming success of the referendum, the response from the Federal Government was less than enthusiastic. The establishment of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs represented some small progress, but there was little interest or belief in a need for special policies to assist Indigenous peoples, provision of an appropriate means to consult with Indigenous populations about to how to provide this assistance, nor any acceptance of the concept of land rights based on traditional title. This was in contrast with the actions in other former British colonies where, for example, Treaties were negotiated with First Nations peoples from early days of settlement - in the US with 370 American Indian Nations between 1774 and 1871, in Canada between 1701 and 1921, and in New Zealand in 1840.

Significant change at Commonwealth level began with the election of the Whitlam government in 1972. The National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC) was established, allowing elected Indigenous delegates to provide advice to the Minister responsible for Indigenous affairs. This was expanded and became the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC) under the Fraser Government. The NAC was abolished in 1985. Although these organisations were seen as providing a 'Voice', in practice they were remote from the communities they represented and were strongly controlled by the central bureaucracy in Canberra.

From 1989, under the Hawke and Keating governments, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was established. This was based on elected members from regional councils. It was responsible for its own policies and budgets and answerable to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. ATSIC was regarded as having both successes and failures. An enquiry held in 2003 recommended that ATSIC should continue, but required structural change to allow greater control at the regional level where it was most needed. Despite these recommendations ATSIC was terminated by the Howard government in 2004.

Since then, various structures to establish Indigenous representation have been considered. Under the Gillard government an Expert Panel was established in 2010 to facilitate recognition of Australian and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In 2012 it recommended constitutional change, but no other progress was made (prompting publication of the cartoon in the *Australian Financial Review*). In 2015 the Turnbull government, in association with the Federal opposition, established a Referendum Council. This led to First Nations Constitutional Dialogues and eventually to a First Nations Constitutional Convention at Uluru in 2017, which led to the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*.

The Voice was one of three fundamental points within the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*. The Statement sought provision of a constitutionally recognised Voice to Parliament. It also sought the establishment of a Treaty and a process of "Truth-telling". And it identified the need for the Voice to be the first priority.

The proposed new wording in the Constitution is:

CHAPTER IX — Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

129 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice

In recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia:

(i) there shall be a body, to be called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice;

(ii) the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice may make representations to the Parliament and the Executive Government of the Commonwealth on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;

(iii) the Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws with respect to matters relating to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, including its composition, functions, powers and procedures.

We soon will be asked to vote either YES or NO to this proposition – most likely during October or November 2023. A publication with YES and NO cases will be sent to all voters about one month before the referendum.

Supporters of the YES and NO cases have begun active campaigning, and political parties have, in the main, adopted their positions.

At the time of writing, and if the opinion polls are to be believed, there is no guarantee that this Voice Referendum will be successful. This Referendum has (like all referenda intended to change the Australian Constitution have had) two significant hurdles to be negotiated: for the referendum to be successful a majority of Australians must vote Yes AND a majority of voters in a majority of states must also vote Yes. That is a very big ask, as illustrated by the track record of Australian constitutional referenda which, over 123 years, have been agreed to by the Australian population on only 18% of occasions. The most recent of these was 46 years ago!

There are two main impediments that seem to act against Australians agreeing to Constitutional change: there is a widespread (and perhaps lamentable) lack of knowledge among Australians about our own political institutions (for example, a 2015 poll revealed that one-third of Australians didn't know Australia has a written Constitution); and many Australians are suspicious of governments seeking change, so Constitutional change proposals that lack support from all major political parties frequently fail.

We may have some interesting times in the months ahead. R

Responsibility for political comment or referendum-related comment published in this issue of Recollections is assumed by its Editor, Peter Lacey.