South Coast History Society Inc.
RecollectionS
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The basalt quarry at Bombo, just north of Kiama, in the 1880s

Kiama

In this issue we venture to the north of the South Coast, to briefly look at the history of Kiama – a history significantly influenced by two volcanic eruptions, one about 240 million years ago, the other about 66 million years ago.

Kiama is probably best known today for its Blow Hole – created by sea erosion along the line of a fracture in the surrounding Latite, the rock deposited by one or both of those volcanic eruptions. (There are actually two Blow Holes near Kiama – the lesser-known Little Blow Hole is located on Marsden Head, south of the more well-known Blow Hole on Blowhole Point.)

In December 1797 George Bass entered the bay that is now Kiama Harbour on his voyage exploring the NSW South Coast. The noise created by the Kiama Blow Hole attracted his attention and he recorded:

The earth for a considerable distance round in the form approaching a circle seemed to have given way; it was now a green slope. Towards the centre was a deep ragged hole of about 25 to 30 feet in diameter and on one side of it the sea washed in through a subterraneous passage, with a most tremendous noise.

It was not long after this (probably by around 1810) that considerable numbers of timber-getters were attracted to the area, primarily to cut the valued cedar that grew in profusion along the valleys in the area. Kiama's main beach, Black Beach, became the 'port' where the timber was loaded onto ships bound for Sydney. By the 1820s, 90% of the cedar arriving in Sydney was coming from the Kiama area.

The local Aboriginals proved to be very troublesome in

Fantastic Reads

the early days, so in 1826 a detachment of the 40th Regiment was stationed in the district for a time to protect the white population. (It appears, however, that the Aboriginal population around Kiama was never large. A census of Aboriginals in 1838 revealed that there were 49 Tharawal people living in the Illawarra with a small number of them living in a camp in Kiama. And the 1901 census recorded just 13 Aborigines living beside the Minnamurra River [north of Kiama], 18 living at Bombo and 3 at Kiama.)

It is likely that Kiama's first permanent European resident in the area, David Smith, was one of those cedar-cutters. He settled in what later became Kiama in 1821 and built a permanent house in 1832. In 1837 this became Kiama's first tavern, the Gum Tree Inn.

A survey of the Kiama area was undertaken in 1819 by Assistant Surveyor-General James Meehan. John Oxley, the NSW Surveyor-General at the time, also explored the area, noted the fertile soils in the area, and named it 'Kiarami' (from an Aboriginal word, Kiarama or Kiarmai, meaning 'place where the sea makes a noise'). The land around the harbour was reserved by 1826 and surveys laying out the town were conducted in 1830 and 1831.

From the 1840s, Kiama developed as the shipping and service centre for the local area. Nearby Jamberoo was the area's population centre from around 1830 to the 1860s, with famers first sowing wheat. Later they switched to dairying, once it became apparent that wheat was not well-suited to the area. Initially convict labour was used for clearing, farming and road building.

The Kiama Lighthouse

When convict labour ceased to be available, Kiama became a major centre of 'chain migration' in Australia (chain migration is the social process whereby immigrants from one area follow others from that same area to a particular destination; 'sponsored immigration' is one form of it) with significant numbers of assisted migrants coming from Northern Ireland to settle on 'clearing leases' (immigrants were let about 20 acres from large estates for five years rent free and given free food during the first few months. Generally these settlers lived in small huts). Half the marriages performed in the Kiama Anglican Church over a one hundred-year period had Northern Irish Protestant ancestry, reflecting this period of 'chain migration'.

A public jetty was built in the bay at Kiama in 1849, and was extended when steamer traffic began to arrive in 1852.

In 1853 locals set up the Kiama Steam Navigation Company and two years later the company's 104-ton wooden paddlewheel steamer, the "Kiama", began regular journeys to Sydney. From this time onwards (weather permitting) Kiama was served by a steamer twice a week.

By the 1880s dairying had become the staple industry for the Illawarra region and in 1883 a 'Pioneers Butter Factory' was erected in Kiama. It is credited as having been the first co-operative dairy factory in Australia, the first factory in Australia to use cream separators (machines that transformed processing in the dairy industry) and the first factory in Australia to make a shipment of butter to Great Britain. (In 1887, The Pioneers Butter Factory was purchased by Thomas Mort's 'NSW Fresh Food and Ice Company' for use as a milk depot. It fell into disuse in the early 20th century when Sydney markets drew the milk supplies from surrounding farms away from the factory.)

In the early days, shipping provided Kiama with virtually its only link to the rest of Australia and beyond. Travelling overland, even to Sydney, was nigh impossible.

It was obvious that Kiama was in need of better harbour facilities, so lobbying began in 1864 seeking the construction of a shipping basin. That construction didn't start for another 7 years and it took until 1876 for work to be completed on Robertson Basin (named after Sir John Robertson, the Premier of NSW, who had supported the project). The adjacent Kiama Pilot's Cottage was finished in 1881 (now the museum) and the Kiama Lighthouse in 1887.

Construction of Robertson Basin made it attractive for large Illawarra and South Coast Steam Navigation Company vessels to use the port, greatly improving accessibility to the area. (And the company had returned to its 'home': in 1858 the name of the Kiama Steam Navigation Company had been changed, by an Act of Parliament, to the Illawarra Steam Navigation Company.)

The opening of Robertson Basin turned out to be well-timed for Kiama. The growth of railways and roadways throughout NSW and tramways in Sydney triggered an enormous demand for blue metal. And Kiama was well-positioned to supply it from the abundant basalt outcrops around the town.

The basalt from the Kiama area was first used in the building of walls of public buildings in Kiama and Sydney (the Kiama Infants School, Courthouse and the Church of England being superb examples that have survived to the present). But the supply of crushed basalt – blue metal (much of which was initially hand crushed) – was to become the town's greatest export.

Kiama's first quarry (now the site of the town's aquatic

Kiama Public School, pictured in the 1920s, was built with Kiama basalt

centre) was established in 1855. Others were opened shortly afterwards.

Up to 30 dray loads a day of crushed stone from the quarries were taken to a fleet of small ships in Robertson Basin. This created an unacceptable amount of dust and continual damage to the surface of the main street, Terralong Street.

So, in 1881, it was decided to build a 3' 6" steam tramway down Terralong Street from the quarries to the jetty. Two staithes for loading the stone were erected at Robertson Basin and steam locomotives were imported. However, the tramway did not work effectively, and was abandoned.

By 1883 the export of blue metal from Kiama reached 400 tons a day. At times six ships were waiting offshore to load their cargoes.

Not all of these arrived at their destinations safely, with at least 11 of these so-called 'stone fleet' coming to grief between Kiama and Sydney. A memorial on Black Beach records the details of one of these, the *SS Bombo*, which capsized and sank outside Port Kembla harbour in a huge gale after departing Kiama for Sydney on 24th February 1949. Twelve of the fourteen crew lost their lives.

The dust menace in town remained, however, until the tramway idea was revived later (a 2' gauge tramway was built along Terralong Street in 1914 by the Public Works Department and operated until 1941. One of the locomotives that operated along this line is still operational at the Illawarra Light Rail Museum in Albion Park Rail.)

The 'Kiama' loading blue metal from the staithes at Robertson Basin, early 20th century. Image: Powerhouse Museum, 85/1284-394

Around 1880 the first blue metal quarry opened in Bombo (the Bombo Headland Quarry) and steam-powered crushing machines were installed there…and the railway line from Sydney was extended to Bombo (not primarily to benefit the quarries around Kiama but to provide transport of coal from the Wollongong area), opening in 1887. (This line was extended to Kiama in 1893, and from Kiama to Bomaderry [then designated the 'Kiama to Jervis Bay Railway'] the same year.) From that time onwards, most of the blue metal was sent to Sydney by train, although some blue metal from the Kiama area continued to be transported by ship up until December 1961.

(Just as an aside, Bombo was originally Bumbo, the Aboriginal word for 'thunder' and perhaps a reference to the noise created by the nearby Kiama Blow Hole. In the 1880s a local minister of religion objected to this 'rude' word, so the u was altered to an o!)

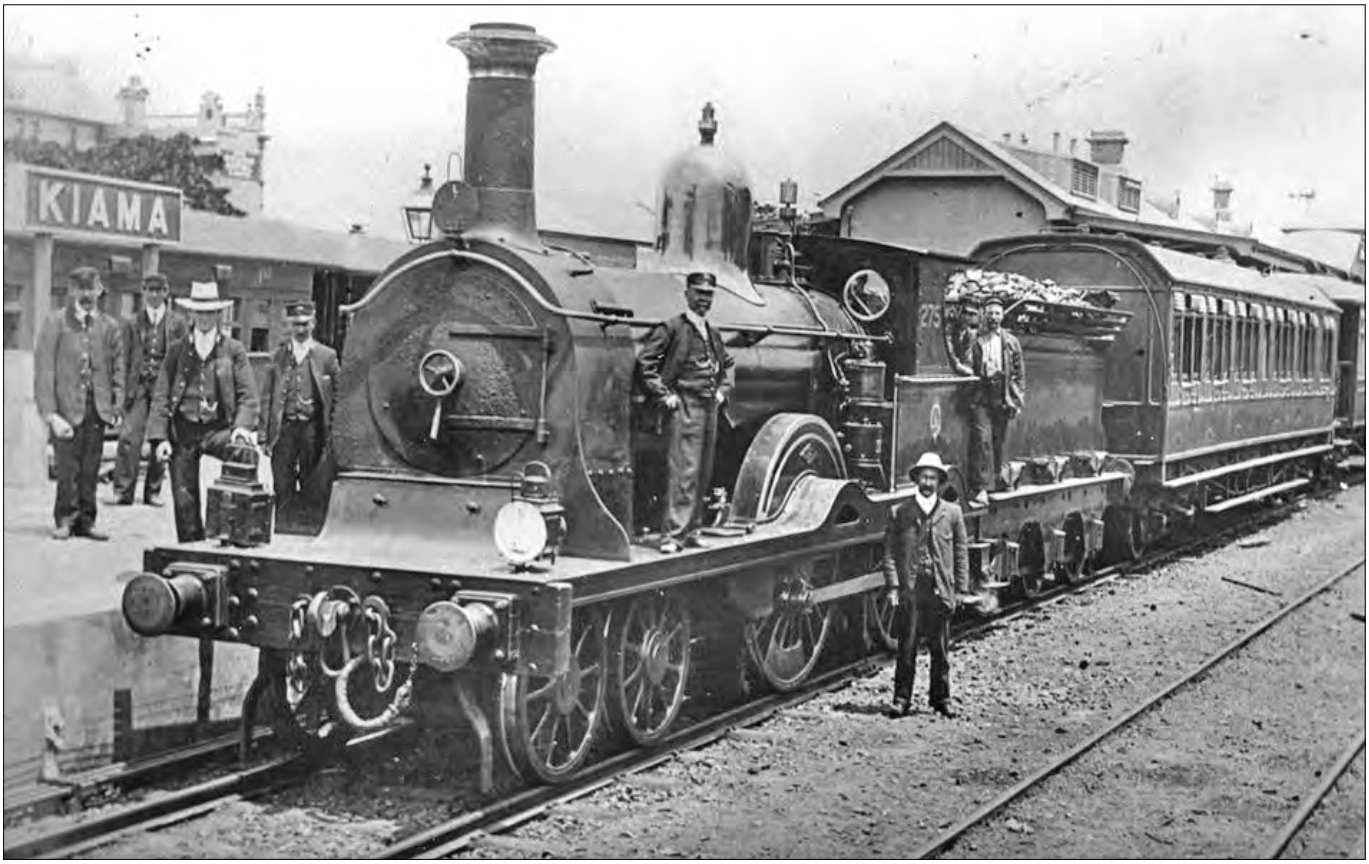
The opening of the blue metal quarries sparked a population boom to the area with significant numbers of Irish Catholics arriving to work in Kiama's quarries. And the blue metal industry was to remain the major employer in the district until the 1960s by which time most of Kiama's mines had closed.

The railway transformed Kiama in other ways. It made the town more accessible – both to day visitors from Sydney and to holiday makers. So, tourism then became an important part of the town's economy. Upgrades to the Princes Highway and the widespread use of motor cars have since made the town an even more popular tourist destination.

Kiama's easy accessibility has resulted in the town becoming a dormitory suburb of Wollongong, with the town expanding from the 1960s from its compact central area into 'suburbs' such as Kiama Heights, Kiama Downs and Gainsborough.

Much of Kiama's early character has been preserved. Dates on heritage buildings reflect Kiama's growth peak in the 1880s, and rows of modest miners' cottages from

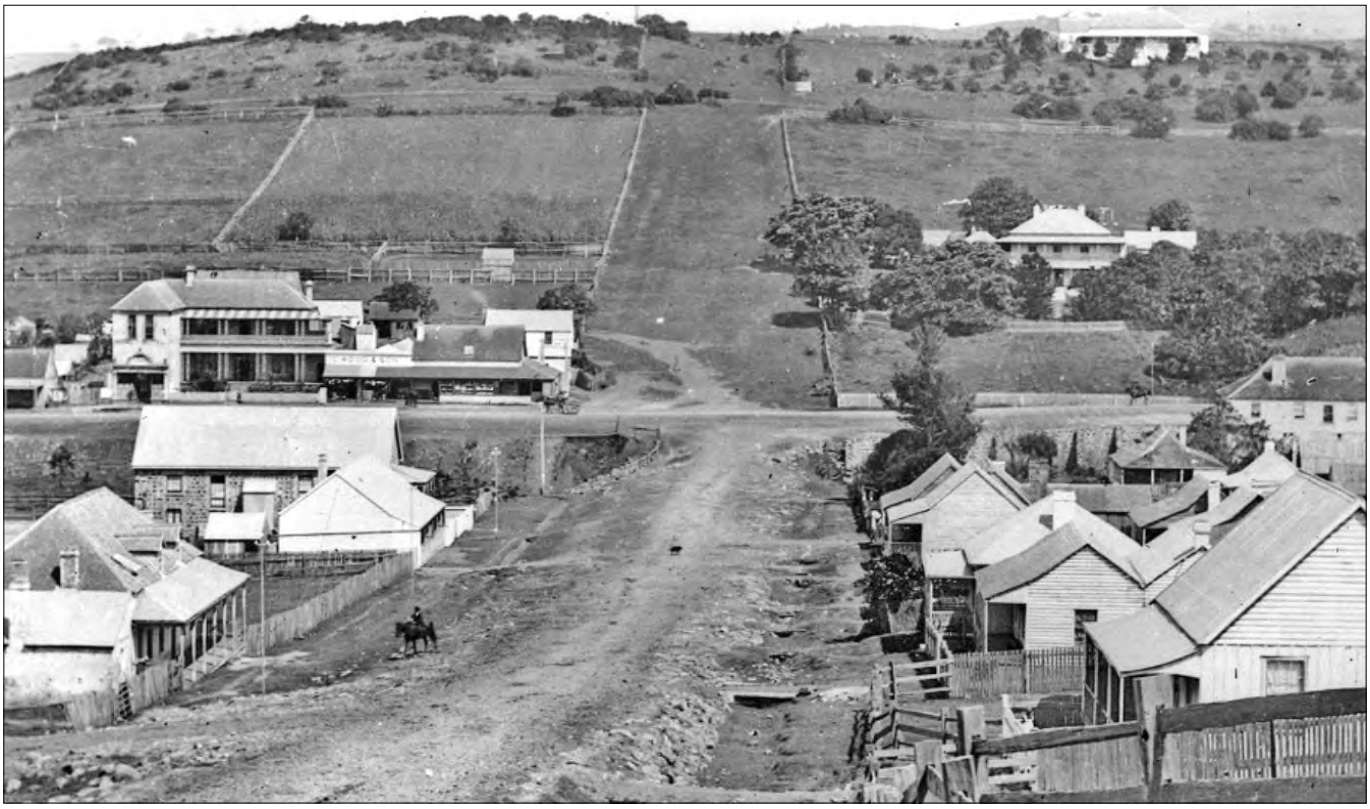
Transporting blue metal along Terralong Street, Kiama to the Robertson Basin hoppers in the 1920s or 1930s



No. 24 to No. 44 Collins Street are reminders of the town's important mining history.

The Bombo Headland Quarry is now protected by a permanent conservation order. But it's not just its history that is important. It is geologically extremely important, providing rare insights into the structure of the earth hundreds of kilometres below the surface, gained from xenoliths (bits of foreign rock) that have been forced to the earth's surface, and because it provides evidence of what geologists call the Kiaman Reverse Superchron, a reversal of the earth's magnetic fields that occurred about 265 to 318 million years ago.

Sources: www.aussietowns.com.au, www.abc.net.au, New South Wales Heritage Register, Wikipedia, 'The Stone Fleet and the Blue Diamond Trade' by Jack Clark in the magazine 'People and Places Afloat', various Kiama Library internet posts.



Looking south along Collins Street, Kiama in the mid-1880s

Robertson Basin

Man v River

From the days of earliest European settlement, up until around World War II, the only practical way for people and produce to be moved in or out of the South Coast was by sea. Roads were, at best, rudimentary and a number of rivers presented major challenges to those wanting to cross them.

With a reliance on sea transport there was, of course, a need for loading and unloading facilities, or ports – preferably in what could be considered 'safe havens' for the ships. Along the South Coast of NSW these were few and far between.

The use of the Moruya River by shipping is particularly interesting because - at times – the Moruya River was navigable to shipping. At other times it was simply closed to shipping because a sand bar had formed at the mouth of the river and/or the river had become silted…or because the river was in flood. And these obstacles presented some major, interesting, ongoing challenges to those who really wanted the river to be a gateway to the Moruya area.

There were certainly enormous advantages in ships being able to enter the river and proceed up to Moruya township, because the only real alternative was for ships to lay off Broulee (often risking changeable sea conditions and changeable weather whilst there), to transfer their cargos onto small droughers (lighters) or barges to possibly be taken up the river or possibly taken ashore at Broulee, after which those cargoes (or passengers) then had to be transported the 13-or-so kilometers overland to North Moruya before finally having to be taken across the river (in the early days,

Steamers at the Illawarra Steam Navigation Company's wharf in Moruya

at least, by boat) into Moruya township.

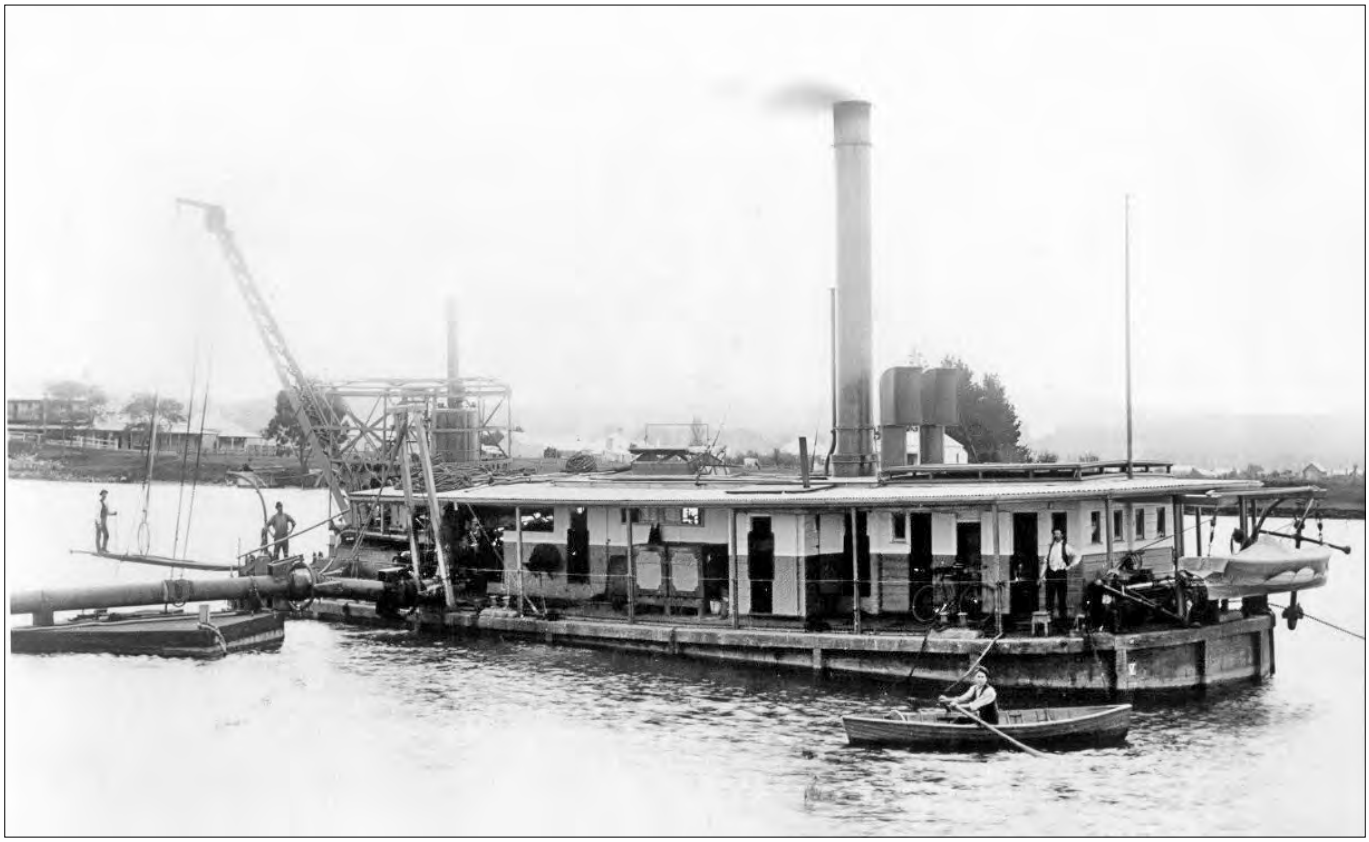
Shirley Jurmann's recently released *Mullenderree Matters* (see review page 15) comprehensively documents much of the history of this river, and has been the primary source from which this story has been compiled. (Mullenderree was/is the extremely fertile flood plain on the northern side of the Moruya River and, when that river was open to shipping, it provided an obvious, easy way for produce from Mullenderree to be transported to Sydney or other markets. But, in contrast, when that river was (all too frequently) in flood, it would simply sweep away whatever crops were growing or livestock were grazing on Mullenderree's river flats.)

In 1826, when the area was being surveyed, surveyor Robert Hoddle found the Moruya River mouth blocked by sand. He noted '*at low water the Blacks are able to ford across.*'

A severe flood in November 1841, however, opened up the entrance, enabling the river to be accessed by small ships. And in 1848 further flooding deepened the river channel, enabling ships up to about 40 tons to use the river.

These floods were a regular occurrence. Jurmann records there was 'heavy flooding' again in 1851, 1852 and 1857. In 1860 there were five floods, then 'severe flooding' twice in 1861 when the torrents of water 'again cleared the river channel', 'big floods' in 1863, two floods in 1864, a 'great flood' in 1865, five floods in 1868, and 'disastrous floods' three times in 1870… In fact, she identifies a total of 66 Moruya River floods '*when fish played water polo with the floating pumpkins*' between 1841 and 1979!

Many of these floods had a huge impact. 1,000 tons of potatoes were lost in the 1832 flood – a small toll compared to damage in the 1867 flood when about 3,000 tons of potatoes were lost. In 1860 '*Broulee Beach was strewn with*



The dredge Tau on the Moruya River in 1903

the ruins of Araluen (an enormous and lucrative goldfield, after gold had been discovered in the Araluen Valley in 1851*), remains of crops, houses, machinery, furniture, dead animals and five human bodies*'. In 1867 the llawarra Steam Navigation Company's wharf at Mynora (downstream of Moruya, near Moruya Heads) was swept away, along with 3,000 feet of sawn timber that had been stacked on it.

The first bridge across the Moruya River at Moruya was opened in February 1876. Prior to that, to cross the river either involved diverting to a ford well upstream or using one of the private ferrymen who provided carriage across the river. Floods played havoc with the services they provided, as a newspaper report in 1867 illustrates:

'*Two punts anchored opposite the town dragged their anchors and went down with the current early on Monday morning. The ferrymen, fearing for the ferry punt, commenced to drag it to the Moruya side from the Mullenderree landing place, but had moved her but a few yards when by the force of the current, the ferry rope broke, and the ferry went down river. By much exertion on the part of Messrs Constable, the ferryman, and others, the three punts were saved, after traversing about a mile. Two other punts were up the river, in one of which was T. Mayne, who was placed in great jeopardy, by the anchor chain breaking. The punt immediately began to descend the river rapidly; he however hoisted a sail, and by great address gradually worked his vessel to the land where he secured her to a tree on the bank of Mr Holroyd's farm. The ferry punt at the Kiora crossing place* (upstream from Moruya) *had no such luck, she broke her fastenings, filled, and went down bottom upwards about 500 yards from the ferry…the current at Kiora was running at about twelve miles an hour when T. Mayne's punt broke from her anchor, she shot away like a locomotive.*'

That first bridge over the Moruya River was described by the *Bega Standard* in February 1876 as '*a splendid bridge, likely to see some generations before it gives place to a successor…* (with piles) *60 feet in some places* (which) *did not touch solid ground.*' (That, however, was to prove its undoing – just a generation or two later it had become known as 'the shaky

The Moruya Bridge after the 1945 flood

bridge' and three floods in 1900 contributed significantly to its instability. Luckily, a replacement bridge with cast iron piers was under construction then, and it was opened in December of the same year). Somewhat optimistically the newspaper also trumpeted '*the traffic way of the structure is above all chance of flood.*'

In contrast to recent NSW Governments' reliance on toll roads, the 1876 Moruya Bridge *'was declared duly open for traffic* (with) *the welcome announcement* (except, perhaps, to the ferrymen!) *that there were to be no tolls.*'

From early on, attempts were made to 'tame' the river – to provide shipping with regular access to it, to have wharf facilities close to town (or, at minimum, downstream from town on the southern side of the river), and to provide a 'safe haven' for coastal shipping.

In 1860 a Harbourmaster/Pilot was appointed to mark safe channels through the ever-shifting sand at the mouth of the river and to guide ships into the river.

From about 1861 work commenced on construction of a stone breakwater that was intended to channel the river so that sand at the river mouth would continually be dispersed and a navigable channel created. Money was only made available in small amounts, so construction of the breakwater took many years.

In 1882 the river was dredged – but the sand was dumped two miles upstream, simply waiting for the next flood to return it to where it had been taken from!! After a while this worked stopped, but it resumed in 1891-1892 – with nothing learned from the previous exercise, with the sand being piled into a large sand-hill in the centre of the river again awaiting the arrival of the next flood! Further attempts were made to dredge the river in 1902-1903 and again in 1909-1910. In 1913 the *Braidwood Despatch and Mining Journal* reported that over half a million pounds had been spent on the improvements but the river had been reduced to the dimensions of a creek with very little water because of silting.

In the 1880s and 1890s a fascine dyke over a mile in length was constructed along the southern shore of the river upstream from the river mouth. This involved placing tree limbs along the bank, then infilling behind them with layers of tea-tree scrub (which grew on the banks of the river) and mud dredged from the river. This work seems to have been reasonably sucessful.

But the river, obviously, had no intention of being 'tamed':

The sand bar at the river mouth often prevented ships from sailing into the river, or resticted their movements to coincide with high tides. In May 1861, the steamer *William IV* was grounded on the bar and took some months to be refloated. In February 1884 the *Kiama* became stuck on the bar, necessitating the unloading of its entire cargo. In March 1889, the *Kiama* again had trouble: it successfully entered the river, took on a cargo only to find the river level was 20cm too shallow for it to clear the bar, so 150 bags of bark had to be unloaded to allow the steamer to get out to sea. In January 1909 the *Hillmeads* got stuck on the bar on the way into the river and again on its way out. A few months later, the same vessel found it was unable to cross the bar when leaving Moruya, tried again a few days later and became stuck on the bar…then, in 1911, it became trapped in the river when a flood swept sand and silt down the river and deposited it at the river mouth…and in 1913 it was again trapped in the river and remained there for several days. Also in 1913 the *Coomonderry* got stuck on the sand bar and in February 1921 the *Bodalla* went ashore in the river and was stranded for a day before being refloated. And in 1951 the *Bergalia* ran aground attempting to enter the Moruya River channel.

The *Sir Arthur Dorman* in the Moruya River, about to load the first granite shipment for use on the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

These groundings not infrequently led to supplies in Moruya and surrounding towns running precariously low.

But these vessels (and others that ran aground) were the lucky ones.

In December 1887 the Schooner *Orient* was washed onto rocks while trying to clear the bar. It was wrecked. So was

the *Moses Fletcher,* a 67' ketch, in June 1891…the *Trident* came to grief in September 1894…the *Mascotte* in April 1909 (it hit part of the wreck of the *Trident*)…the *Benandra* in March 1924.

Floods in June/July 1891 washed away portions of the fascine dyke and *'a cross dyke connecting the island with the shore was cut through by the current and is now nearly all gone*'. In 1925 '*the river rose to two feet above the decking of the Moruya Bridge*...S.S. Bermagui *was washed over the retaining wall and twenty-five feet of the wall had to be dismantled to allow her back in the river.*' In 1934 the seawall at the river entrance was swept away by flooding. In 1935 *'thousands and thousands of logs came sweeping down the river and crashed into the piles of the bridge, which is a structure nearly a quarter of a mile long, and at normal river level about 20 feet above the water. Each fresh log which came down crashed into the jam against the piles and the whole bridge shook ominously*'.

In 1945 the bridge was not so lucky: '*At Moruya the quarter mile long steel and timber bridge was demolished, fishing craft were swept out to sea, three vessels in course of construction at the local shipbuilding yards were wrecked, and the countryside was flooded for miles'. 'Not one stick remains of the comparatively new swimming baths*' and the sand bar at Moruya Heads also competely disappeared in this flood with the Pilot from there remarking '*an Orient liner could now cross in, turn around and go out again.*'

No permanent solutions were ever found to the problems caused by silting of the river and the formation of the sand bar at the entrance to the river. When shipping to the area ceased, the need to find solutions disappeared!

From 1925 to 1931 enormous quantities of granite were shipped out of the Moruya River to Sydney to clad the four pylons of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. These were probably the years when it was imperative there be little flooding of the river and few impassable bars at its entrance. It seems the river chose to be unusually 'cooperative' during that period.

'Monday Memories'

Some years back, Bega Valley Shire Library put out a call to the community asking people to bring photographs of historic interest to the Library for digitisation and inclusion in the Library's collection of photographs. This project had the dual advantage of expanding the Library's digital photographic collection and helping to preserve valuable historical records. The original photographs were returned to those who responded and information about the subject matter of each photograph was simultaneously collected from those who provided the photographs.

The Library now holds an interesting and historically valuable digital photographic collection and continues to add to this special collection.

Library staff and volunteers carried out research to add further information about the people, places and events depicted by the photographs. The images and the added information were then published on the Library's Facebook page every Monday under the banner 'Monday Memory' with the first one posted on 2 November 2015 featuring the South Wolumla Public School. Over 100 have now been published on the Library's Facebook page!

The 'Monday Memory' series is still available on Facebook and a fresh image with information is published from time to time. However, a little effort is required to access them. It is exciting to be able to share some of these local treasures via 'Recollections'. This is a sample. We'll feature more in future issues of 'Recollections' and we'd greatly welcome similar contributions from other South Coast libraries and history societies.

South Wolumla School

Monday Memory No 1

The teacher looks happy and so do most of the children in this photo taken in September 1930 of the South Wolumla School. The school was established in about 1868 and by 1870 there were nearly 50 children attending (Australian Town and Country Journal, 10 Dec 1870, page 7).

There used to be small schools all over the countryside that formed social hubs for rural localities and their families.

Children often walked, rode horses or bicycles to school or maybe the school "bus" was a horse-drawn cart. During the early 1900s the Bega Valley boasted many one-teacher schools – it was just too far to get children into school at major towns like Bega, Pambula or Eden. There were small schools at Springvale, Kameruka, Tarraganda, Buckajo and even a school at Tanto (an area to the south-west of Cobargo).

Do you know of any other small locality-based schools in the Valley that used to be? Even better, do you have a photo of the school?

F.F. Bower Store in Candelo (Monday Memory no. 69)

This photograph of the F.F. Bower Store dates from 1916, which is when the business first opened. The proprietor was Frederick Francis Bower, who was involved in various local societies and groups including The Candelo Agricultural Society and the Candelo Citizens League. He married Lillie Beatrice Tortice in 1913.

The store was originally located where the petrol station now stands, on William Street in Candelo. It specialised in 'made to measure' clothing, but also sold a variety to goods including groceries, household items and medical supplies to surrounding farming families. An advertisement placed in the *Southern Record & Advertiser* from 1933, stated that the store was the 'Home of good value, good will and good service.'

Sources: *The Southern Record and Advertiser* Friday 17 March 1933 and Friday 1 September 1933. Photograph donated by Marg and Doug Bower.

Join Us

The release of 'Extraordinary Histories' has provided us with an excuse to talk South Coast history at:

Bermagui Library on Tuesday 23rd January at 10.30am
Eden Library on Thursday 1st February at 10.30am
Nowra Library on Tuesday 6th February at 10.30am
Ulladulla Library on Tuesday 6th February at 2pm
Narooma Library on Friday 5th April at 10.30am
Batemans Bay Library on Tuesday 9th April at 2pm
Moruya Library on Thursday 18th April at 10.30am.

We'd be delighted if you can join us on any of these occasions.

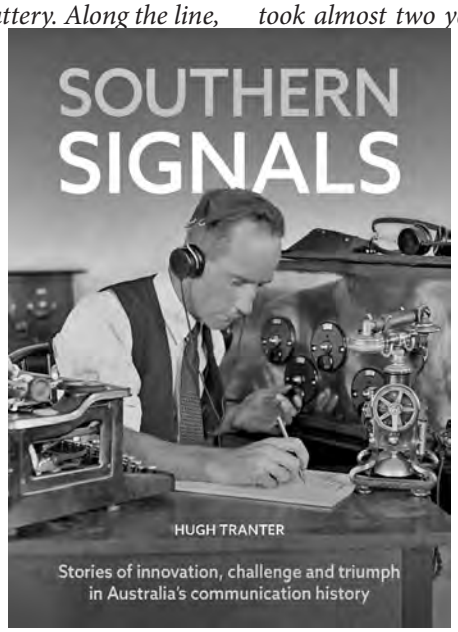
Helping Us

We greatly appreciate (and encourage!) readers who deposit money into our bank account for memberships, donations, book orders, etc. But occasionally we don't get advised who has deposited that money. So when you send us money, PLEASE also send us an email advising that it is you who has done so. Many, many thanks.

Southern Signals: Stories of innovation, challenge and triumph in Australia's communication history

by Hugh Tranter

In 1746, a French monk and physicist, Jean-Antoine Nollet, decided to conduct an experiment. He assembled 700 fellow monks in a line, forming a human chain of about half a mile (800 metres). Promising vats of red wine to his nervous volunteers as a reward, he asked them all to pick up a long wire. Once they all had hold of the wire, he attached the end to a Leyden jar, a type of early battery. Along the line, monk after monk almost simultaneously received a jolt as the electricity ran through their bodies. Voila! Nollet had shown that an electric current can travel a long distance at high speed through a metal conductor.



Since early history, people have sought to communicate faster than their feet would carry them, or ship, carriage or horseback bear them. From relaying messages via smoke signals and beacons, to the sounding of horns or bells, people found ways to send messages some distance – but were always seeking ways to send messages further and more quickly.

In the mid-eighteenth century, humanity was on the cusp of great discoveries in communications, discoveries that would allow messages to travel around the world within hours, minutes, and then seconds. But these experiments were meaningless to the colony of New South Wales. When Governor Arthur Phillip wrote to London in 1788, pleading for more supplies for the struggling new penal settlement at Sydney Cove, it took almost two years for his request and London's response to complete the round trip of 24,000 kilometers by sea.

Those who arrived on Australian shores in 1788 and after soon learned the importance of communications. Whether it was scratching with a pen, tapping on a telegraph transmitter or speaking through a telephone, they knew they needed communications to work across vast distances. They were quick to adapt new technologies. There was much information they needed – about government, weather, politics – and even more information they wanted – letters and messages from loved ones and news from faraway places.

This book tells the stories of new inventions in communication technology during key moments in Australia's history,

including the use of wireless radio by Sir Douglas Mawson in Antarctica, the deadly business of being a signalman during World War I, the life-and-death communications of search and rescue, and the role of the Australian receiver stations during the Moon landing of July 1969.

The book also examines more recent developments: the introduction of the internet in the 1990s, and the risks and challenges brought about by new waves of technology in the twenty-first century.

This is the apt Introduction to *Southern Signals*, an absolutely fabulous book.

Southern Signals is well-written and easy to read as it only examines the major advances in communications in Australia and their impacts on Australians. So it does not get bogged down in less-important detail from the periods in between.

But it does include quite a few 'I didn't know that' facts that add considerable interest to the stories. For example, I was aware that the different Australian states chose different gauge railway tracks that led to enormous challenges when the states decided to come together at Federation. However I didn't know that, in the age of telegraph, different states also employed different telegraph codes (the precursors to Morse Code) with, for example, a translation station having to be set up at Eucla (near the South Australia -Western Australia border) where lines of workers busily processed and passed on messages received from Victoria in 'Victorian Alphabet', which were then re-transmitted in 'Universal Code' to their Western Australian destinations.

This is a book from NLA Publishing (National Library of Australia Publishing) so, as usual, it's extremely well designed and it's full of interesting photographs from the National Library's collection.

If I have any criticism of it, I'd suggest it could have included more detail about the impact of some of the communication advances on Australians. For example, the only mention of commercial radio (which had a significant impact on Australia) in the section on radio is a photograph of 'a Russian orchestra performing at radio station 2CH in Sydney'! And in parts it's entirely NSW and Sydney-focussed: Channels 2, 7 and 9 in Sydney get a mention, but there is no acknowledgment of their equally-important Melbourne counterparts.

The book ends with an intriguing look to the future:

Eye implants may be a feature, and we've already seen the forerunners of this technology in various smart and augmented reality (AR) glasses. Some of these devices feature the ability to make calls and take photos, others integrate with existing voice assistant programs. These early examples are a 'stepping-stone to more fully realised forms of wearable AR', which may one day in the not-too-distant future include eye implants that allow us to overlay the real world with the digital.

This integration, essentially of our smart phones with our bodies, promises much: not only swift communication through various channels, but also instant information about the world around us; directions laid out before us in pulsating arrows; starred reviews on restaurant windows; or historic information about the statue we're staring up at. The potential implication for education and travel are significant. We could be physically here in our home, yet standing on a lookout in the Serengetti, or atop the Endeavour with Shackleton and his men…

The key issue for the twenty-first century is to make communications systems a help, not a hindrance, to our progress.

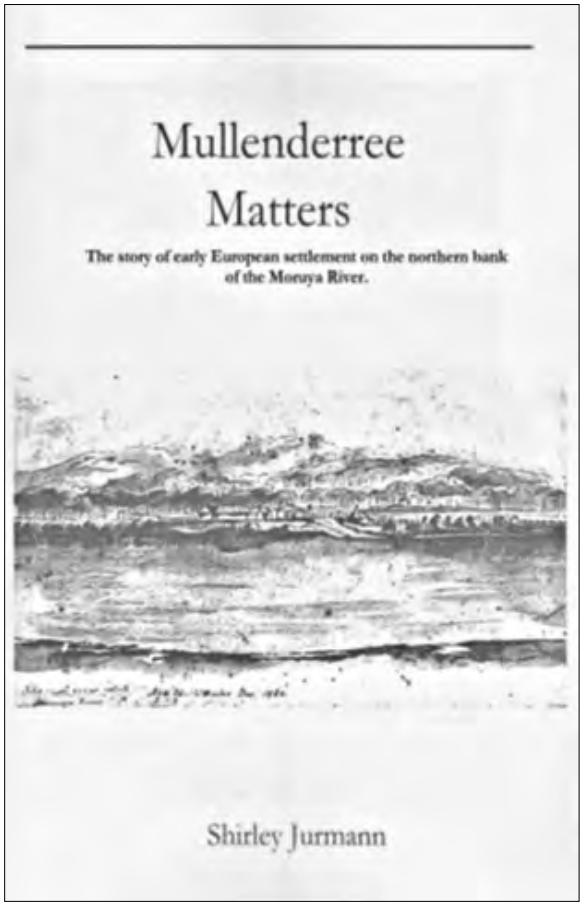
Southern Signals is a hardcover book. It is available for around $42.75.

Mullenderree Matters: The story of early European settlement on the northern bank of the Moruya River

by Shirley Jurmann

Local histories, local family histories, and genealogical studies of local families are a dime a dozen. Go into any local historical society, ask what has been written about the local area, and hundreds of them are likely to be made available to you. Most are worthy, but most are far too detailed to be of much general interest.

But it's that detail which they contain that is **extremely** important. Detail which often, if it is not recorded, is likely to be lost over time. Detail which ultimately becomes a valuable historic record. Detail which (as in this case) justifies the efforts that the author has made to record everything that has ended up in the book.



Moruya historian Shirley Jurmann's recently-released *Mullenderree Matters* is a typical example of these local histories.

Few people are likely to become enthralled by a history of Mullenderree, an area that I suspect most people have never even heard of – basically the large flood plain stretching north from the Moruya River, now unremarkable agricultural land, soon to be bisected by a repositioned Princes Highway that is planned to bypass Moruya township. But the area does have a history – even if it isn't the most exciting of Australian histories!

The chapters that comprise this book are fairy local history-predictable: The early history of the north side of the Moruya River, The River, Commercial Activities, Stories from the Past, Accidents and Disasters, Sporting Activities, Life Stories, and The Families – their Births, Deaths and Marriages.

I've used information from the 28 pages about The River to compile the story about the Moruya River for this issue of Recollections (see page 7)…and just hope that Shirley Jurmann will be pleased that I have found her research to be both interesting and useful.

So apart from 'The River', what particularly grabbed my attention in *Mullenderree Matters*?

Stories in the 'Accidents and Disasters' chapter, including:

Six Young Airmen – plane crash

On 1st November 1945 at 3.07pm an Avro Anson aircraft crashed into Dooga Creek on Mullenderree Flat killing all six young airmen on board. The aircraft was attached to the Flying Training School at Uranquinty near Wagga Wagga. The crew were taking part in a training flight in cross country navigation. For the return journey, several bags of fish and oysters weighing many pounds were loaded on to the plane as a treat for the Officers' Mess. With the weight of the crew, all equipment and the seafood, the plane was stretched to its limits. It took off from the Moruya Airfield and flew low over the township and river. Excessive manoeuvring of the overloaded plane caused the starboard engine to break just as the plane was beginning to climb over Buckley's farm. The aircraft broke up in midair and crashed, killing all on board… They are buried in Moruya Cemetery. (*The Melbourne Age*, 2nd November 1945)

Mr O'Connor – fall from a telegraph pole

Mr O'Connor, a telegraph line repairer, had a very painful experience and narrow escape from death when he fell while descending a pole having completed his work on the line at Moggendoura in 1909. He was using leather stirrups to aid his descent. He lost his grip and balance and in falling, his legs were caught in the stirrups. He was left suspended, head down. Fortunately, he was close enough to the ground to be able to relieve his weight by his hands. After a time he was able to kick his legs free. The sudden jerk caused by the fall sprained his ankle and both his wrists. Had he been a little higher he may well have been trapped in the remote unfrequented area. A few years before a man had died a painful death in a similar area under similar circumstances. (*Shoalhaven News,* 6th March 1909)

Mullenderree Matters is a 186-page A4-size softcover book. It is available in paper format for $35 or in a downloadable PDF file for $25 from Moruya & District Historical Society.

How NOT to Organise a Successful Australian Referendum

Announce an election or an Australian referendum and I'm hooked! It's because these reflect public opinion, which interests me — having spent much of my working life undertaking research and crunching numbers relating to 'what makes people tick'; having worked on elections with the AEC and State Electoral Commission for many, many decades; being currently in a position where I am interacting with many community members and thereby am able to get insights into the community's 'current thinking'; and, as a historian of course, being able to look back at the history of Australian elections and referenda.

The recent Australian referendum (which was not successful) provided, in my view, a textbook example of how NOT to organize a successful Australian referendum.

Before looking at why this referendum failed – and failed so dismally – I must say that suggestions the outcome of the referendum was a slap in the face to Australian Aboriginals, or demonstrated that Australian generally do not want to improve the position of Australian Aboriginals, or demonstrated 'racism against First Nations people' are very wide of the mark. **Purely and simply, the result of this referendum was nothing more than the rejection of the particular proposition put to the Australian people on this occasion**.

(I may be wrong, but my reading of Australians' thinking is that they DO want to see an improvement for our disadvantaged Australian Aboriginals and ARE willing to provide some form of [acceptable to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians] special 'recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the first peoples of Australia'.)

And, at the outset, I must also say that any Australian referendum has a very small chance of success. We've had 46 referenda to date and only 8 have been successful (that's just a 17.4% success rate). And, as the experts constantly tell us, for any referendum to be successful a whole lot of planets must align.

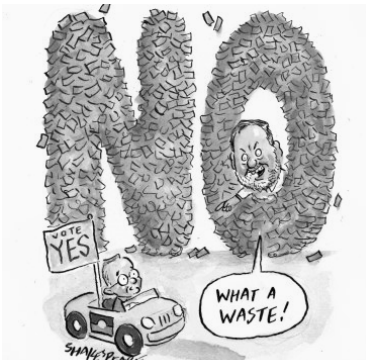
So, why didn't those planets align this time? And what went wrong with 'The Voice' referendum?

1. No compelling rationale was ever provided for the need to change the Australian Constitution.

The Australian Constitution is a legal document defining how the States and the Commonwealth should function. It is not a 'history', so proposing to add a 'history' clause about Australian Aboriginals being the country's original inhabitants was, from the outset, something that seemed a little 'odd'.

Australian Aboriginals previously had a 'Voice'. It was called ATSIC – and it was disbanded because it was not working and because it was being rorted. Awareness of this led to voter scepticism that the proposed Constitutional Voice might be any more successful…along with a fear that, if it was not any more successful, 'we'd be stuck with it' (and stuck with significant ongoing costs of it) simply because it had become enshrined in the Constitution.

Then it was conceded, at the outset, that Parliament could legislate to establish a 'Voice', without the need to hold a referendum. Holding a referendum, when basically the same thing could be achieved without holding a referendum and at the fraction of the cost of a referendum, simply did not pass many Australians' 'pub test'!



From 'The Age' newspaper

But – worse – Anthony Albanese suggested (incredibly, stupidly) early in the campaign that if the referendum was unsuccessful, he would consider legislating (totally against demonstrable wishes of the Australian electorate), to establish a 'Voice'. The message he should have been giving at that time was that it was imperative to vote 'Yes' for the referendum proposal, not this message that effectively said 'it's OK to vote 'No' because another alternative is available'.

And providing an additional 'voice' to one section of the community did not seem to be very Australian. Every Australian (including Indigenous Australians) already has a 'voice' to Parliament via their elected Member. And no other group (however deserving) has, or was proposed to be given, a similar additional 'voice' – so this proposal had all the hallmarks of favouring just one small, elitist section of the population.

2. The proposal for The Voice came from a small, 'by invitation' group of Indigenous people who, it was widely reported, had difficulty in even agreeing among themselves on what they were really seeking.

The Uluru Statement of the Heart was the start of the trail (although more had preceded it) that ultimately resulted in the Referendum. It was not the ideal start: in reality

the Statement was little more than a 'wish list' compiled in (as Amnesty International described it) 'an exclusive process' by 250 'by invitation' Aboriginals (so certainly not a representative group of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; and no non-Indigenous participation was invited – surely, not a good look to at least some of the 96.8% of non-Indigenous Australians who were later to be asked to vote in the referendum). Australians were not blind to this.

But then publicizing that the Voice did not have the support of all Indigenous peoples (including even quantifying that 17% did not support it!) was just plain dumb, and simply gave 'No' supporters valuable ammunition to use in their campaign opposing the referendum. And they certainly did not let that opportunity pass by!!

The Voice proposal also ran counter to much of what Australians had previously been asked to accept: that everyone, regardless of race, should be treated equally as Australians. Newcomers, including huge numbers of Greeks, Italians and Chinese, have been urged to 'integrate', 'assimilate', and everyone (ironically, often accompanied by pictures of Aboriginal children!) had long been singing '*We are one, but we are many. And from all the lands on earth we come. We share a dream and sing with one voice: I am, you are, we are Australian.*' Suddenly, Australians were being asked to (officially) recognize one group of Australians differently – and this simply did not sit easily with many.

3. Anthony Albanese got carried away by his election victory and by early pro-referendum opinion polls.

Albanese's elation at his election victory, which he (incorrectly) interpreted as having given him a clear electoral mandate to enshrine The Voice in the Australian Constitution (in reality, this was just one of numerous election pledges, and his success at the election did not necessarily mean that Australian voters endorsed every one of his election 'promises'), and early public opinion polling results (which indicated around 65% of voters supported moves to establish a Voice to Parliament), seem to have led him to thinking a Voice Referendum was certain of success (and I wonder if this led to a belief that The Voice would 'sell itself' because, as noted below, no marketing strategy seems to have ever been developed), and to thinking that detail about The Voice could be provided after the referendum. At that time he seemed to have forgotten how rapidly public opinion can change.

4. No Constitutional Convention was held to debate The Voice proposal.

Most moves to amend the Australian Constitution begin with a Constitutional Convention, providing the general community with an opportunity to comment about the proposed Constitutional changes. On this occasion, no Convention was held, denying the public its usual 'democratic procedure'.

A Constitutional Convention would have also provided a real opportunity to make the proposal more 'palatable', perhaps persuading some (and, ideally, many) of the public figures who ultimately opposed the proposal to instead support it. Key among these were the Liberal and National Parliamentarians, because without their support it became a very, very big ask to secure 'Yes' votes from a majority of notoriously-conservative Australian voters, AND from a majority of Australian voters in a majority of Australian States.

Then legal academics and professionals who proposed alterations to the proposed Voice were also ignored. As one authority noted *'Reforming Garma (the pronouncement by Albanese that 'there was nothing to fear and everything to gain' from an Indigenous voice to parliament) by adopting the ideas of Frank Brennan (a Jesuit priest and constitutional lawyer) and Louise Clegg (a barrister) would have inevitably boosted the yes vote by reassuring the community that equality of citizenship was safe and parliament had more control.'*

A Sydney Morning Herald view

5. No details were ever provided about how The Voice would be structured, operated or funded.

The day that Anthony Albanese announced that details about the Voice would be determined AFTER the referendum by some (yet-to-be-decided) body of politicians (with politicians being generally distrusted by Australians!) and Indigenous 'representatives' (who had a vested interest in the Voice; and because the Voice would then have been mandated in the Constitution, could have effectively 'demanded the world' in the negotiations leading to the setting up of the Voice) was the day this referendum was lost. From that day, support for the referendum reversed from a significant majority of voters being in favour of the referendum to the majority of voters becoming undecided or against the proposal.

Albanese and the 'Yes' campaigners, from that point, were then simply attempting to sell a increasingly-unappealing product.

Significant advances in health, living conditions, education, etc., among the most disadvantaged Australian Indigenous people were suggested as the major inevitable flow-ons from establishing a Voice. Crucially for the referendum, details about how exactly these benefits would be delivered, at what cost, and when, were never provided. Nor was it ever explained how having the Voice would necessarily deliver these benefits to Indigenous communities. Voters therefore had a genuine reason to wonder whether The Voice was the best model to address systemic Indigenous disadvantage.

The lesson for future referenda (one which should have been learned from the failure of the 1999 Australian Republic Referendum) is that, if a referendum is to be

successful, Australians need to be given full details about the proposal AND the proposal must be one that has widespread community support. The 1967 Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginals Referendum had both of these essential elements (with both the House of Representatives and the Senate voting UNANIMOUSLY in favour of support of the Referendum proposal, and nobody submitting a case for the 'No' vote to the AEC) – the result being an overwhelming 90.8% 'Yes' vote!

6. The 'marketers' of The Voice were the wrong people.

It's salesmanship 101. If you want to sell something (which is what the 'Yes' campaign people were attempting to do), use your best salesmen. Ones that are trusted and are believable. In this case, not politicians – they are not trusted. Certainly not Linda Burney – again a mistrusted politician, who answered every question that was seeking information about The Voice with an emotional response – the conclusion being that, by not providing the requested information, there was something being hidden from Australians. (In contrast Jacinta Nampijinpa Price performed brilliantly, simply reiterating the one simple message that the Voice did not have universal Indigenous support. Voters were then left to draw their own conclusion about the implication of this.)

And Alan Joyce? Qantas? The banks? The AFL? Cricket Australia? The NRL? What real relevance did the Voice referendum have to any of these? It seems corporate Australia undertook no research before jumping in with their tuppence-worth to the debate, and perhaps it should now be asked how so many corporates became so misaligned with public sentiment and the mindsets of their customers.

And (apart from ineffective Linda Burney) there was no identifiable Aboriginal 'spokesman' acting as the authoritative front man for the 'Yes' case. That was interpreted as Aboriginal disinterest in the cause.

There was one - and only one – cogent argument needed by the 'Yes' campaign for the referendum to succeed: the Voice would improve the lives of Indigenous Australians. Clearly, this message was never effectively delivered.

…in contrast to the 'If you don't know, vote 'No" message!

Artwork projected on the Sydney Opera House during the 2023 NSW Australia Day 'dawn reflection' was adapted by social media users to support a particular view in the lead-up to the Referendum.

7 A significant misinformation campaign emerged.

Spreading mistruths, even telling outrageous lies in political advertising is not illegal in Australia, so campaigners are free to say whatever they want and whatever they think is most likely to sway people's opinions. On this occasion, the spreading of misinformation about The Voice and the impacts it would have, reached new heights – no doubt aided by the increasing emergence of unregulated social media. (The impact of the misinformation has never been quantified, so we don't know exactly how much the misinformation affected the outcome of the referendum. However, spreading misinformation has now become a problem that needs to be seriously addressed with appropriate legislation; the media needs to rigorously, relentlessly identify misinformation when it encounters it; and the absence of regulation of the social media giants, who profit from their online traffic but take no responsibility for any damage caused, needs to be recognised.)

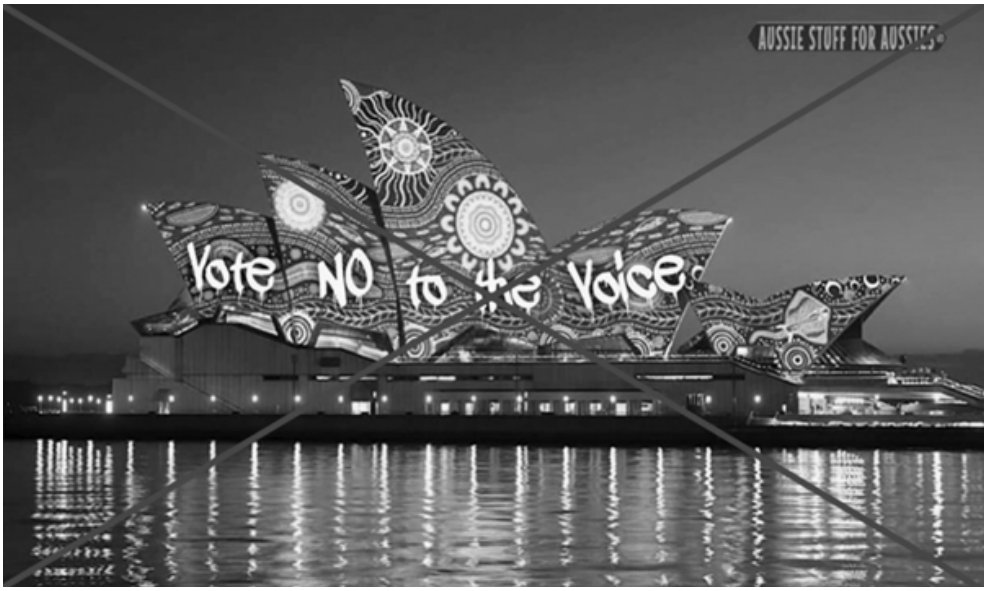
The significant information void (the deliberate decision to leave details about how the Voice would function until after the referendum) also did not help – it simply invited all sorts of uninformed nonsense to emerge…which often then remained unchallenged. Liberal frontbencher Sussan Ley's claims that the Voice could spell the end of Anzac Day and Australia Day was one such example.

Normally, when a proposal such as this is advanced, answers to every possible question are pre-prepared and those 'selling' the proposal are properly briefed so they can adequately handle every query about the proposal. This appears not to have happened in this instance, and one wonders why.

The 'politics of shame' also occasionally emerged during the campaign which, understandably concerned voters and likely led to a reduction in support for the 'Yes' campaign.

Perhaps most destructive were Marcia Langton's widely-publicised assertions at a forum in Bunbury that "racism" and "stupidity" were at the heart of the 'No' side's arguments. When the 'Yes' campaign realised that such negativity was leading them to quickly lose support, their rhetoric dramatically shifted. But it was too late. The damage had been done.

So where from here? Improving the lives of disadvantaged Indigenous Australians still remains a challenge. If The Voice concept is still felt worthy of support, it could be legislated (although this would likely attract significant opposition from those who do not support the idea, with them now being able to argue [perhaps wrongly – see paragraph 3 at the start of this piece] that Australians overwhelmingly rejected a Voice in the referendum). It's unlikely Australian governments are likely to again venture near



referenda for many years, maybe even for many decades (so it's no surprise that in early January the Labor government admitted it was too politically risky for another referendum to be held and shelved plans to hold a republican referendum). It would be desirable that something be done to address the 'problem' of public misinformation. And it will be interesting to see what lessons will be learned and by whom from this unsuccessful referendum exercise – so what 'history' has taught them!

Peter Lacey