South Coast History Society Inc.

RecollectionS

Issue 47 — August 2024

Wallaga Lake Bridge and 'Allawah House' on Payne's Island, c. 1930. Image courtesy Bermagui Historical Society. See story page X . 'Allawah House' was a boarding house, providing overnight accommodation, that was established in 1928 by William and Mary Payne. In 1938 it was moved to Wallaga Lake Caravan Park and is now part of the Camel Rock Brewery.

We recently had a phone call from Damien, wondering why we had not yet included the story of the survivors of the *Sydney Cove* in *Recollections*. A good question, Damien…and thank you very much for the call.

Professor Mark McKenna (Professor of History at Sydney University) included details of this saga, along with several other fascinating 'founding stories from the littoral edge of the Australian frontier', in his award-winning book *From the Edge: Australia's Lost Histories* that was first published in 2016. If you haven't yet read that book, please seriously consider doing so whilst the book is still available. Mark's story about the *Sydney Cove* survivors is quite comprehensive and extends to 63 pages – so, it's far more detailed than this briefer *Recollections* version which, as Damien rightly suggests, really deserved to have been included many years ago.

Australia's First-ever Long-distance Trek

In May 1796 a company of traders in Calcutta, India, received a tip-off from the captain of a ship that had recently returned from a voyage to Sydney that there was enormous potential for trade with the newly-established colony in Sydney. This led to them quickly finding a vessel to sail to Sydney, which they filled with over 100 casks of rum, wines and beers, champagnes, gin and brandy, Chinese porcelain, textiles, rice, sugar, and even an organ! Their hope was that this would be the first of a series of speculative, regular, profitable voyages to Sydney.

The ship had been recently repaired and was re-christened the *Sydney Cove*. It left Calcutta on 10th November 1796 with a crew of just over 50 men.

Four weeks out from Calcutta and more than a thousand

kilometres from the west coast of Australia the ship started leaking badly, necessitating the constant use of (hand) pumps to remove the water that was pouring in.

The voyage continued, however, until, battered by a severe storm, the crew had no option other than to beach the stricken ship, which then rapidly broke up. They were to the south-west of Cape Barren Island in Bass Strait, on a small then-unnamed island, now known as Preservation Island.

The reality was that, if the crew of the *Sydney Cove* were to survive, they somehow would need to summon help from the colony in Sydney. Which in turn, effectively meant having to sail the ship's longboat (which was about the size of a surfboat) to Sydney – a voyage of over 800 kilometres.

So, after repairing and adapting the longboat for the voyage and provisioning it, 17 of the strongest men set sail for Sydney on 27th February 1797.

The first two days of their voyage, during which they completed the crossing of Bass Strait, went to plan. But then they were hit by a storm of gale proportions that flooded their boat, forcing them to head for shore – which was the middle of Ninety Mile Beach and 40 or 50 kilometres south of modern-day Lakes Entrance. In so doing, their longboat was irreparably damaged by the surf and most of their provisions were lost.

They now had two options: hope to attract the attention of a passing ship (there were next to none of these in 1797) or walk overland to Sydney.

They chose the latter option, embarking on the first-ever long distance trek in Australia by non-Indigenes. It was to take them along much of the coast of Gippsland and along the entire NSW South Coast.

One of the leaders of the group, William Clark, kept a notebook on the trek which he later expanded into a 6,000 word 'abstract' (implying that a much more comprehensive publication was to follow, but which never did) which was published in Calcutta's *Asiatic Mirror* newspaper with the title '*Voyage of the Sydney Cove's Longboat from Preservation Island to Port Jackson*'.

This is how that abstract described the group's initial predicament:

Imagination cannot picture a situation more melancholy than that to which the unfortunate crew was reduced—wrecked a second time on the inhospitable shore of New South Wales; cut off from all hopes of rejoining their companions; without provisions, without arms, or any probable means either of subsistence or defence, they seemed doomed to all the horrors of a lingering death, with all their misfortunes unknown and unpitied. In this trying situation they did not abandon themselves to despair; they determined to proceed to the northward in the hopes of reaching Port Jackson, although the distance of the settlement, the unfrequented deserts they were to traverse, and the barbarous hordes among whom they had to gain their way, presented difficulties that required no ordinary share of fortitude to encounter and perseverance to overcome…the dangers that surrounded them served but to excite them to exertion; they resolved to brave every difficulty, and to commence their journey without delay. The three days following the loss of their boat were spent in collecting such articles as had been thrown on shore from the wreck. On the 15th [March] *they began their march.*

This was to become an epic undertaking, one for which they were totally ill-equipped.

Encounters with Aboriginals

To start with, they absolutely no idea what to expect from the 'barbarous hordes' they were to encounter on their journey, and neither had the Aboriginals they were to meet along the way had any previous contact with outsiders. So, three days into their trek:

We this day fell in with a party of natives, about fourteen, all of them entirely naked. They were struck with astonishment at our appearance, and were very anxious to examine every part of our clothes and body, in which we readily indulged them. They viewed us most attentively. They opened our clothes, examined our feet, hands, nails, &c., frequently expressing their surprize by laughing and loud shoutings. From their gestures during this awkward review it was easy to perceive that they considered our clothes and bodies as inseparably joined. Having made them a present of a few stripes of cloth, which they appeared highly delighted with, we pursued our journey, and halted in the evening, after a march of 30 miles.

The natives on this part of the coast appear strong and muscular, with heads rather large in proportion to their bodies. The flat nose, the broad thick lips which distinguish the African, also prevail amongst the people on this coast. Their hair is long and straight, but they are wholly inattentive to it, either as to cleanliness or in any other respect. It serves them in lieu of a towel to wipe their hands as often as they are daubed with blubber or shark oil, which is their principal article of food. This frequent application of rancid grease to their heads and bodies renders their approach exceedingly offensive. Their ornaments consist chiefly of fish-bones or kangaroo-teeth, fastened with gum or glue to the hair of the temples and on the forehead. A piece of reed or bone is also wore through the septum, or cartilage, of the nose, which is pierced for the admission of this ornament. Upon the whole, they present the most hideous and disgusting figures that savage life can possibly afford.

Nine days later they were to encounter the first Aboriginal women:

A good understanding being thus established, the men called to their wives and children, who were concealed behind the rocks, and who now ventured to shew themselves. These were the first women we had seen; from their cries and laughing it is evident they were greatly astonished at our appearance. The men did not think proper to admit of our coming sufficiently near to have a full or perfect view of their ladies, but we were near enough to discern that they were the most wretched objects we had ever seen—equally filthy as the men, coarse and ill-featured, and so devoid of delicacy or any appearance of it that they seem to have nothing even human about them but the form. We pursued our way and walked about 10 miles.

The Aboriginals they were to subsequently meet were to become essential to their survival and greatly assisted their trek northwards:

[Day 19 of the trek, at Pambula Inlet] *Between 9 and 10 o'clock we were most agreeably surprised by meeting five of the natives, our old friends, who received us in a very amicable*

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manner, and kindly treated us with some shellfish, which formed a very acceptable meal, as our small pittance of rice was nearly expended. After this little repast we proceeded 6 miles further and halted.

[Day 27, between Tathra and Bermagui] *We were overtaken by a few of the natives with whom we parted yesterday, but seeing us on our guard…and perceiving our resolution not to be imposed upon, they acted with more prudence than heretofore. We did not at this meeting indulge them with any presents, but to one gave a piece of cloth, in exchange for a large kangaroo's tail, with which we endeavoured to make some soup, by adding a little of the rice we had remaining, from which we received great nourishment, being much weakened by the fatigue and want which we had suffered in these inhospitable regions.*

[Day 28] *Walked 8 miles and came to a river, where we met fourteen natives, who conducted us to their miserable abodes in the wood adjoining to a large lagoon, and kindly treated us with mussels, for which unexpected civility we made them some presents. These people seemed better acquainted with the laws of hospitality than any of their countrymen whom we had yet seen, for to their benevolent treat was added an invitation to remain with them for the night. They did not, however, lodge us in their nominal huts, but after we were seated around our resting-place they brought their women and children to see us, and certainly, to judge from the attention with which they surveyed us, we afforded them no small share of entertainment. As far as we could understand, these natives were of a different tribe from those we had seen, and were then at war with them. They possessed a liberality to which the others were strangers, and freely gave us a part of the little they had…We endeavoured to make our entertainers sensible by signs how rudely their neighbours had behaved to us; to compensate for which both the old and the young were anxious to give us part of their shellfish.*

[Day 37, from Batemans Bay] *Got over the river and had a long walk, about 18 miles, through an immense wood, the plain of which was covered with long grass. We had the good fortune this day to have a friendly native in company, who undertook to be our guide, by whose good-natured assistance we were enabled to avoid several high points and cut off a great deal of ground.*

Relations were not always entirely friendly:

[Day 43, Wreck Bay near Sussex Inlet] *We had not parted more than twenty or thirty minutes when a hundred more natives approached us, shouting and hallowing in a most hideous manner, at which we were all exceedingly alarmed. In a short time a few of them began throwing their spears, upon which we made signs to them to desist, giving them some presents, and appearing no ways dismayed at their conduct—any other demeanour on our part would have been quite superfluous, having only one musket unloaded and two pistols out of repair, and at best were only six opposed to such a multitude, for our little company were daily dropping off. No sooner had we turned our backs on this savage mob than they renewed hostilities and wounded three or us, viz., Mr. Hugh Thompson, myself, and my servant. Notwithstanding this disaster, we, in our painful situation, proceeded 8 miles, to get clear, if possible, of these savages; but just as we came up to a very deep bay they overtook us again. This pursuit induced us all to suppose they intended to murder us—as we were, however, to make a virtue of necessity, and to remain among them all that night, though it may be well supposed that the anguish of our minds and the pain of our wounds prevented the possibility of sleep.* (The next day) *our disagreeable and treacherous companions continued with us on our journey until about 9 a.m., when they betook themselves to the woods, leaving us extremely happy at their departure. We continued our route along this extensive bay 10 miles.*

The *Sydney Cove* survivors became almost entirely dependent on the native Aboriginals supplying them with food:

[Days 40, 41 and 42, between Ulladulla and Jervis Bay] *Walked 10 or 12 miles each day, without meeting with any natives, and being wholly without nourishment almost perished for want.* (The next day) *at 9 a.m. observed several natives on the top of a high bluff, who came down to us as we approached, and remained with us for some time. When we had made signs to them that we were hungry and much exhausted, they brought us plenty of fish and treated us very kindly. After we had refreshed ourselves and put up some fish to carry with us…*

Finding food and dealing with occasional unfriendly Aboriginals were not the only challenges faced by the group.

As Mark McKenna observed '*on certain days the sun was still hot enough to burn them severely. Exposure to extreme heat, wind and rain, countless bites from sandflies, mosquitoes, ticks and march flies, as well as badly scratched legs, arms and faces from occasional bush bashing were all guaranteed irritants. As for potentially lethal snakes – red-bellied blacks, browns, tigers and death adders – ignorance was bliss.*'

The Challenges of Crossing Rivers

Crossing the numerous major rivers they encountered on their walk was another constant, major challenge:

[Day 10, near Mallacoota] *We had travelled about 7 miles when our progress was stopt by an immense river, which emptied itself in the ocean by several branches. We began to prepare a raft, in order to cross the river before us.*

[Days 11, 12 and 13] *These three days were employed in completing the raft and crossing the different branches of the river.*

Again, local Aboriginals often came to their aid:

[Day 16, at Wonboyn] *We came to a pretty large river, which, being too deep to ford, we began to prepare a raft, which we could not have completed till next day had not three of our native friends, from whom we parted yesterday, rejoined us and assisted us over. We were much pleased with their attention, for the act was really kind, as they knew we had this river to cross, and appear to have followed us purposely to lend their assistance. In the evening we travelled about 4 miles farther, and rested for the night.*

[Day 30, Narooma] *Came to a large river, where we met with a few natives, who appeared very timorous at seeing us; but in a short time we came to a better understanding, and they kindly carried us over in their canoes. This was not accomplished without several duckings, for their rude little vehicles formed of bark, tied at both ends with twigs, and not exceeding 8 feet in length, by 2 in breadth, are precarious vessels for one unacquainted with them to embark in, though the natives, of whom they will carry three or four, paddle about in them with the greatest facility and security. After crossing the river, and receiving a few small fish at parting, we walked 10 miles.*

[Day 32, Tuross River] *We were joined by our last friends, who ferried us over a very large river in their canoes. Whether this meeting was the effect of chance or one of their fishing excursions, or that perceiving we should find it difficult they had come to our assistance, we could not determine; but had it not been for their aid we must have been detained here for some time in making a raft.*

[Day 33, Moruya River] *Having walked about 12 miles we once more met with our friends, who, a third time, conveyed us over a large river at a shallow part, which they pointed out. On the banks of this river we remained for the night.*

Rescue

On 16th May 1798 – 63 days after having left Ninety Mile Beach – three survivors from the Sydney Cove reached Wattamolla, now in the Royal National Park and just 40 kilometres south of Sydney. The remainder of their party had either died or were unable to continue the arduous journey and had been left behind – never to be heard of again.

At Wattamolla they spotted a small fishing boat not far from the shore which 'picked up [the] three men, in a most wretched and worn out condition.' It transported them to Sydney.

The three survivors created a minor sensation in Sydney. Their assessment of the lands to the south of the settlement, which had not been explored at that time, were eagerly sought, and George Bass was one of those to whom Clark was to speak. This conversation was to prompt Bass to undertake his historic 1,900 km voyage down the South Coast from Sydney to Western Port between December 1797 and February 1798.

Meanwhile, a rescue mission for those who had remained on Preservation Island was organised. Two vessels left Sydney on 30th May 1797 and reached Preservation Island on June 10th. All but six of those who had survived by then were taken off the island – but seven or eight of those who embarked were to perish on their way to Sydney when one of the two ships was lost in a violent storm. One of the six men who remained on the Island (they did so to protect the cargo that had been salvaged from the wreck of the *Sydney Cove*) died before another ship arrived to transport them and the remaining cargo to Sydney.

This fascinating story, this important part of the NSW South Coast's history, is not well-known. But, in reality, it is as least as epic and important as the Burke and Wills story and, therefore, is deserving of much, much greater coverage.

A small, not entirely historically-accurate, plaque at Tathra recognising the trek by survivors of the Sydney Cove.

Do you also have a suggestion for a South Coast story that should be included in *Recollections*? We'd love to hear from you – just like we did from Damien.

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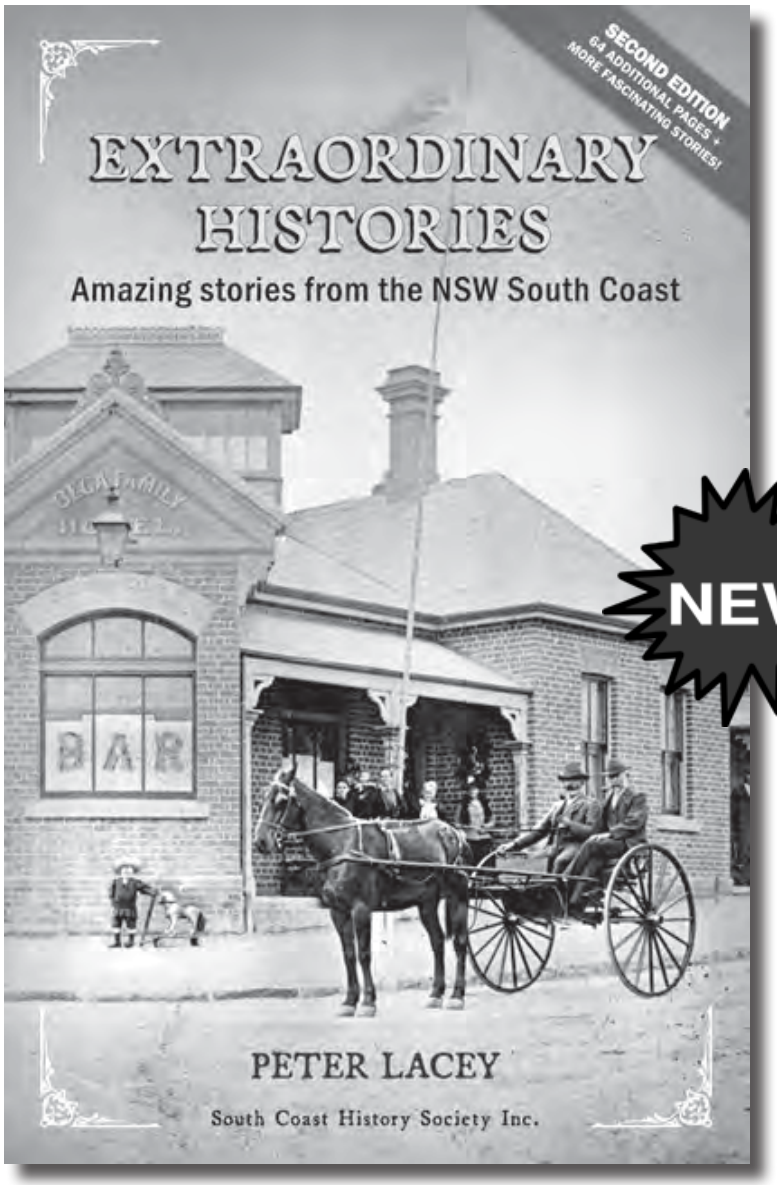

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Recollections 42 included a story by Dr Richard Reid about the laying of a foundation stone on July 22nd 1951 for a major, rearwards extension of St Patrick's Church in Bega. This foundation stone, to quote an accompanying inscription stone, 'came from The Very Summit of Croagh Patrick [St Patrick's Mountain] Ireland and was presented on behalf of the people of Ireland by Dr T J Kiernan M.A. Ph.D, Ambassador of Ireland'.

There is much more to this story, though. There are actually TWO 'Croagh Patrick, Ireland' stones at St Patrick's Church in Bega. In this piece Richard reveals why this is the case and traces the journeys of both stones 'from The Very Summit of Croagh Patrick' to Bega.

'... a bit of his own Holy Mountain to stand upon' —

Croagh Patrick comes to Bega, Part II

How did a piece of rock, from the 'very summit' of Croagh Patrick (Cruach Phádraig, St Patrick's stack or St Patrick's Holy Mountain) in west County Mayo, Ireland, get to Bega in 1951 to become part of the foundations of St Patrick's Church in Bega?

Surprisingly, the answer lies in the records of Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs in the National Archives of Ireland.

The online research facility on the Irish National Archives website shows the existence of a file of Ambassadorial reports from Canberra for the period 1950-1952. Another search on 'Croagh Patrick' reveals a bonanza of information in another file. Indeed, use 'Bega' as a search term and up comes the following file title:

'Fr. D.J. Griffin Bega. N.S.W. Austrailia Request for piece of stone from Croagh Padraic to be built into foundation stone of a new church being dedicated to St. Patrick', DFA/6/439/15

Note the misspelling of Australia, a location that was not on the original file's handwritten title. As the file's title page shows, the contents were passed around, largely between a Mr Kirwin and a Miss Kelly with a Miss Nolan and a Mr Durnin getting into the act at various moments during 1951.

This file also helps to clear up, in part, a mystery about the Croagh Patrick stone – the fact that St Patrick's, Bega, has TWO stones from the 'very summit' of Croagh Patrick. This makes that church unusual, perhaps unique, among Australia's Catholic, indeed Christian, churches.

The fact that Bega ended up with two stones is not mentioned in the 1951 accounts of the laying of the extension's foundation stone. Nor does it appear in the account in the *Bega District News* [17 March 1953] of the dedication of the extension, two years later, on Sunday, March 15, 1953.

The dedication was front page news. But descriptions of the ecclesiastical aspects of the event took second place to remarks from the Auxiliary Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra/Goulburn, Guilford Clyde Young,

on the need for the country to develop its economy on a firm footing, supported by building Australia into a 'completely Christian country'. This was necessary because 'visiting' experts had warned that to Australia's north were millions who worked for more than 80 hours a week and 'who need land'.

The *Bega News* turned the Bishop's remarks into an alarmist headline:

'Grim Facts given by Bishop – Warns at Church Opening of Asian Hordes'

There is no evidence, in what was reported of Young's remarks, that he used such an emotive word as 'hordes'. Description of the devotional festivities attendant on the opening were covered, but in general terms in the last section of the article, after Young had praised Irishman Dean David Griffin for his efforts in getting the extension built. As promised by the Dean, a long list of all the locals, Catholic and non-Catholics, who had contributed financially to the cost of the extensions, was eventually published in the *Bega District News* on 16 October 1953.

There were two other published accounts of the dedication of the extensions. So significant was the occasion considered that Sydney's *Catholic Weekly* sent a sub-editor, Ken Scully, to Bega. The *Weekly*'s headline for the story was factual:

'New £35,000 Church Blessed, Opened, by Bishop at Bega'

Scully reported that Young had linked the Bega Catholic story back to the early days of Irish convict devotions in 1803 in Sydney, the faith brought out from Ireland by the local settler families, and the arrival of that faith in Ireland with St Patrick himself.

In this context Young alluded to the piece of Croagh Patrick stone embedded, in 1951, with the foundation stone of the new extension:

' … the rock of the mount on which he [St Patrick] prayed. It was a happy thought of the Dean's to have it brought across the seas'.

A newspaper photograph from the laying of the foundation stone at St Patrick's Bega, in 1951

The larger 'Croagh Patrick Ireland' stone on the outside northern wall of St Patrick's Bega, sourced by the Tiernan brothers. It arrived after the laying of the foundation stone ceremony, but became the foundation stone.

Scully also mentioned Young's remarks about the need to develop Australia's as a balanced economy and a Christian country.

But Young had placed those remarks in context, the context of the erection of a church as of 'civic significance'.

Fortunately for the story of the Croagh Patrick stones, there is another full account of the extension dedication ceremonies in the Archdiocese of Canberra/Goulburn's own diocesan publication, *Our Cathedral Chimes,* on 19 April 1953. And it provides a clue to the second Croagh Patrick stone now inside the church:

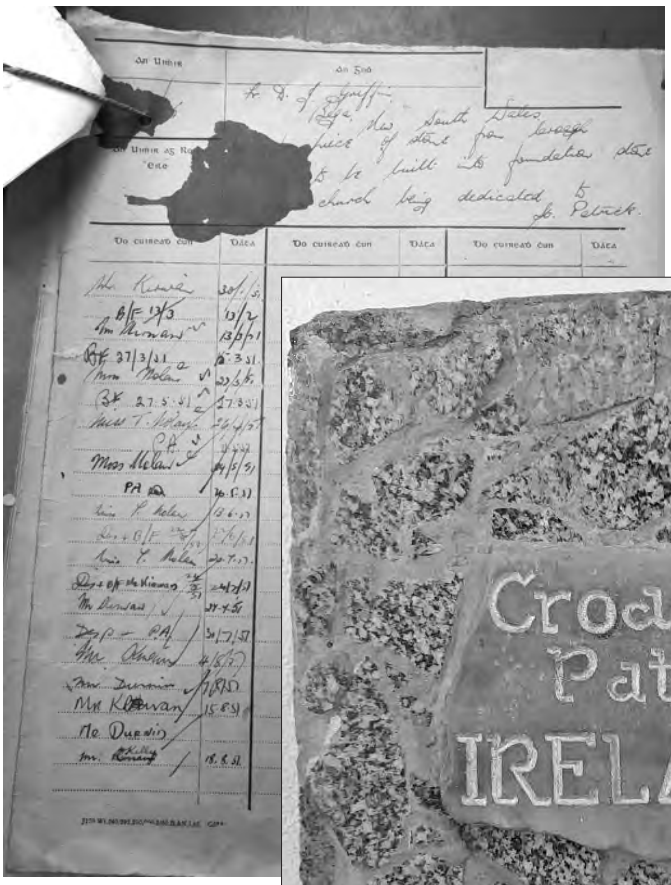
'To balance the pulpit on the Epistle side of the Sanctuary is a fine statue of St Patrick standing upon a niche of polished silver ash and a slab of Wombeyan marble. Inset in the base of the niche is a piece of rock from the very summit of Croagh Patrick. This is a small piece of polished stone, surrounded

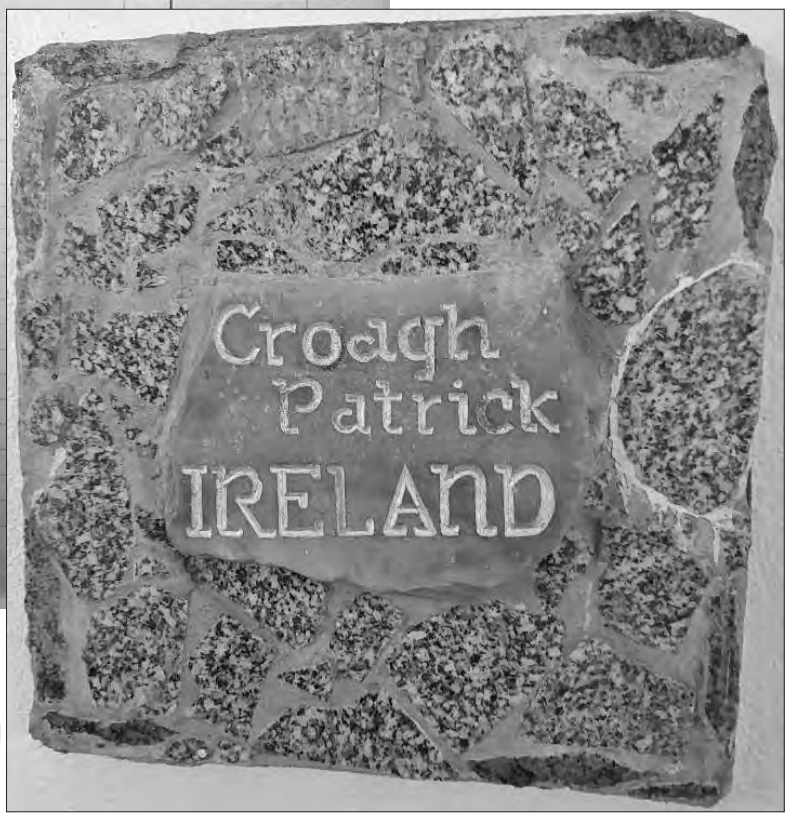
by grey granite chips and carrying the inscription 'Croagh Patrick IRELAND' in gold letters'.

Above that stone today is a large image of Christ covering the niche: the statue of St Patrick has been removed to the vestibule.

Affixed to the base of the statue is a plaque with this inscription:

Pray For John and Margaret Nickle R.I.P.
(who arrived in Australia from Armagh, Ireland in 1857)
And their Descendants, 1953





The cover of the Croagh Patrick Stone file in the National Archives of Ireland and The smaller 'Croagh Patrick Ireland' stone, sent by Father J. Burke, the Parish Priest of Westport in County Mayo, Ireland that was used at the laying of the foundation stone ceremony. It was then relocated inside the church 'to be placed under the feet of St Patrick…just in case he may feel a bit lonely'.

The *Cathedral Chimes* article further describes this statue as being the 'gift of Mrs Jack Britten, Numbugga, in memory of John and Margaret Nickle'. The Nickles were pioneer Catholics of the upper Bega Valley but they came from County Tyrone, not Armagh. The family arrived in Sydney on the *Peter Maxwell* as assisted immigrants on 10 January 1858 giving their place of origin in Ireland as 'Tyrone'. When John Nickle died, aged 91, in 1907 his obituary in the *Southern Star* said he had 'first seen the light of day in Cookstown, in the county Tyrone'.

The Irish Department of Foreign Affairs file shows that in late January 1951 Father Griffin (the Catholic Parish Priest of Bega and also Dean of the South Coast of New South Wales) approached Ambassador Kiernan in Canberra requesting his assistance in obtaining a stone from Croagh Patrick, from the 'top' of the mountain. Could the local police in County Mayo get this for him and the Department facilitate sending the stone to Bega?

While this was an 'unusual request', Kiernan described Bega as an 'old centre of Irish settlement' so it was 'worth the trouble to assist' the Priest.

The Department's response, in late February 1951, was to write to the Parish Priest of Westport in County Mayo, Father J. Burke. Could he assist in realising Father Griffin's intention? Perhaps a parishioner had a souvenir piece of Croagh Patrick stone lying around they could donate to Bega. The stone should be about the size of a brick and Bega would pay all postal expenses.

Two months later, on 25 April, Father Burke responded to the Department. Clearly no parishioner had something as convenient as a brick-sized piece of Croagh Patrick stone. Winters, Father Burke reminded those in Dublin, were severe on the west coast of Ireland and 'inclement weather' had made the obtaining of a stone from the summit of the mountain itself impossible until now. But, the same day, Burke mailed a stone 'from the summit' to Father Griffin in Bega with the hope that it would reach him in time for the laying of the foundations in July.

Whilst all this was going on, Father Griffin again wrote, on 20 April, to Ambassador Kiernan in Canberra. Independently, he had been able to organise for a stone to be sent. He had been visited by a Father Tiernan, an Irish priest who had spent some time in Bega and who came from Mayo, 'beneath the shade of Croagh Patrick'.

Griffin does not say exactly when Tiernan visited him, but it would seem to have been before he had heard any news from the Ambassador about his request for the Irish Foreign Affairs Department and Father Burke in Westport, Ireland, to provide the stone.

Tiernan, responding to Griffin's need for a Croagh Patrick stone, had written to his brothers in Mayo. They had also now also obtained a stone from Croagh Patrick's summit measuring 15 inches by 9 inches by 2 inches (38 x 22 x 5 centimetres) – 'They have written to Father Tiernan asking him what next?'

So, by the end of April 1951 two stones had been independently obtained: one from the Westport Parish

Priest Father Burke, on its way to Bega by post, while the other was still in the hands of Father Tiernan's brothers awaiting instructions.

On hearing this news from Father Griffin, Ambassador Kiernan instantly wrote to Dublin on 26 April asking that this Tiernan brothers stone be sent out to him:

'*I shall go down to Bega [to the official laying of the foundation stone] next July to present it to the Bishop and the Parish Priest*'.

Dublin then wrote back to Kiernan, on 10 May, stating that the stone from Father Burke was already on the way and that perhaps it was not necessary to send the second stone, the one obtained by the Tiernan brothers. Father Burke was accordingly written to, thanking him for his efforts in obtaining a stone and posting it off to Bega.

At the same time, Kiernan in Canberra was becoming worried lest Father Burke's stone that was coming by mail, might not arrive in time for the 22 July ceremony in Bega. The Ambassador had been invited for the stone laying ceremony and he could hardly turn up with no stone!

So, on 31 May he wrote to Dublin that it would be advisable to send the second stone, the Tiernan brothers stone.

By early May, Father Griffin had still heard nothing from Father Burke but, by 20 April, he had received full particulars on the Tiernan brothers' stone. This, he wrote to Kiernan, was of a suitable size for incorporation in the foundation stone:

'*You see I know the size of the one which Father Tiernan's brothers were good enough to go to the top of the mountain in order to procure and in the Foundation Stone, which will contain the slab, provision is being made for the slab of the size mentioned by Father Tiernan's brothers*'.

Griffin now clearly wanted both stones. The larger would be for the foundation slab proposed for the north wall of the St Patrick's extensions, while he could use the other inside the church:

'*… to be placed under the Feet of St Patrick in his place over the High Altar, just in case he may feel a bit lonely like so many of us do, whose fate demands that they be endless exiles until death, and afterwards*'.

This is an interesting statement. Griffin ended up positioning this stone, not above the High Altar but under the statue of St Patrick dedicated to the Nickle family in a niche to the side of the apse.

But what had he originally intended for the wall behind the altar? Pre-extension photographs show three stained glass windows behind the altar, the central one depicting Christ on the Cross. But the 1953 *Our Cathedral Chimes* article about the dedication ceremony described a 'new reredos' and surmounting the reredos and 'set into the old canopy of the altar, the old statue of St Patrick now artistically redecorated'. Surely it was here, at St Patrick's feet, that Griffin originally intended to place this second piece of Croagh Patrick stone.

The reredos is still there but the 'old statue of St Patrick' has gone. What is evident is that in 1953 there were two statues of St Patrick in the church … the 'old' one and the new one donated in memory of the Nickle family. But clearly this second Croagh Patrick stone was never placed beneath the 'old statue of St Patrick' above the reredos. Perhaps Griffin found there was no room for it. This 'old statue of St Patrick'

is also no longer in the church.

The Dublin file also clears up a further mystery regarding the final placement of the two Croagh Patrick stones. As we have seen, Kiernan, on 31 May, requested the Department in Dublin to send out the Tiernan brothers' stone but he did not think it would reach Bega in time for the proposed July ceremony, even though this was the stone Father Griffin, because of its suitable dimensions, wanted for the outside wall to place above the foundation inscription slab.

On 22 June, Kiernan heard from Dublin that they had no address for the Tiernan brothers! Could the Ambassador please ask Father Griffin to write to them to approach the Department and they would arrange to ship out the stone in the diplomatic bag — providing it weighed no more than 11 kilos!

On 9 July Father Griffin wrote to the Irish Ambassador in Canberra to say that the Tiernan brothers stone was already in Dublin and simply awaited despatch. However, clearly, it would not reach Bega in time for the ceremony on 22 July.

Whilst all this toing-and-froing about the Tiernan brothers' stone was happening, the stone from Father Burke in Mayo arrived.

But, Father Griffin in Bega was not pleased:

'*It was too small to regard it as a stone, and for a while I was pretty anxious. Then I hit on the idea of surrounding it with chips of granite held together with a cement made from granite dust…at least I have a stone for the ceremony, which was my greatest worry for a while…it will meet the day's needs and will be duly used in the church also*'.

So, it was this smaller stone that was used on the day of the foundation stone ceremony, 22 July 1951. It was blessed, then solemnly taken in procession outside to where it would have seemed to everyone present that it would be inserted in the wall above the foundation marble slab.

The 1951 *Our Cathedral Chimes* article described the stone:

'*Before Mass a small stone, on which was written in gold lettering 'Croagh Patrick Ireland', mounted in granite, was presented to the Bega Parish by the Ambassador of Ireland … It was accepted by the Dean, covered by an Irish flag and placed at the feet of a statue of St Patrick*'.

However, it is clear Griffin never intended to use this stone, far too small for his intentions, on the outside wall. He awaited the arrived of the larger Tiernan brothers stone and it is that stone which can be seen on the side of the church to this day.

The stone's dimensions tally roughly with those sent by the Tiernan brothers. The small stone, with the gold lettering, remains where it was placed in 1953 under the feet of the statue of St Patrick presented in memory of the Nickle family for the 1953 dedication of the extensions. Only it no longer, as Griffin might have hoped, makes St Patrick less homesick, because St Patrick has been removed to the vestibule!

And that is how St Patrick's Catholic Church, Bega, New South Wales, came to have two pieces of stone on display, both from the very summit of Croagh Patrick, County Mayo, Ireland, and 17,310 kilometres away from Bega, according to Google. R

St Patrick, now in the vestibule of St Patrick's Church, Bega

Dr Richard Read thanks Dr Perry McIntyre from the National Archives of Ireland for his assistance whilst undertaking the research for this article.

Dr Richard Reid is a Canberra-based historian and is President of the Canberra & District Historical Society. He has a special interest in South Coast history and is a frequent visitor to the area – recently, for example, giving the Commemorative Address at the Centenary of the Bega Soldiers' Memorial.

The 1860s inn that came all the way from America in a flat pack — really!

by Tim the Yowie Man

The journey up from the far South Coast to the Monaro and Snowies is torturous enough today. Most of us tackle Brown Mountain or Mt Darragh, so long as there aren't any landslides. The more adventurous attempt Tantawangalo Mountain Road.

Either way, in an air-conditioned motor vehicle the trip up the escarpment and onto the tablelands is luxurious when compared to how hordes of miners in the 1860s made their way from South Coast ports to the Kiandra goldfields.

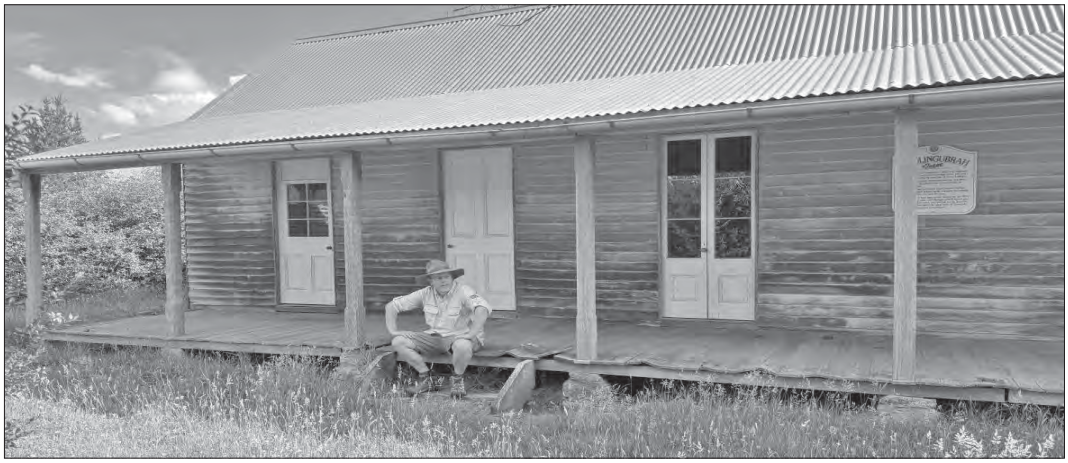
Back then there was one main road. Although with its steep gullies, precipitous sides, and regular washouts, the Big Jack Mountain Bridle Track was hardly a road by today's standards.

Many miners would have traipsed up the hill on foot, battling leeches, hunger, and blisters. The lucky would have been in horse-drawn drays or bullock wagons.

No matter how they travelled, by the time they reached the top of the range near present-day Cathcart, they'd have been thirsty and exhausted. Not surprisingly, to cash in on this passing trade, shanties and hotels quickly began to pop up along the route.

One of the 19th-century entrepreneurs who thought he'd have better luck striking it rich by servicing the passing parade of miners than panning for gold himself was Malcolm McPhee.

And boy did McPhee have big plans. He didn't want to mill a few cedar trees and whack them together as a basic lean-to. No, instead he erected Mountain Hut Hotel, one of the more substantial accommodation houses along the entire route.



Tim on the front steps on Woolingubrah Inn, contemplating the journey of weary travellers who stopped here in the early 1860s. Picture by David Hanzl

Due to the shortage of labour at the time (presumably many tradesmen rushed off to try their own luck on nearby diggings), rather than constructing his hotel from scratch, he imported his hotel all the way from the United States.

Yes, the entire building arrived in a flat pack.

And to think I'm still grappling with my daughter's bed/desk combo which Santa foolishly bought in a flat pack from you-know-where.

Oh, and before you ask, while McPhee would have needed a hammer or two, there wouldn't have been an Allen key within cooee, for they weren't invented until 1901. At least all the pieces had letters and numbers to assist construction.

While I'm not sure how long it took McPhee to assemble, by October 26 1860 he was advertising in the ***Twofold Bay Telegraph*** his "accommodation house at the top of the Old Mountains on Bridle Track Road, being the shortest route to the [Kiandra] diggings from Eden and Pambula".

It might have been a dry house the first few nights because it wasn't until October 30 that cargo for McPhee landed at Merimbula on the *Illawarra*. The delivery included "one hogshead of ale, one case of cordials and one quarter-case of rum".

According to Laurie Platts in ***Bygone Days of Cathcart*** (Fyshwick, 1989), the Mountain Hut Hotel, or Halfway Hotel as it was also known, "consisted of a bar, dining room, kitchen and six bedrooms". I told you it was substantial.

Unfortunately for McPhee, The Kiandra gold rush was one of our country's shortest and it's likely he only traded as a licensed premises for a few years. Perhaps he should have joined the diggers on the Eucumbene at Kiandra after all.

Curiously, only after it ceased trading was the building known as the Woolingubrah Inn, and in 1871 it was sold to Henry Nicholson.

Not that poor Henry got to enjoy his newly purchased property, for less than four months later he drowned in the flooded Little Plain River, aged just 41.

However, Woolingubrah stayed in the Nicholson family for well over a century. In a state of disrepair, in 1986 State Forests NSW purchased the property and along with funding from the NSW Heritage Office, undertook an extensive program of much-needed restoration.

On a recent pilgrimage to the little-known and seldom-visited former inn, the only sign of life were piles of wombat dung on the front veranda. Nonetheless, more than 20 years after the conservation work, you can still see just how much blood, sweat and tears must have been shed to bring this historic hotel back to life.

Inside, it's in remarkably good condition and you can still make out the numbers on each piece of timber - part of the three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle that would have faced McPhee 164 years ago. The walls are lined with old photos, including some of the Nicholson family relaxing on the veranda and a couple enjoying a snowball fight in the front yard.

Although Platts described Woolingubrah (a local word meaning "windy place") as perched on "a rather exposed flat at the peak of the Big Jack Range of mountains", today, hemmed in by pine forest, it feels more hidden than open. [To find it, drive 4.5km south-south-east of Cathcart on Woolingubrah Rd (via Coolangubra Rd) in the Coolangubra State Forest.]

It's often said the best way to preserve a building is to use it. While the conservation efforts are to be commended, it seems a pity Woolingubrah isn't utilised by the community in some way.

Many of us, your Akubra-clad columnist included, are obsessed with huts in Kosciuszko and Namadgi national parks. This Cathcart relic predates many of those, and what's more, it tells a story of a fascinating time in our region's past.

The door is closed but usually unlocked. Well worth the drive.

(Reprinted from *The Canberra Times*, 24th February 2024, with kind permission of the author.)

The building was lovingly restored in 2001. Picture by Tim the Yowie Man.

FEEDBACK

1.

Recollections 45 included a photograph of a somewhat unusual World War I War Memorial. A reader has since supplied the original caption to the photograph, from the *Daily Telegraph* of Wednesday 5th August 1931:

MEMORIAL FISH POND surmounted by model of the Harbor Bridge, opened yesterday at Callan Park by the Governor, standing by whom is the designer, Mr. Douglas Grant. The cost of the material, consisting of scrap metal and other oddments, was about £5.

Douglas Grant was a full-blood Aboriginal and was described as 'Found in the Jungle above Cairns in Queensland; Raised and educated in Lithgow and Annandale by a Scottish family; Skilled draftsman with Mort's Dock Engineering; Fought in the Great War, captured by the Germans; Eloquent defender of equality.'

Douglas Grant

It is estimated that around 1,000 Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders served in the AIF in World War I. The exact numbers are unknown because enlistment processes at that time did not record a person's ethnicity.

When the war began in 1914, the 1903 Defence Act prevented Indigenous Australians from enlisting:

Aborigines and half-castes are not to be enlisted. This restriction is to be interpreted as applying to all coloured men.

But, as the war progressed and the Australian military was faced with rapidly declining numbers of men willing to join the army, the Australian Government relaxed the conditions for enlistment. The new standard for enlistment in 1917 became:

Half-castes may be enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force provided that the examining Medical Officers are satisfied that one of the parents is of European origin.

At least 20 Indigenous Australians from the NSW South Coast have been identified as having enlisted in World War I (Arthur George Andrews, Walter Ernest Andrews, Thomas Henry Balcombe, David Henry Bindoff, Edward George Bindoff, Harold Edward Bindoff, Andy Bond, Frederick Brook, Herbert Lester Brook, Robert John Brown, Henry Cooley, Ernest Lacy, George Longbottom, James Longbottom, Frank Stewart, Herbert Timbery, Charles Henry Watts, Ernest Longbottom Watts, Joseph Carlisle Watts and Henry Alfred Willoughby).

2.

Our *'Local News, 100 Years Ago'* article in the same issue was given a BIG THUMBS DOWN by a reader who suggested *'it appears to be more like you're reporting on a trashy romance novel rather than taking a serious look at the facts'* and contended that there were other possible reasons why the young lass may have taken her life that were *'not nearly as dramatic as your slant on the story'*. One possibility suggested was that she and the young man with whom she was 'keeping company' simply had different religious affiliations (e.g. one was Catholic, the other Protestant) which, back then, would likely have resulted in significant family disapproval. This, however, still does not explain

why the Editor of the *Southern Record and Advertiser* subsequently chose to name the man with whom the young lass had been 'keeping company' – something that seems somewhat curious.

We accept that this could be considered better history had we omitted the one paragraph speculating about why the young lass took her own life.

3.

'Are you sure that the front page photograph in Recollections 45 was taken at the unveiling of the Bega Soldiers' Memorial in May 1924?' another eagle-eyed reader asked.

The short answer, now it's brought to our attention, is 'No'.

That photograph, the first one below, was sourced from the State Library of NSW who, in turn, sourced it from the Bega Pioneers' Museum in 1988 as part of an 'images of rural life in NSW 1880–1940' Bicentennial project. At that same time it was titled 'Opening of Soldiers' Memorial – Carp Street, Bega NSW'.

But the Bega Pioneers' Museum also has a second photograph of the opening of the Soldiers' Memorial in 1924 (the second photograph below).

And these two photographs were clearly not taken on the same day. When the Soldiers' Memorial was constructed, it did not include the word 'Bega' at the top of the Memorial. That was a later addition (probably to better identify the location of the Memorial in photographs of it; photography then was becoming an increasingly popular pursuit, and Bega's Memorial was a significant attraction in the town) that was not rendered as finely as had been the original words 'Soldiers' Memorial'.

So, it's likely our 'Unveiling of the Bega Soldiers' Memorial' photograph was taken some time after the actual unveiling – perhaps at an Anzac Day or Armistice Day gathering.

Wallaga Lake Bridge and its Causeway

Ken Robinson

Wallaga Lake Bridge is well known to residents and travellers on the far south coast, and is one of the five remaining timber bridges on Tourist Route 9 (MR 272) between the Princes Highway at Tilba Tilba and Tathra.

Unlike the other bridges it is the responsibility of Transport for NSW (TfNSW), rather than Bega Valley Council, due to its location on the boundary of Eurobodalla and Bega Valley Shires. The bridge has been in many people's minds recently, due to TfNSW undertaking maintenance works during 2024. These works involved the closure of the bridge for 4 weeks in late April/May and again for three weeks in July.

Colonial settlement of this area of the South Coast occurred from the 1830s when graziers sought new pastures for their cattle and sheep, and from the 1850s as free selectors established various agricultural industries in the area, especially dairying. Woodland was cleared and the timber was utilised locally and also milled and shipped to the Sydney market from Cobargo and Tilba districts.

Shipping was from Wagonga (now Narooma) and Bermagui, and the poor condition of the coastal roads meant that shipping remained the main mode for long distance transport into the twentieth century.

A regular steamer service between the South Coast and Sydney was established in 1857-8, with the formation of the Illawarra Steam Navigation Company (renamed in 1904 as the Illawarra and South Coast Steam Navigation Company) which was in service until 1948. The steamers operated through Eden, Merimbula and Bermagui, and from the wharf constructed at Tathra.

By the 1880s Bermagui, rather than Wagonga, had become the preferred port for shipping produce from Tilba district and from Quaama, Wandella and Cobargo districts. 'Easy' access to Bermagui from the north depended on the lake being closed so that goods could be hauled over the sandy beach. By this time, outward trade from Bermagui had increased to about 2,000 tons per year, but facilities and access to the port were clearly inadequate.

During the 1880s efforts were made to improve Tilba's access to Bermagui and onwards to Sydney

utilising the regular and reliable steamer service. So, the steamer wharf was built in Horseshoe Bay at Bermagui in 1887, the bridge over the Bermagui River was built in 1888, and the bridge across Wallaga Lake was opened in 1894. By 1901 the steamer wharf at Bermagui had been extended and in 1912 a new wharf was built.

The Wallaga Lake Bridge, completed in 1894, appears to have had two celebratory openings. One newspaper source indicates it was opened on 27 March, 1894 by Mrs Elizabeth Bate, in the presence of "a large gathering of residents". Transport for NSW states that the Wallaga Lake Bridge was officially opened on 19 April, 1894 - that opening having been delayed for a month so that dignitaries from Sydney, prevented by bad weather from travelling in March, could

arrive by steamer. Local pioneer, John Jauncey, prepared a speech for the opening, with Elizabeth Bate being recorded as doing the honours.

Once the Wallaga Lake Bridge was opened, much of the Tilba trade switched to Bermagui and its more reliable steamer service. By 1896 steamers were calling at Bermagui four times per week.

As with most bridges in the area, local hardwoods and labour were used to construct the nine-span timber beam bridge and its causeway, thereby providing a crossing of Wallaga Lake on the main route south into Bermagui. This single lane bridge was set low to the lake, connecting the northern shoreline to a causeway which curved to a raised area that was originally an island; the causeway then continued to the southern shore.

In its environmental assessment report, Transport for NSW says that the maintenance records for the Wallaga Lake Bridge between 1894 and 1930 could not be found, but major repairs appear to have been carried out in the mid-1930s, 1960s and 1990s, with ongoing maintenance at other times. The works of the 1990s were delayed and in 1993 the western side of the bridge dropped, leaving a girder end unsupported before repairs were undertaken. Also, following flooding in 1992, the northern abutment collapsed and repairs were carried out by council staff.

The low approaches to Wallaga Bridge were often flooded when the lake was closed to the sea or after prolonged heavy rain. This happened regularly, such that the water was over the axles for long distances over on the southern approach to the bridge and on the northern flat.

By 1916 the two councils had special arrangements to open the lake whenever the road started to flood. The problem persisted, however, and in 1933 the local councils were asked to raise the Wallaga Lake Road by "two feet" so that it would be passable at all times.

In 1936 the long causeway which forms the southern approach to the bridge was raised. The periodic submergence of this roadway by the lake's waters was at times as long as two months. The raising of the causeway and the opening of the lake to the ocean when necessary have generally ensured continuous access across the lake.

Wallaga Lake Bridge is regarded as an important item of heritage in the shire. It is listed in Schedule 5 of Bega Valley Local Environment Plan 2013 (item 1126). A Statement of Significance for the bridge states: *The Wallaga Lake Bridge has Local historical, aesthetic, social and representative significance. On construction, the bridge was a key component in the regional road network allowing access to Bermagui port when shipping remained the region's primary form of long-haul transport. The bridge is a local landmark and appealing rustic structure in the scenic locale of Wallaga Lake. The bridge is recognised as a significant historic structure by the contemporary local community, as demonstrated by the enthusiastic celebration of the bridge's centenary in 1994. The bridge is a rare representative example of a low style timber beam bridge retaining the essential characteristics of the pre-1894 trestle design concept.*

While the bridge as a whole meets the criteria for Local Significance listing, the individual elements that comprise the bridge vary in significance values. While each of these elements contribute to the overall significance of the bridge, the design changes proposed and the environmental assessment undertaken by TfNSW separated the bridge into its components and examined the heritage significance of each. The work to repair the structure included renewing, replacing and/or strengthening the headstocks, girders and piles, repairing the bridge deck and upgrading the abutments. The most substantial works would involve

The opening of Wallaga Lake Bridge, 1894.
Image by W.H. Corkhill, http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-140333486

permanent modifications to the abutments and piles.

The piles have been assessed to be of 'Moderate' significance. Since 1894 the original form of the piers has been extensively modified, as pile deterioration has required additional piles to be driven. It is unlikely that any of the piles are original, and some have had protective tape and HDPE (High Density Polyethylene) jackets used to unsuccessfully protect them from deterioration. These require regular inspection and intervention works. Recent work removed the existing jackets and wraps from all piles and replace them with a fibre reinforced grey laminate. This is regarded as a more permanent modification and, given their location and visibility, it is considered to maintain the piles' 'Moderate' level of heritage significance.

The abutments consist of stone slopes with timber sheeting, supported by timber piles. Given the modifications over the years these are now regarded as having 'Low' significance, so the configuration of driven timber piles was supplemented by installation of additional timber piles. This is consistent with the original design and any visual effect can be regarded as negligible.

There have been no substantial modifications to the deck and superstructure because these were assessed to be of 'High' significance. The components of the superstructure such as the deck, girders and railing were replaced, where necessary, in a like-for-like manner, thereby preserving the essential defining components of the bridge. Similarly, the headstocks (the top-most parts of the piers of the bridge), identified as being of 'Exceptional' significance as a rare "evolutionary" feature, were replaced like-for-like.

The analysis of the condition and the existing heritage values of the various parts of the bridge drove the renewal of the bridge. Rather than deciding to demolish the bridge and replace it with a new concrete one, a careful examination of the condition of the timber bridge and an analysis of how the heritage values could be retained in its repair and renewal, has resulted in the recent works program.

This will allow the bridge to be upgraded to suit the bridge's functional requirements while retaining it as a valuable heritage asset.

Although a different solution would be expected to be applicable to each of the existing timber bridges along Tourist Route 9, the works undertaken at Wallaga Lake clearly demonstrate that careful consideration can be given to retaining timber heritage values as bridges are renewed.

Information sources: Bega Valley & Eurobodalla Shire Councils. Wallaga Lake – Coastal Zone (Estuary) Management Plan. June 2006 Update; Laurelle Pacey. Tilba Times revisited. November 2015; Transport for NSW. Wallaga Lake Bridge Review of Environmental Factors. January 2024.

Thank you to all who provided feedback about Recollections 46, our 'NSW South Coast Women' issue, and particularly to those who have suggested other significant South Coast women who deserve recognition. We're now aiming to compile a list of at least 50 of these women and to share their stories in future issues of Recollections.

More Significant South Coast Women

Deborah Cheetham Fraillon

Deborah Cheetham Fraillon '*is the single most outstanding Indigenous classical music artist that Australia has produced*' and is the Chair of Vocal Studies at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

She was born in 1964 in Nowra. Her mother was a Yorta Yorta woman (from lands along the Murray River). At 3 weeks old she became one of the Stolen Generation, taken from her mother to be raised in Sydney by a ('loving' – Deborah's word) Baptist family who told her she had been abandoned. She was not to reengage with her Aboriginal family until she was in her thirties, discovering then that they – including her uncle, renowned Australian singer and musician Jimmy Little - were musical.

Deborah was schooled at Penshurst Girls High School before being accepted into the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

She recalls a school excursion. "*I sat in Row L, Seat 23. It was the 19th of February 1979, at the Sydney Opera House. Dame Joan Sutherland was in the title role of The Merry Widow. It was life-changing…I fell in love with opera that night. How could I not?…and I just thought, 'Where has this been all my life?'*" From that point, she harboured the desire to be an opera singer, although she had no idea how that might come about. *"My adoptive family were working-class people and there was no expectation that I would finish Year 12, let alone be the first in my family to head off to university.*"

The same year "*when I was 15 years of age, I visited the south coast of NSW — the area around Narooma and Bermagui known as the beautiful Sapphire Coast. I was mesmerised by the sparkling blue of the ocean and the sky, the coastline stretching on for miles and miles. When I returned home from that journey I was visited by a recurring dream. Night after night the image of a mountain reaching down to the sea came to me in my dreams.*"

"For 35 years this dream returned again and again. In 2018 I returned to the Sapphire Coast, this time to connect with my Grandfather's country and the people of the Yuin nation. Once more I was struck by the beauty of the ocean and the brilliant blue sky but this time, I turned my attention to the land as well and there was the mountain which had appeared to me in my dreams for so many years. Gulaga, Mother Mountain, sacred to the Yuin people. When I was 15 years old, I knew very little of my Aboriginal heritage…All those years ago I did not see the mountain, but the mountain saw me. Gulaga, Mother Mountain, called me home."

After graduating, Deborah studied at the Julliard School of Music and the Metropolitan Opera in New York, then worked as a high school music teacher in Australia – although her performances, which involved frequent travelling, eventually drew her away from teaching.

Her first major work was an autobiographical one-woman play, *White Baptist Abba Fan*, which told of her experience of discovering that she was a member of the Stolen Generations and confronting attitudes towards her sexuality and Aboriginality. The inspiration for this landmark work came after her reunion with her birth mother, Monica Little.

In 2009, Deborah founded the national Indigenous opera company Short Black Opera, creating opportunities for First Nations singers wishing to pursue a career in classical vocal music. Then in 2010, she wrote Australia's first Indigenous opera, *Pecan Summer.*

Among other things, the "*Short Black Opera set out to confront the fact that there were no Indigenous players in any of our state orchestras*…(including) *working with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra to create meaningful* (Indigenous) *development and mentoring programs.*"

Deborah has used her success as a renowned opera singer, composer and educator to speak out on issues close to her heart. She has particularly championed the causes of women and First Nations musicians.

Bridget Johnston

Undoubtedly, there have been many exceptional teachers on the NSW South Coast. Bridget Johnson was one of them – the *Sydney Morning Herald* even deeming it appropriate to write a piece about her and include a picture of her in the *Herald* when she retired.

Bridget Ann Ryan was born at Duea River in 1859. She completed her formal education with a two-year teachers' training course at Blackfriars Teachers' College on Broadway in Sydney before receiving postings to Moruya Public School and then Cleveland Street Infants School in Sydney.

In August 1882, when she was 23, she was appointed teacher at a small one-teacher bush school in Eurobodalla Village (that village now long gone). In the 18 years before Bridget's arrival, the school had six teachers. Bridget was to stay (the *Herald* suggesting 'in charge'!) for 45 years.

In April 1907 (so 25 years after arriving in Eurobodalla) Miss Ryan married and became Mrs Johnston.

Under a 1902 Act, which was amended in 1932, no married woman could be employed as a teacher unless 'there are special circumstances which make her employment desirable in the public interest'. Miss Ryan/Mrs Johnston's employment at Eurobodalla Public School must therefore have been considered 'desirable in the public interest'.

Mrs Johnston's teaching was described as 'high quality, strict, dedicated and inspired'. And, of necessity, she was teaching all levels from infants' classes to higher education entrance levels.

She let it be clearly understood that no pupil, however reluctant a student, would ever leave her school without being able, at the very least, to write, read and do arithmetic.

Her success as a teacher soon became widely-known. At various times, students from as far away as Tilba Tilba, Narooma and Eden were sent to board in Eurobodalla village so they could attend her school. And one father, from somewhere down the coast, even set up two tents near the school and installed his young son in one, and a woman to look after him in the other, so he could receive an education from Mrs Johnston.

The results her pupils achieved are testimony to her skill as a teacher. For example, four bursaries for the Leaving Certificate years were awarded each year to students in the Cooma Inspectorate (which included Eurobodalla Public School) and every year at least one student from Mrs Johnston's little school would be awarded one. In one year, pupils from the school received all four! This so amazed the Department of Education that it sent an Inspector to the school to re-examine the students. Leaving the four examinees and the Inspector in the schoolroom, Mrs. Johnston gathered the rest of her pupils together and adjourned classes to the outside. She conducted lessons under the trees in the school grounds until the Inspector emerged, thanked her for her co-operation and left. The school day then resumed its normal pattern. (Three of these four students subsequently were awarded medical degrees and one an arts degree.)

And at least 45 of her pupils received scholarships to teachers' college, and several received university scholarships.

In 1924, when she reached the age of 65, the Education Department's age for retirement in those days, Bridget Johnston was asked to continue teaching. She did so for another three years.

As well as teaching her students, Mrs Johnston was concerned for their welfare. She would often shuttle children to their homes in her own sulky and, if it rained, would provide coats for her students from her own wardrobe or her husband's wardrobe or, having exhausted those, would provide sacks as makeshift protection from her own shed.

Bridget Johnston, as one would expect in a small village, also became a driving force in the community. She is credited with the construction of the town's cricket pitch and tennis court, and then encouraging everybody to use them. And she instigated the building of a community hall which was used for many years as a venue for concerts, parties and other functions.

Mrs. Bridget Johnston died in 1939, at the age of 80. She is buried in Moruya cemetery.

On The Calendar

South Coast History Society regularly gives talks to community groups. Here's a few that are coming up, along with contact details should you be interested in attending any of the talks near you:

10th August, Family History ACT (www.familyhistoryact.org.au) Sharing Your Genealogical and Historical Research
5th September, Bodalla CWA (0481 481 344) South Coast Women
10th September, Batemans Bay Library, History Week. Eurobodalla Women
11th September, Narooma Library, History Week. Eurobodalla Women
12th September, Moruya Library, History Week. Eurobodalla Women
13th September, Merimbula VIEW (0448 840 752). South Coast Women

From mid-August, you may also find we have a stall at local markets – in Merimbula, Pambula, Candelo, Narooma, Moruya, etc.. Please do call by and say 'g'day'!

Is This You?

Are you P.J.S., E.H., or S.A. who recently (generously) deposited a donation into our bank account? If so, would you please contact us – 0448 160 852. We need your contact details! Thanks.