

South Coast History Society Inc.

# Recollections

Issue 48 October 2024



Bullock team hauling timber across the Bega River in the 1930s.

## The Bullocky

The bullock-driver was an important figure in the early days of settlement. On him largely depended the welfare of the remote and isolated stations, and his arrival was long looked forward to. When at last his tall, muscular figure, arrayed in Parramatta frock, pulled up his bullocks in front of the station store, it was a gala day. Equally his detention or non-arrival was a season of tribulation.

The popularity of the bullock dray, as a means of carriage and locomotion in Australia, was but natural. In the first place, the bullocks were always at home, and found fodder wherever they went. The working gear was of the most

primitive construction, and consisted only of wood and iron in their crudest forms; and the whole equipment was calculated to resist the hardest of hard roads and the rudest extremes of weather.

Height, in the bullock driver was of some consideration, especially as regards yoking and unyoking, a tall man having so great an advantage over a short man when it came to reaching over the neck of the near-side bullock. Moreover, he could put more brutal strength into a far-reaching blow with a bullock whip, that terrible weapon of old days. The Hawkesbury, famous as it was for its tall striplings, was a notable nursery for turning out good bullock drivers.

### Fantastic Reads

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Bullock-driving was an art, a dramatic art one might almost say, for the difference of the bullocks towards the professional driver and the amateur was striking. Though the amateur might rage up and down a long team, swearing strange oaths and aiming ineffective blows at the culprits, always selecting the wrong bullock for punishment, his team persisted in straggling along at their own pace and at their own sweet will, an odd bullock occasionally getting one leg over the chain. But mark the difference when the professional took hold of the whip. Like the word "attention" shouted in the drill-ground, so the bullocks, down to the youngest and greenest steer, straightened themselves together when "stand up, Tiger; get on, Snowy" came from the stentorian lips in the voice of a master.

The past bullock driver never seemed to walk up and down his team incessantly like the amateur, but ever and anon appeared to be in the very place he was wanted, as if by magic. Now at point straightening up a laggard, then suddenly back at the pole in time to induce the polers to give an extra heave at a rocky pinch. And his whip never kept up a noisy accompaniment, to the progress of the team, but occasionally, when needful, was heard like a report of thunder as it came down on some unfortunate animal's rump.

Bullocks can be the most aggravating animals that ever saw service under man when they find out, as they quickly do, that their driver is not an adept at the art. They are not of a highly nervous disposition, like horses, who can be quickly maddened by a brutal or incompetent driver, but are slow and deliberate in doing exactly the opposite to what he wishes them to do, soon reducing the irascible driver to a state of foaming idiocy, while they munch the cud and gaze kindly and curiously at him with benevolent eyes. A man must have served a long apprenticeship to bullock-driving (commonly called bull-punching) before he fully appreciates the extreme limit of insanity to which the finished perversity of even the best team can reduce a man.

Bullock-drivers have assisted in the exploration of much of the inland country of eastern and south-eastern Australia. Mitchell was always accompanied by several teams and on one occasion, during his first trip, the drivers he left in camp when near the Gwydir were murdered by the blacks — not by any means the first or last victims that these men have offered up on the altar of pioneering.

Another case was when M'Kinlay took a bullock dray with him in search of Burke and Wills. On learning their fate, however, he continued his exploration, and the driver drove the dray across the continent. He was working up



Bullock team, Eden. C 1935. Photograph by Harold Cazneau. nla.obj-140229234

## **'Recollections' – Nothing is Changing...For Now**

The challenges of producing *Recollections* magazine were discussed at length at the recent Annual General Meeting of the South Coast History Society, and it was decided that – at least in the immediate future – no changes would be made to the frequency it is issued or the ways it is published (in both electronic and print formats).

It was acknowledged, however, that the Society is faced with two major, ongoing challenges in producing *Recollections*:

- The vast majority of readers, whilst apparently really appreciating the magazine, are contributing nothing towards to the cost of producing it. That's currently \$26,000 per year - which the Society's volunteers somehow have to raise every year for *Recollections* to continue to be produced. And that is a MAJOR ongoing challenge for the Society, especially as grants to community organisations will very rarely fund core- or ongoing-activities such as, in our case, producing *Recollections*. So again we're appealing to ALL readers (i.e. YOU) to contribute something (however modest, however generous) to help ensure *Recollections* can continue to be issued regularly. Details of how you can do so are on page 4.
- Researching and writing four or five or six major articles, usually totalling some 12,000 words, every two months is a VERY big ask – a big ask that invariably ends up at the door of our volunteer (and, therefore, part time) Editor. The job is also increasingly becoming more demanding as all the 'obvious' and 'easy' topics progressively find their way into the magazine – so we're always thrilled when we receive articles from contributors (if only there were more of them!), or even just ideas or tips about things that might be included. After all, if you find a local history story to be of interest, it's likely that other readers of *Recollections* will too...and we'll certainly be happy to share it!

The bottom line is that – providing enough financial support is forthcoming and sufficient interesting stories are received – 20-page *Recollections* magazines will continue to be produced every second month in both electronic and print formats. So, please enjoy this issue, and you can now look forward to our next (December) issue.

north for many years afterwards, and was known in the Flinders and Burdekin districts as Overland Ned.

Central Australia has not been so much the hunting ground of the bullock-drivers, although they did yeoman's service during the construction of the overland telegraph

line, but long, dry stages are fatal to the use of bullock teams on account of the slowness with which they travel. "Slow and sure" is pre-eminently the motto of the bullock-driver.

In Western Australia the bullock dray was never commonly so much in use as in Eastern Australia. Horse



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teams driven in single file, like an elongated tandem, traversed the sandy roads, and twisted their tortuous way through the scrubs. Feed had to be carried for the horses, and this was impossible for bullocks, and the watering places were often awkward and difficult of approach; therefore the familiar sight of bullock team and driver was never so common on the roads of Western Australia as it used to be in this State, Victoria and Queensland, who both claim New South Wales as their mother, were equally devoted to the use of the bullock dray, and ranked some fine knights of the green-hide whip amongst their sons. They were pioneers of the first order were the old-time bullock-drivers; drought or flood, settled or unsettled country, it was all the same — they went steadily on, self-relying and independent — the very stuff for the making of a nation.

Whether they had to toil over a range or across an endless plain, to force their way through thick scrub or wade through a treacherous morass, and at times to change the bullock whip for the carbine and shotgun and defend their lives from the natives, it was all the same — the work was done, and well done, as witness a reclaimed Australia.

Of course, it was not long before the old-fashioned dray gave place on long journeys to the wagon, and these required longer teams and more skilful driving; but then they carried a larger amount of loading, and the long journey was altogether more worth the money. And now all must give way to a trip to the nearest railway station.

The bullock-driver led an independent, free, and healthy life. If his team was his own he did not work for wages, but contracted for the carriage of the goods, and therefore called no man master. Or if he owned up to a superintendent over his affairs, it was that indefinable individual, the clerk of the weather. Sometimes he had a taste for horseflesh, and had a nag he rather fancied, and carried a bit of corn for him, and was always ready to take a wager and run him for a pound or two when he spelled for a few days at a country township, and could find anyone of a like sporting turn with a horse to oblige him.

And at night, tired with his day's work, he laid himself down on his stretcher, rigged up at either end on the spokes of the wheels; he slept the sleep of the just. A little distance off the bullock bells rang out their persistent *boom, boom*, telling of the succulent feed the bullocks were revelling in; that steady and soothing sound — the distant beat of the bull-frog bell — no more charming lullaby can be heard by a wearied teamster.

In the morning, he rises before the stars grow dim, and cooks a substantial breakfast, while his mate and offsider is away on the old night-horse to round up the bullocks. Then, after breakfast, yoke up and away, and break the back of the day's journey before the sun gets hot.

This is the rosy side of what the teamster's existence used to be in fine weather, when the roads were unfenced, and no man begrudged another man a bite of grass or a mouthful


of water.

The offside bullock-driver, as the teamster's assistant or understudy was usually known, was generally a decided character in his way. He was supposed to have charge of the bullocks when they were unyoked, act as bullock watchman during the night, and be always on the alert during the day. The duty of bullock watchman did not, as the name seemed to imply, consist in actually watching the bullocks all night; but to listen to the direction of the bell every time he should happen to wake.

If they were rambling too far away, or walking instead of feeding quietly, which the sound of the bells would at once betray to a practised ear, it was his duty to take the night horse, a quiet old stager tethered close by, and go and turn them back and steady them down.

In manner and bearing the offsider was, as a rule, more bullocky in appearance and talk than the original. Every trick and manner of the teamster he would copy, inadvertently perhaps, but unmistakably. If the teamster swore any particular and fancy oath, he would always use the same; if he was a sporting man, the offsider was still more sporting; if quarrelsome, why, the offsider was always ready to fight. He was loyal to his colours, and if you touched the team you touched him.

The bullock whip is an article of chastisement and persuasion that has remained unaltered throughout succeeding generations. The stockwhip has undergone many alterations of taste and fashion; long whips with short handles, and short whips with long handles, eight strands and upwards, from the redoubtable old gully raker to the exaggerated thong affixed to a hunting crop; but the bullock whip still remains the same. The plain, sturdy old whip of green hide is made with four strands and affixed to a well-chosen whip-stick picked carefully from whatever is the favourite wood in use in the district. This varies greatly. Ti-tree sticks are very popular, and in the north of Queensland a light scrub locally known as myrtle is used very often; on the lower Murray a particular scrub is known as whip-stick scrub. Be it whatever the user chooses, it must be nearly 9ft. in length, tough and flexible, requiring no trimming, the natural tapering growth of the stick selected meeting all the requirements of shape and form. With a good falling whip bent on, the bullock whip forms an irresistible weapon.

I feel fearful to enter upon the subject of what a man can or cannot do with a bullock whip; it is so surrounded with legend and romance. Although on long trips a bullock driver often rides a horse when driving, whenever a ticklish part has to be negotiated he always works on foot. It is all very well along the level bush road to drive with the voice and the aid of a carelessly-flung whip, but when real driving has to be done and the whip used properly, then the luxurious saddle must be discarded. 

—From *The Sydney Wool and Stock Journal*, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1916

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We're a volunteer-based, community-based organisation, so are totally reliant on your support.

- ✓ **CONTRIBUTE** to the costs of producing Recollections. Phone 0448 160 852 with your Visa or MasterCard details and we'll charge your card, or send your cheque to South Coast History Society, 90 Whitby Wilson Road, Quaama NSW 2550, or transfer your donation to BSB 633 000 Account 158877472 (but please also advise us YOU have done so). (More hints on page 6)

One of the significant events in Araluen, highlighted on signage along the town's new History Trail (see *Recollections* 46), was the 'Pick Handle Election'. We were intrigued, so did some digging:

## The 1869 'Pick Handle Election'

by Robert Willson, 2008. Accessed via Gale Literature Resource Centre.

On Polling Day December 14<sup>th</sup> 1869, in the mining boom town of Araluen there were ominous signs that there was going to be trouble. It marked the beginning of two days of rioting when the mob took over the town and the democratic process was reduced to a farce.

In 1869 the population of the beautiful valley was estimated at 3,600 whites and 350 Chinese. Self-government had been granted to NSW only thirteen years earlier and the miners of the Araluen valley took their politics seriously.

There were three candidates standing for election. Michael Kelly, an Irish storekeeper, was the candidate representing the miners' interests. Edward Grenville was a Sydney publisher who never went to Araluen, but represented the squatters' interests. As well there was Dr. George Underwood Alley, a medical practitioner in Araluen.

On polling day you could vote at the courthouse if your name began with A to K and you could go down to Elliott's pub and vote if you were in the L to Z half of the alphabet.

As usual several police officers, under the command of Senior Sergeant Martin Brennan were stationed to keep order. Brennan was a most unusual policeman, tough and courageous. But polling day in Araluen in 1869 tested his resources to the limit.

By 9 am on that hot summer day, the returning officers and the scrutineers had taken their seats and the poll was declared open. A four-horse coach loaded with supporters

of Mr. Grenville, the squatters' candidate, arrived to vote. Load after load of Mr. Kelly's supporters pulled up in every kind of vehicle. By 10 am there was a vast crowd packed around the courthouse and the approach to it.

Mr. Downer, a newspaper proprietor from Braidwood later described to a Parliamentary inquiry what happened. He recalled that those who came to vote for Kelly found that the crowd opened up and let them through. But those who expressed support for Grenville or Alley did so at the cost of torn clothing and being shoved off the verandah and kicked and trampled. Brennan and his men fought desperately to keep the path open for voters to enter the courthouse but the mob was too much for them. After midday, when the miners traditionally knocked off work, the mob grew even larger and the mood uglier. Brennan was heard to shout to some voters "you'd better go round the back, you cannot get in at the front." But those attempting to climb the back fence to the courthouse were pulled down and chased off.

In the course of the day the polling place at the pub was closed and shifted to the courthouse, presumably to enable the police to keep together, but the riot only intensified. Mr Downer frantically telegraphed to Mr Orridge, the superintendent of police at Braidwood, for reinforcements. But Orridge could send only two mounted troopers because polling was going on in other places, including Braidwood itself, and he could spare no more men. When the extra men

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arrived, some hours later, they were hooted, spat upon and chased away.

Dr. George Alley, one of the candidates was present throughout the days of the riot. He saw Sergeant Brennan attempt to escort Mr. Johnson of the London Tavern pub at Araluen, to cast his vote at the courthouse. They never made it. Sergeant Brennan drew his revolver. His arm was pushed up in the crush of men around him and he fired in the air, probably by accident. The report of his weapon was hardly heard above the din.

Another voter named Leach rushed in with his clothes torn with a mark on his side where he had been struck with a pick handle. George Alley caught a glimpse of Brennan speaking to a man named Maloney about the manner in which the party were conducting themselves. In reply Maloney was seen to tuck up his sleeves and shout: 'By the grace of God and our fists we shall get our rights!'

As the afternoon of the first day drew on, Mr Brennan in charge of the L to Z part of the voting, decided to close the poll because it had become a farce. A bitter dispute broke out among the officials because the other half of A to K voters, under Mr MacDonagh's care continued until 4 pm. When it was finally closed and the votes counted showing Kelly in front, the mob dispersed for the night.

Early next morning December 15, the district returning officer, Mr. Bunn, and a strong force of over twenty mounted police troopers arrived from Braidwood. The appearance of Mr. Bunn did nothing to quieten the feelings of Araluen. He was a prominent local squatter and had presided at previous elections in the district in 1864. The Irish miners at Araluen were sure that he used various loopholes to make certain that their candidate would not be returned. Word spread quickly among the miners that Bunn was back and again they began massing, armed with pick handles and shovels.

In spite of the presence of so many police they appeared able to do little to uphold the democratic election. Dr. Alley was disgusted and stated that the police were walking up and down airing themselves but doing nothing.

Those not voting for Kelly were stopped at the edge of town or by miners hiding in the 'tips' – heaps of mine tailings which dotted the landscape. Suddenly marching six abreast, and all armed with pick handles

and shovels, the miners marched through the main street and vanished at the other end. Many people appeared to take the hint. As the second day wore on hardly anyone appeared to vote. At four o'clock the poll was closed and votes were counted. Mr. Kelly was declared the winner. As the Braidwood newspaper asked in disgust: 'How could it be otherwise when no one else had a chance to vote except at the risk of his life?'

Araluen was not the only example of electoral intimidation in the rip-roaring days of colonial democracy, but it was certainly one of the most violent. There were a number of factors involved in the affair. One was that the feeling that the candidate put up by the squatters, Edward Grenville, was not a local man. How could he possibly know the problems of the mining community? There was a measure of sectarian feeling, the Irish Catholics fighting the Scottish and English Protestants.

But the events of 1869 were so outrageous that the Government was forced to act. After hearing evidence from a number of eyewitnesses, a parliamentary inquiry concluded that Kelly should have never been elected. He was disqualified and Grenville was then declared the new member. Grenville represented the seat he never visited for more than ten years. He was said to be the dullest speaker in the Assembly.

Today the village of Araluen is a pleasant drive from Canberra. Under the peaceful sun the peach trees ripen their fruit and it is a marvellous spot for a picnic. But with a little imagination and the official records of the time, one can see the village when the mob ruled and the pick handle was the symbol of political power. **R**



The Mail Coach at Araluen Post Office

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## Alexandra Seddon

'One person can make a difference' is a quote that has been attributed to many, including John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa and Albert Schweitzer.

And if this saying appropriately describes any one person from the NSW South Coast, then Alexandra Seddon surely must be that individual.

Alexandra is a wildlife carer who, over several decades, acquired a number of significant South Coast properties that she transformed into conservation areas and then handed back to the local community. Her motivation for purchasing these properties was entirely driven by her love of and regard for Australian fauna.

Alexandra's links with the South Coast began in January 1975 when she, her brother Peter, and her then-husband Nicholas, a lawyer from Canberra, purchased a 110-hectare cattle farm near Candelo called Cowsnest.

It was intended to be a farm for Peter, a place where Alexandra could breed, raise and ultimately sell 'quiet Jersey house cows', and a retreat for Nicholas.

However, inspired by Alexandra's fascination with the Kibbutzim concept of labour being exchanged for lodgings, it rapidly became a communal farm that primarily attracted local unemployed people and those who were then on the margins of society, including punks, gays, reformed drug addicts, those who had been abused, and those recently released from prison.

Up to 30 people reside at Cowsnest at any time. Cowsnest's invitation is simple: 'come for a week, see how it goes'. And there are only four rules: 'clean up after yourself, return tools and equipment, take responsibility for any tasks you take on, and keep communicating'.

A variety of artists and artisans were particularly attracted to the alternative, communal lifestyle at Cowsnest, and the Candelo Arts Society ('founded by community, powered by community, part of the lifeblood of our community') developed in 1986 largely out of the many creative arts that members of the Cowsnest community were practicing – music, dance, theatre, writing, the visual arts.

Caring for native wildlife became a major focus at the farm and, over time, a 23-hectare feral animal-proof wildlife sanctuary was established on the property as a halfway house for injured and orphaned animals prior to their release. It is used by around ten wildlife organisations.

Then, in 1997 Alexandra purchased six hectares of swampland on the lower side of Bullara Street, Pambula, to conserve its bird habitat. She named it the Waterbird Sanctuary and handed it to the Pambula Area Progress and Planning Association to manage. It was ultimately



to become the first section of what is now the 77-hectare Panboola Wetlands.

In 2001, Alexandra purchased a further 42 hectares of adjoining river flats which, along with the Waterbird Sanctuary, was managed for the next few years by a newly-formed Pambula Wetlands and Heritage Program committee. Two years after that, she gifted both parcels of land to a re-constituted, community-based Pambula Wetlands and Heritage Project Inc. organisation. Combining Alexandra's land with an adjoining vacant Crown Land Reserve which, up to 1997, had been the site of the Imlay Racing Club racecourse, then became a possibility...and a reality.

The Panboola Wetlands conservation area and sanctuary

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has developed into a very popular recreation area that now includes extensive walking and cycling tracks, viewing platforms, and picnic areas. 160 species of birds have been recorded in the area.

In 2001 Alexandra purchased more land – this time, nine hectares of flying-fox roosting and feeding area at Lochiel, west of Pambula. Here she set up the Batty Towers Flying-fox Sanctuary and Hospital to protect the flying-foxes of the region, and organised for the land become a declared conservation area.

In 2006, Alexandra became aware that an ailing 20-hectare Yellow Pinch Wildlife Park, 9-km north of Merimbula, was for sale. So, with money she had inherited from her mother and father, she purchased the property, renamed it Potoroo

Palace (there were actually no Potoroos on the property when it was acquired by Alexandra; 'palace' was chosen as a symbol of the excellent conditions that would await their arrival), made it a home 'that was as little like a zoo as possible' to 200 animals and 40 species, and opened it to the public as a native animal sanctuary and conservation and education centre. It, more-recently, legally became the property of a tax-deductible charity.

All three of these properties have been gifted to the public, saving them from further development. Today, Cowsnest is self-supporting and tax-deductible donations from the community provide most of the income needed to maintain Potoroo Palace. 

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## Bridget Johnston

Undoubtedly, there have been many exceptional teachers on the NSW South Coast. Bridget Johnston 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' because she remained the village's teacher.

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. 



# Irene King

**S**leeper cutting was physically an extremely hard job for men. And, therefore, it was not a vocation usually associated with the 'gentler sex,' 'the fairer sex'.

Irene King, however, was born a sleeper cutter, became a very successful sleeper cutter, and is reputed to be the only woman in N.S.W. to have held a sleeper cutter's licence.

Irene was born in 1905 in Gippsland, Victoria. Her Dad was a sleeper cutter.

In 1925 she married Alf King, a short man in stature (he was known locally as 'stumpy') and a World War I veteran who had been severely gassed on the Western Front. They remained in Gippsland for the next 13 years during which time Irene gave birth to three sons and ran the mail service between Nowa Nowa and Wairewa.

In 1936 the Kings relocated to Bega and both Alf and Irene were employed on the Taylor family property at nearby Tarraganda. They worked there for two years until the attraction of a rough life in a forest became overwhelming, and they moved to work in Tanja State Forest. The Taylor family gave Irene two Jersey cows as a parting gift so that her family could continue to have a fresh supply of milk.


Irene became a sleeper cutter in Tanja State Forest utilising the skills she had learned from the father and husband.

Alf King later became unable to work, so Irene – working as a sleeper cutter – became the breadwinner for the family. And she did everything expected of a sleeper cutter – she felled trees, cut the logs into billets (probably 8 foot [2.4 metre] lengths), then squared them with a broadaxe before snigging the finished sleepers (dragging them out of the bush, using a horse) so they could be transported to nearest wharf for shipment.

At one stage, Irene also had a small sideline business,

supplying charcoal to a blacksmith in Bega – which, of course, she had to make and also had to deliver.

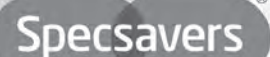
When Irene retired, she moved to Bermagui where she had land on which she could keep her Jersey cows.

Information taken from 'When the Chips are Down' by Robert Whiter. 



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# Montreal: Australia's Goldfield by the Sea

People were aware that gold could be found in the area surrounding Mt Dromedary (Gulaga), near Tilba Tilba, from the 1850s.

In 1852 the Rev. W. B. Clark found traces of alluvial gold in Dignams Creek. In 1860 gold was discovered on the slopes of Mt Dromedary and, in 1878, the Mt Dromedary Gold Mining Company was formed to mine reef gold on Mt Dromedary.

But the amount of gold being won was insufficient to ensure viable long-term operations, so the miners contracted H Williams, L Minnewether and two Hollingdale brothers to search for other gold deposits in the area. Their searches proved fruitless.

In 1880, a Canadian Henry Williams discovered alluvial gold shingle in a gully on the beach seven kilometres north of Bermagui and to the east of Mt Dromedary. On 17<sup>th</sup> September 1880 Williams and his partner L Minnewether registered a claim at Wagonga (now Narooma).

The news quickly reached Sydney. Ten days after the claim had been registered the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported:

*A great rush has set in at Wallaga Lake, Tilba Tilba, on a farm belonging to Mr Wintle [Jane Wintle's husband – see *Extraordinary Histories: Amazing Stories from the NSW South Coast, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*] and the adjacent land. 200 men are on the field. All the diggers are down from Dromedary. The sinking is four to ten feet deep. 7dwts [7/20<sup>th</sup> oz] to the dish on one claim and 4dwts [1/5<sup>th</sup> oz] on another. Gold has been traced one mile away. Two stores are on the ground and there is great excitement here.*

Four days later, the *Sydney Morning Herald* was again singing the praises of the newly-discovered goldfield:

*The news from the Bermagui rush is very encouraging. Kiss and Stack have got good gold and several other claims are doing well. Upwards of 200 men are at work and numbers continue to arrive. Constable Church returned from the rush today and considers the prospect of a permanent field so good that on his advice and other information, Mr Davis, Police Magistrate advises the Government to withdraw the land from selection [i.e. available to be granted to new settlers to occupy and work].*

The Bermagui gold rush was on!

The field had several attractions, apart from offering the prospect of possibly getting-rich-quick:

First, it was easy to reach. Unlike, for example, the Kiandra goldfield that required a trek of at least 117 miles up the mountains from Merimbula, those travelling to the Bermagui could simply catch a steamer from Sydney, be put ashore in Horseshoe Bay, Bermagui, and then walk just four or five miles to the diggings.

And, second, the gold was relatively accessible. It could be found on the beach or by digging down just a few feet along the 'terraces' between the beach and Wallaga Lake to a bed of coarse gravel where the alluvial gold could be found.

By 5<sup>th</sup> October 1880 (so just 2½ weeks after the first claim in the area had been registered) several wooden buildings had been erected and shopkeepers were at work. A Post Office opened six days later. By 21<sup>st</sup> October, the new diggings – named Montreal by the miners, apparently after Henry Williams who originally came from Montreal in Canada – had a population of around 2,000.

This was to be the area's peak population, because it soon became apparent that Montreal would not be an extraordinarily rich goldfield. But, for a time, the Montreal settlement had a bakery, a butcher, a chemist, a blacksmith, a police station, an undertaker and three hotels (named the 'Diggers' Retreat, the 'Wallaga Lake Inn, and the 'Diggers' Home').

In 1881 an application was made to the Department of Public Instruction for a school to be established at Montreal to cater to about 35 children. It did not open until May 1882 and, because miners and their families left the area soon thereafter, it closed in August 1883. The Montreal Post Office had closed the previous month.

It is estimated around 8,700oz of gold was taken from the Montreal Goldfields – so it was a reasonably lucrative goldfield, albeit for a very short time.

Today, surviving shafts that were dug by miners on the land between the beach and Wallaga Lake are the only reminders of Montreal's 1880s heyday. **R**

Sources: *The Montreal Gold Rush Bermagui 1880 – 1883* by Judi Hearn; Montreal Goldfields website.

Stories about Australian goldfields featured frequently in Australian newspapers during the 'gold rushes' era. Here's one from the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 15<sup>th</sup> September 1860 about getting from the coast to Australia's Goldfield in the Snow:

## NEW ROAD TO KIANDRA.

A few days since we noticed a neatly lithographed map, published in Melbourne, of the various routes to and from the Snowy River diggings by way of Merimbula and Twofold Bay. The map in question shows very distinctly the course taken by the two roads from these ports, both of which, owing to their following the ridges of the steep mountains westward of Twofold Bay, are necessarily circuitous; the two roads meet at Bibenluke, about half way to Kiandra.

The most important feature of the map is, however, its pointing out a new route, which is unquestionably the

shortest and most direct yet discovered from any part of the coast to the new diggings. The route referred to leads from Merimbula, and branching off from the present day road at the Wolumba Dairy, passes through Kamaruka, and crosses the foot of the Nimitibelle mountain, one of the great dividing range; thence it proceeds to Kiandra, leaving Cooma about ten miles to the right.

A person lately arrived at Merimbula on foot from Russell's in four days; he described the country to be, except at the Nimitibelle Mountain, generally very level and convenient for travelling, and gave it as his opinion that the



distance was not more than 105 miles, or 117 miles from Kiandra to Merimbula. The hills along this line are much less precipitous than those to the south, and beyond Nimitibelle the line crosses a series of gently undulating downs. The new route presents almost a straight line between Kiandra and Merimbula.

The residents in the intervening country appear fully alive to the directness of the route, and to the extensive traffic it will obtain when this fact and also the general evenness of the country are known.

A public meeting was lately held at Nimitibelle, at which it was agreed to raise a subscription towards getting a bridle track made thence to Merimbula, the residents being resolved to lose no time in opening the route. Contributions have also been made by proprietors of land in that neighbourhood, and the work is now in active progress. A dray road will no doubt be eventually constructed, but for the present it is proposed merely to provide for parties of diggers who constitute the bulk of the passengers to Kiandra.

Across the Maneroo Plains it is proposed to fix a succession of short white posts, a quarter of a mile distant from each other, for the purpose of indicating the road, and also to clear away the loose stones, so as to make a tolerable bridle track. These works will in the course of a month be sufficiently advanced to enable people to traverse safely the new route.

As a saving of about twenty-eight miles upon the present road from Merimbula, and of forty-four on that from Eden, will be effected, the opening of the new route will be a clear and well appreciated gain to the diggers, at the same time

that those at whose expense it is being constructed will derive ample compensation from the stream of traffic which it will attract, as a very short period will suffice to test the comparative shortness, or other advantages of the several routes.

Unlike most of the roads to Kiandra, the country along the new line is, to within eight miles of Merimbula, well grassed, so that the distance can, as soon as a road is made, be traversed by bullock teams, without carrying a supply of fodder; and, at Merimbula there are large accommodation paddocks. It is intended next month to establish at Merimbula a regular site of horses with saddles and other requirements, immediately on the arrival of every steamer from Melbourne or Sydney.

The map above referred to is published in Melbourne, probably in anticipation of the enterprise of the Victorians being developed upon the new route, but it is perhaps more calculated to be of value in Sydney, as at present the steam communication of Merimbula is only with Sydney, the port of Eden being as yet preferred by the Victorian speculators. It should not be overlooked, however, that travellers from Eden will save at least twenty-five miles by the new route. Should this prove to be the best and most frequented road between the seaboard and Kiandra, as not a single penny of public money is being spent upon it, its construction will render somewhat less applicable the constantly repeated taunt, that we are quietly allowing our neighbours to bring all the enterprise to, and to reap all the advantages from, the new diggings. **R**



## **New Montreal Goldfield Movie**

**A** new movie about Montreal Goldfield will be premiered at 6:30pm on Thursday October 10th at the Bermagui Country Club. An invitation is extended to the local community to attend this function.

The film has been produced by well-known local filmmaker Hiromi Matsuoka and has been in production for over a year. It has been financed with a grant from Create NSW.

The film is primarily intended to be shown to visitors (especially those arriving on bus tours) to Montreal Goldfield who are unable to join the guided walk of the Goldfield, so that they will also leave with a full appreciation of the history of this only goldfield in Australia that extends into the sea. **R**



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# Palmer's Mystery Hikes

by Paul Ashton

Sometimes people just trip over a history. Or bits of it. They bump into stories accidentally. I 'bumped into' this fabulous small book (a 32-page paperback booklet) recently at a mini-conference organised by Family History ACT.

Paul Ashton, Adjunct Professor of History at the University of Technology Sydney, gave a talk there about (among other things) different ways that history can be used, and he mentioned the first of a series of creative non-fiction books he has written, pitched at 6 to 16 year olds and aimed at encouraging their interest in history.

This particular book is about Palmer's Mystery Hikes – a series of bushwalks that were organised in 1932 by F.J. Palmer and Sons' men's and boys' department store of Park Street, Sydney, to promote their sales of hiking apparel. One of these walks attracted over 8,000 people!

I'd never previously heard about these incredibly successful Palmer's Mystery Hikes (but was immediately intrigued!), and neither had Paul Ashton until his father

and niece gave him a small photograph album that someone had put together in 1932 that they had rescued from a pile of old rubbish awaiting collection in a council clean up in Sydney.

One photograph depicted a large group of people, somewhere, most of whom were paying attention to a speaker standing on a small stage that displayed a banner 'Palmer's Mystery Hike'. This for Paul – naturally! – demanded investigation and, ultimately, resulted in him writing this book.

The book is the story of a fictitious Thomas finding an old photograph album in a pile of rubbish and how the photograph prompted him to research Palmer's Mystery Hikes by doing an internet search and then utilising Trove to trawl through newspaper reports of their walks and similar 'mystery hikes' organised elsewhere in Australia – so, essentially, it's a story mirroring Paul's research and utilising his findings.

It's a great little book. It retails for \$18.95.

So, what exactly was the story of 'Palmer's

Mystery Hikes'?

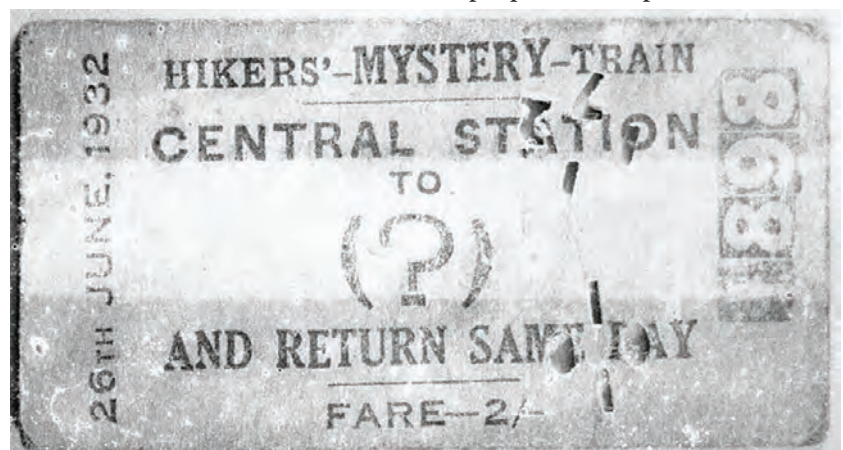
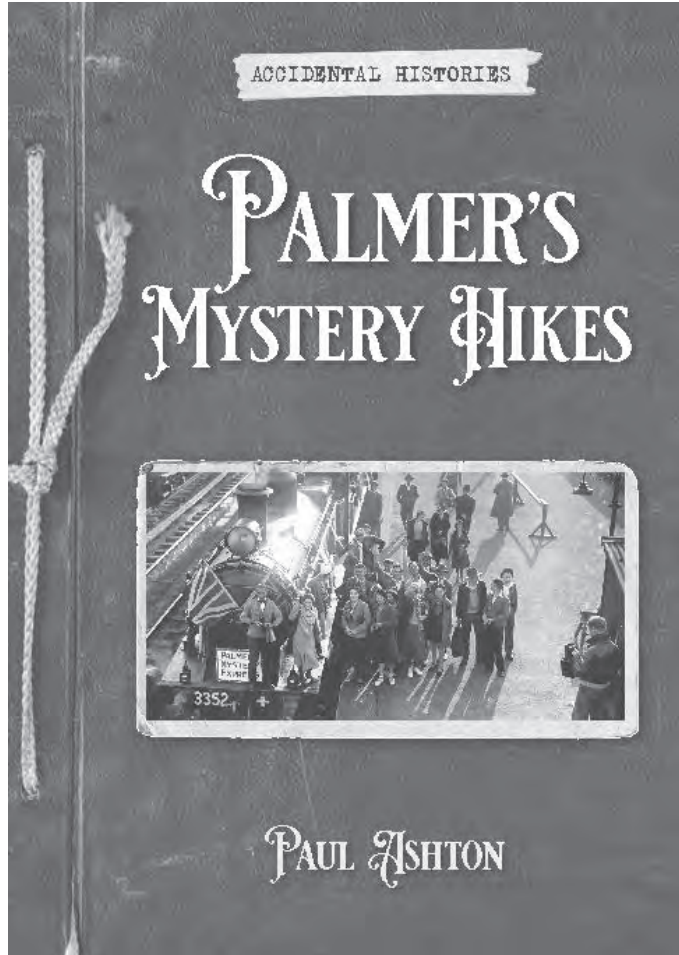
In 1932 F.J. Palmer & Sons established a hiking club to promote the sales of their hiking apparel. Members could buy a 'mystery' ticket from New South Wales Railways,

turn up at Central Station on a Sunday morning, and be taken by special 'mystery express' train to an unknown destination. From there they hiked for about ten miles to another station before catching the train back to Sydney. There were five hikes. Paul has been able to uncover some details about the first four of these:

By Sunday 26th June 1932, 1,300 tickets had been sold for the first mystery hike and the railways provided three steam trains to take the walkers to the 'mysterious destination' that turned out to be Waterfall railway station. From there the crowd walked to Audley River.

3,000 people bought tickets for Palmer's second hike on Sunday 10th July. On this occasion the railways provided four trains which were not enough, and 200

participants ended up catching a regular train to Valley Heights. From there the group walked along a bush track to Penrith. 'Orders were given that the hikers were not to pick ferns, wattle blossom or flowers. There were so many people. If they had all taken a little bit of flora there would have been none left! 200 people ended up with blisters on



A ticket for the first Palmer's Mystery Hike on 26th June 1932 at the height of the Great Depression. The 2/- fare then would be the equivalent of more than \$20 today.



their feet, keeping ambulance men busy!!

The third mystery hike attracted 8,000 people! Eleven special trains, each powered by two steam engines, and collectively pulling 144 carriages left Central between 8.30am and 9.30am and headed to Cowan Station. The hikers then basically followed the old highway down to Hawkesbury River where they had lunch and an outdoor

Church service was conducted. The trains arrived back at Central between 5pm and 7.25pm.

The fourth hike on Sunday 7th August attracted only (only!) 3,000 participants (although one newspaper report says it was 13,000). It started from Stanwell Park where a young couple were married on the council reserve before adjourning to the council ranger's cottage with 30 of their relatives for a wedding breakfast!

NSW Railways made £3,000 (\$700,000 in today's money) from Palmer's Mystery Hikes.

Similar 'mystery hikes' were organised around the same time in Hobart, Newcastle and Adelaide. However, significant criticism of NSW Railways resulted from them 'desecrating the Sabbath by running 'mystery hike' trains on Sundays' and for it being 'indecent for the railways to invite young people to take part in organised gatherings on Sundays', so in Adelaide – the 'City of Churches' – mystery hikes were held on Saturdays. **R**



3,000 hikers arrive at Valley Heights Railway Station for the second Palmer's Mystery Hike

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## South Coast Historic Buildings

**H**istory is evident everywhere. And many interesting, heritage listed, historic buildings can be found throughout the NSW South Coast.

So, where to start? With this somewhat random selection:

**T**he **Crown and Anchor Inn** was the first substantial building in Eden (previously only slab and bark huts had been erected) and today is the oldest

standing building in Eden. It is an elegant Regency building.

It was built in the mid-1840s by William Hirst. The Crown & Anchor's first license for the sale of 'Fermented and Spirituous Liquors' was issued to James Rixon in March 1845, and he secured ownership of the building from William and George Hirst in 1848 after the Hirst brothers became bankrupt.



Eden: The Crown and Anchor Inn. 239 Imlay Street

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James Rixon and his wife Elizabeth continued to operate the Inn until 1861, after which they moved to Bega to take over the running of the Family Hotel (now the Bega Pioneers' Museum). The Inn gained a reputation for providing 'as good accommodation as the best hotel Sydney can boast of' and the Rixon's themselves were renowned for their local benevolence. They and the Inn certainly benefitted from the start of the Kiandra goldrush in late 1859 and, recognising

the opportunities this presented, Rixon moved quickly to improve the facilities undertaking 'extensive additions to his hostelry'.

The Crown & Anchor Inn's liquor licence was cancelled in mid-1865. In 1868 it was briefly used as the town's Telegraph Office, then became a private residence. Today it operates as a bed & breakfast establishment.

### **PAMBULA: Toad Hall, 55 Toalla Street**

The building now known as Toad Hall is one of the most recognisable heritage structures in Pambula. It has been used over the years as a post and telegraph office, general store, saddlery, accommodation house, fisheries inspector's office, mining warden's office, and gift shop.

The original single storey portion of the building was erected around 1880 for John Behl, an immigrant from Bavaria who became the licensee of Pambula's Forest Oak Inn. He was described as 'an enterprising townsman' and was responsible for erecting a number of other notable buildings in the town including the Commercial Hotel and

the Pambula branch of the AJS bank. He also donated the land on which the School of Arts was erected.

Behl provided the building to the telegraph department rent free for two years to ensure a telegraph office would be established in the township.

The main two-storey section of the building was not erected until about 1884, from which time the building became known as Behl's Two Storey.

The building received its present name – Toad Hall – in the 1970s from its then-owner whose two home towns had been Frog's Hollow and Rocky Hall.



## MERIMBULA: Mitchies Jetty, Fishpen Road

In the early 1920s a fisherman named Ernie Wills fished for salmon in Merimbula Bay. He would row his wooden boat out over Merimbula Bar, set his net around a school of salmon, then haul the fully laden net behind the boat back to a 'pen' where the salmon would await transport to Melbourne. He would row out to sea on the outgoing tide and complete the netting of the catch in time to take advantage of the incoming tide.

Downstream and closer to the entrance to the lake was a small jetty and wooden hut which was built to house Ernie's fishing gear and nets.

In the late 1920s a fisherman by the name of Don Mitchelson from Lakes Entrance arrived in Merimbula, and fished for a time with Ernie. He also courted and married Ernie's sister-in-law, Edna Dunn. They had two children,

Elizabeth (Betty) and Donny. The Dunn family originally owned the large area of land now occupied by South Haven & Tween Waters Caravan Parks. Hence the street names: Dunn's Lane and Elizabeth Street.

Don bought Ernie's boats some time later, and set up his own fishing business. He had two 'pens' near the entrance to the lake plus the original one in the corner at the southern end of the causeway. It is said that if you wanted to catch a fish from the pen, Don would supply the line and charge sixpence for each fish caught.

In the 1940s a new shed and jetty were built on the Fishpen site nearer the entrance and Don continued to fish for salmon and blackfish.

In 1978 Don (affectionately known as 'Mitchie' and then aged 72) suffered a heart attack whilst fishing. His body was found in his boat.

Mitchies colourful Jetty and Shed is today one of the most photographed locations on the NSW South Coast.



## WOLUMLA: South Wolumla Butter Factory, 410 South Wolumla Road

Dairying has been the major industry in the region virtually since the first European settlers arrived in the 1830s. Initially, each farmer independently organized his own production, transport and marketing.

Dairy co-operatives emerged in the 1890s, the first locally being a butter co-operative at Wolumla in 1893. (The Bega Co-operative Creamery Company started production seven years later and in 1924 a new butter factory was erected on the present Bega Cheese site at North Bega.) These serviced local areas. At one time there were 49 cheese factories and 8 butter factories operating in the Bega valley and its

surrounds – all subsequently closing and their milk supplies having been diverted direct to the much larger Bega Cheese factory. (The current Tilba Cheese factory commenced production in 2013 in the old ABC Co-operative Cheese Factory building in Central Tilba – ABC Cheese having ceased production in 1981.)

A group of early 20<sup>th</sup> century dairy buildings associated with the South Wolumla Butter factory have survived and now are an attractive and historically-linked group of buildings.

A manager's house once stood below the factory itself, but it was destroyed in a fire in 2013. The cottages on the other side of the road are assumed to have been provided to the cheese and butter makers and to other staff.





South Wolumla Butter Factory

### **BEMBOKA: Hobbs Store and Cottage, Snowy Mountains Highway**

**H**obbs Store is significant because it was one of Bemboka's major businesses, serving travellers along the main road from Nimmitabel to Bega, and because its three buildings (the shop, a cottage and a storage shed) are an important part of Bemboka's historic streetscape.

The store was built and then operated as a general store by Walter Curry Allen from 1889 to 1912. Then Michael and Emily Wall ran it from 1912-19, as did L.R. Hurrell in 1919-20. Nicholas H. Hobbs and Lance Redgrave acquired the business in 1920 before Redgrave sold his share to Hobbs in 1923.

Hobbs capitalized on Bemboka's strategic location and by the end of the 1920s had installed 8 petrol bowsers. Prior to this, petrol was poured into cars from 4-gallon drums. However, electricity did not reach Bemboka until the early

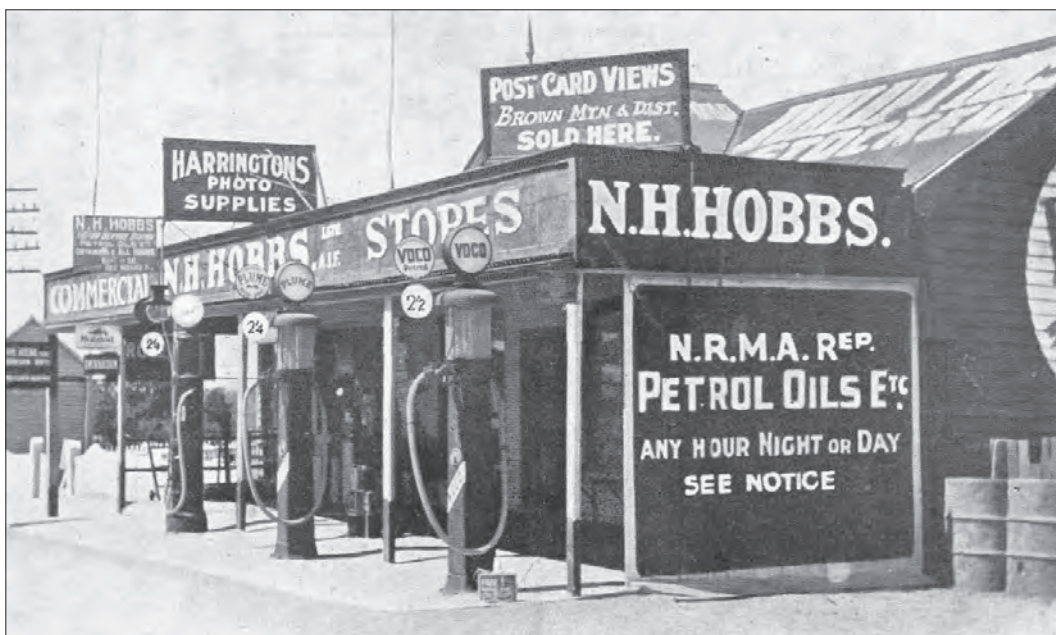
1940s so, up until then, the pumps were hand-operated and the petrol was transported from the wharf in Tathra in 44-gallon drums and was decanted into a 500-gallon underground tank.

In the mid-1930s cricket test matches between England and Australia would be broadcast over loud speakers on Hobbs' verandah, attracting large Saturday night crowds.

The store served the local community and travellers of more than 80 years, until its last owner, Jack Hobbs, retired in 1990.

The adjacent cottage, which dates from 1890, is understood to have originally been the home of a dressmaker Mrs O'Neill, before being used as the residence of several of the store owners.

The shed appears to have been constructed in the late 19th or early 20th century to further serve the local community and/or possibly passing trade and is presumed to have been associated with the main store.



## TATHRA: 'Illawarra House', 15-17 Bega Street

This attractive, late Victorian style residence exemplifies the development of Tathra township following the construction of a wharf on Tathra Headland in the 1860s. Coastal shipping was then able to call into Tathra and provide an easier and faster shipping service from the fertile Bega Valley to Sydney and other markets.

'Illawarra House' was erected on 1½ acres of land owned by Thomas Spence who also owned a tannery in Bega. The builder was R.W. Thatcher, Bega's most significant and prolific builder. It was completed circa 1906, at a time when Tathra had fewer than 80 residents, but in a period when

Tathra township was developing. The town's Post Office had opened in 1880 and a telegraph line from Bega to Tathra was put through in 1897.

Around 1920 'Illawarra House' was leased to the local agent of the Illawarra Steam Navigation Company who managed that company's business across the Bega Valley. Later it became a private residence and in the late 1970s was converted into a restaurant when the closed-in front verandah was probably added.

The associated brick stables at the rear (currently being refurbished and repurposed) are assumed to have also been built c 1906 to house the carriage and the tack for a horse that provided transport in the days before the advent of motor vehicles.



We'll continue our journey north, looking at more historically-important South Coast buildings, in the December issue of *Recollections*.

And what South Coast historically-important buildings have grabbed your attention? Please let us know what other buildings we should feature in *Recollections*.

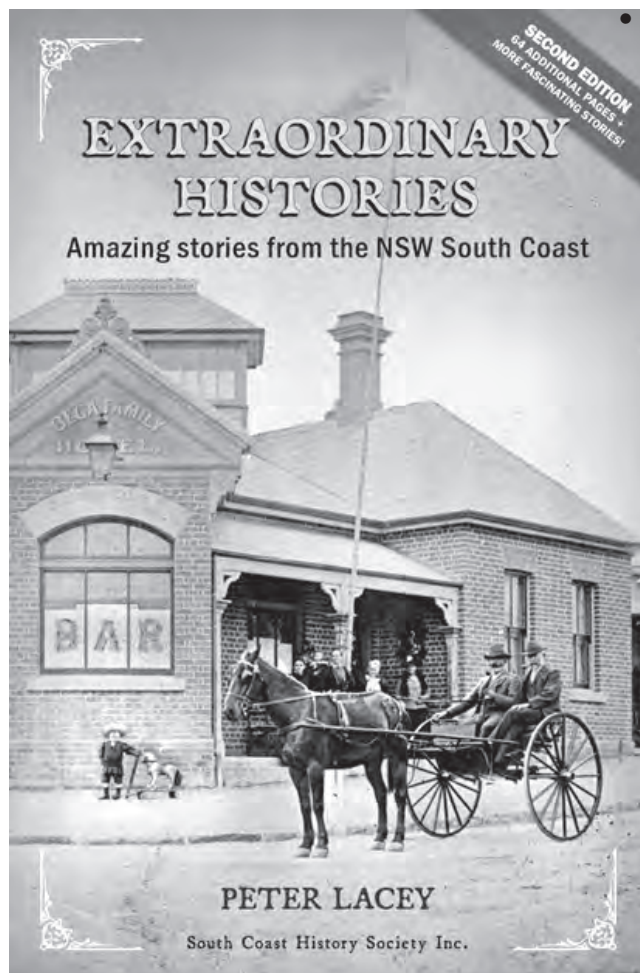
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