

South Coast History Society Inc.

Recollections

Issue 11, December 2018

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S.S. 'Cobargo' at Tathra Wharf, c. 1915. State Library of NSW FL1700228. See story page 12.

Tathra Wharf is historically significant because it is the sole surviving sea wharf on the east coast of Australia. It has been chosen to be one of 101 objects of historic or heritage significance from the Bega Valley Shire in a community project co-ordinated by South Coast History Society and assisted by the NSW Government through the Heritage Near Me program.



**Inside
this
issue**

Highlighting History– page 2
Flotsam and Jetsam– page 2
We'll Wait for a Pig– page 3
More Flotsam and Jetsam– page 11
101 Objects– page 12 **Which 101 Objects**– Page 15

Tathra Wharf– page 12
Mumbulla Mountain– page 13
Guboo (Ted) Thomas–_page 14
Steam Australia– page 17
How Healthy is Local History– page 19

THE FIRST WORD**History to be Highlighted**

We're delighted to announce that the South Coast History Society has received a \$95,000 grant from Heritage Near Me (part of the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage) to select, then research and then publicise 101 objects from the Bega Valley Shire that epitomize or represent the history and the heritage of the Shire.

South Coast History Society is continually looking for new ways to share the fascinating and important history of the NSW South Coast...and is continually seeking funding to allow us to do this!


We'd probably need \$1,000,000 or more to do everything we'd like to do: employ a full-time 'South Coast Historian-in-Residence' for 12 months; start digitizing existing [and often – sadly – rapidly disappearing] histories of the NSW South Coast; get some history-related signage into Bega [this town's fascinating, largely intact streetscapes – incredibly! – have absolutely no explanatory signage], and much more.

So, having just started out by publishing 'Recollections' and organising all-day seminars and our regular 'Talking History' morning teas, we now see this 101 Objects project as the next step forward (albeit a giant step forward!) in an on-going quest to significantly enhance the standing of our local history throughout our local community.

We're currently seeking YOUR suggestions

about objects that should be added to the primary list of 101 history/heritage objects – and you can contribute by emailing these to southcoasthistory@yahoo.com. We'll be featuring some of the items in 'Recollections' (and, as a start, in this issue we have included details about a couple of the first nominations to have made the list), we'll probably be issuing several special publications featuring all of the objects, and heaps of information about all the objects will ultimately be freely available via the internet and through a special App. If you would like us to keep you regularly updated on progress with this important project, simply email 'Update me on 101 Objects' to southcoasthistory@yahoo.com.

Our regular 'Talking History' morning teas are always extremely interesting and, because the Society had recently celebrated its second birthday, we took the opportunity at the last 'Talking History' morning to reflect on the current state of our local history. A particularly spirited discussion ensued – and we were asked by those present to include some of the topics discussed at that meeting in this issue of 'Recollections'. So we've done just that – as you'll discover when you turn to page 19.

Enjoy the reading...and enjoy what our fascinating local history has to offer! 

Flotsam & Jetsam

A lantern was normally placed on one of the outer breast piles of the wharf at Tathra to guide the ship's approach. One night it was removed by someone on the wharf who needed a light to go to the toilet. The lamp, now on the top of the toilet, misled the master of the Cobargo and she narrowly avoided smashing into the wharf, being stopped just in the nick of time.



Bob Harrison had a rough introduction to coastal boats when, on his first trip to Tathra, he was told to load the pigs.

Having loaded about 125, he had set up a barrier to keep the porkers for'ard and out of the accommodation. His 'barrier' proved to be inadequate and during the night the pigs broke it down and had the free range of the ship. Poor Bob Harrison woke to find two large pigs asleep on his cabin floor – an interesting thought as pigs are large animals and 'south coast' cabins were very small.

On arrival at the Market Street wharf in Sydney, Harrison was wondering how to get the reluctant pigs ashore, until he found that Stan Miles had the answer – simply pour a drop of water

on each pig's tail from the ship's large enamel teapot full of hot water, and watch them go!



At Ulladulla the cargo shed was slightly higher than the wharf. This meant that the cargo could be placed on a track that ran down to the wharf, and it would arrive at the ship under the effect of gravity.

However, it required a horse to pull it back to the shed.

One day the cargo sling somehow got caught on the truck and lifted it so that it fell over the edge of the wharf into the harbor. Unfortunately, it took the poor horse with it. Looking over the edge, those on the wharf could see the horse put its head down and calmly set out to walk ashore, as the weight of the harness and the truck prevented it from swimming. With a dreadful sense of helplessness, they watched it continue until it drowned.



More on page 11

We'll Wait an Hour for a Pig, But Not One Minute for a Passenger

The Illawarra and South Coast Steam Navigation Company (ISN) ships provided the vital commercial link, and, for local settlers, the personal link from the south coast to Sydney and beyond from between 1858 until just after World War II. And its ships played a pivotal role in the development of the south coast.

The company was founded as a result of the amalgamation of three smaller shipping companies – the Kiama Steam Navigation Company, the Shoalhaven Steam Navigation Company and the General Steam Navigation Company (which itself was an amalgamation of the Illawarra Steam Packet Company and the Brisbane Water Steam Passenger Company) – that

had each been servicing parts of the NSW south coast but were all suffering from what had become a too-competitive marketplace.

So the ISN commenced business with at least four larger vessels from these companies, the 54-ton wooden paddle

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steamer *William the Fourth* (which was dubbed 'Puffing Billy' and was described by the *Illawarra Mercury* as 'an old flat-bottomed tub of uncertain speed ranging from two to six knots'), the 104-ton iron steamship *Kiama*, the 142-ton iron paddle steamer *Nora Creina*, and the 166-ton paddle steamer *Illawarra*. By today's standards, these were tiny vessels; in comparison [for those who can remember them!], the *Dee Why* and the *Curl Curl* – two iconic Manly ferries that operated on Sydney Harbour from 1928 until the 1950s – were both 799-ton vessels. In addition, the newly-formed ISN inherited a drogher (a small vessel used for transferring cargo between the shore and a larger seagoing ship), the *Nowra*.

The ISN immediately extended the services that had been provided by the three smaller companies by calling to more ports further down the coast. Ultimately the ISN was to develop a virtual monopoly of shipping on the

south coast, either through negotiating with or acquiring potential competitors. For example, in 1891 the Moruya Steam Navigation Company was established because of dissatisfaction with the ISN. It thrived, before being bought out by the ISN in 1905. And in 1905 the Shellharbour Steam Navigation Company was acquired by the ISN.

ISN's vessels visited every significant port between Sydney and the Victorian border: at various times these included Wollongong, Port Kembla, Shellharbour, Kiama, Gerringong, Berry, Nowra, Jerara, Huskinson, Ulladulla, Bawley Point, Pebbly Beach, Batemans Bay, Nelligan, Broulee, Moruya, Tuross Head, Potato Point, Narooma, Bermagui, Tathra, Merimbula and Eden.

And it was not until rail and then road started to provide significant transport alternatives to the area that the company experienced any real competition.

At various times both passengers and goods, including

THE ILLAWARRA STEAM NAVIGATION COMPANY

(from the Sydney Daily Telegraph, 27th May 1882)

The present Illawarra Steam Navigation Company was founded in 1859, but its real history dates very much further back.

As Sydney commenced rapidly to develop into the important city which it now is, the conclusion forced itself upon a good many minds that communication between it and the rich dairy and pasture lands in the Kiama district was very much a matter of time.

Let John Bull establish himself where he will, he likes to see a peace-offering from the dairy on the breakfast table. This want the Illawarra Company does its best to supply, although at the present time, the cry is in the city that dairy produce is almost at famine prices.

Very fortunate it is that Wollongong and Kiama are within such easy means of communication, and that the navigation of this part of the coast is generally safe. Notwithstanding, there are unpleasant reminders that accidents will occur. The company has lost the *Monaro* and the *John Penn*, and it was only the other day that the *Llewellyn*, with so skilful a navigator as Captain Amora in charge, came to grief.

Messrs. Edye Manning and Son were first to establish a regular trade between the metropolis and this portion of the south, and their venture was subsequently merged in the Kiama Steam Navigation Company, which, in its turn became the Illawarra Steam Navigation Company.

The Company's fleet consists of the

Illawarra, the *Kameruka*, the *Hunter*, the *Kiama*, and the *Allowrie*. The latter is a nearly new twin-screw steel vessel, and a sister ship to her, to be called the *Bega*, is now building for the Company in England. These changes and additions are rendered necessary by the increasing trade which is naturally springing up, along the coast. Passengers are yearly becoming more numerous, and they must be treated in the boats of a coasting company (as if they are in the) same position as the leviathan ocean-going steamers of the age.

The ports at which the Company's boats call are Wollongong, Kiama, Shoalhaven, Ulladulla, Clyde River, Bateman's Bay, Merimbula, Moruya, Tathra, Eden, and Bermagui. Besides the vessels that have been named there are three droghers for harbour and river services.

The cargoes consigned to the(se) ports consist principally of general merchandise, and the, to us, more interesting return cargo consists of wool (during the season), maize, potatoes, bark, livestock and both agricultural and dairy produce.

The company has one very great advantage in carrying on its trade. For steam purposes the Wollongong coal is considered to be quite equal, if not superior to that from Newcastle, and of course the vessels burn it only, the company having its own staiths [loading platforms] at its own wharf in the coal district.

The Illawarra Company can claim to have settled the great wharf storage question of the day for its constituents long ago. It is in an altogether different position to the owners and consignees of home and foreign-going vessels. It has its regular customers both at Sydney and at the outports, and there is a policy in treating them fairly.

At the wharf in Darling Harbour, there is excellent storage accommodation, for which no charge is made. Sometimes maize and goods that are not perishable are left in the stores an unconscionably long period, but the only step taken is to issue gentle reminders, which may or may not be heeded — frequently may not.

It will be observed that the company has no stronger competition to contend against than that of the Tasmanian Company, the vessels of which call at Eden every few days to take in livestock. Along the coast, the company has wharves, in some instances freehold, and in others leasehold.

On the whole, it may be congratulated upon the fact that its lines seem to have fallen into tolerably pleasant places. We may fairly hope that as time rolls along it may see its way to a further increase of this fleet, and that the residents in the Kiama district may so far benefit by the regular means of communication it affords, that we may not again have dairy produce selling at fancy, famine, and almost fabulous prices. **R**

livestock, were transported on its ships. Live pigs were commonly carried, leading to the service becoming known as the "Pig and Whistle Line".

It was commonly joked that its ships would wait an hour for a pig, but not one minute for a passenger!

'Countless thousands of pigs were shipped, with mobs of up to 700 animals walking long distances from farms and the tremendous noise of their squealing

amusing generations of schoolchildren ... For years one Bega passenger regularly drove his horse and sulky to Tathra to be loaded aboard ship solving his transport needs in Sydney. Upon disembarking at Tathra, he harnessed his horse, climbed into his sulky and drove home.'

The ISN fleet rapidly grew. Two steam vessels – the *Maitland* (a 140-ton wooden paddle steamer), and the



The S.S. 'Kameruka' aground, 1897. Photograph by W.H.Corkhill. National Library of Australia, obj-140338889

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The 'Merimbula' at Tathra Wharf. Photograph: State Library of NSW FL1698203

Mimosa (a 163-ton iron paddle steamer) were soon added to the fleet to help service the south coast as well as the Hunter River near Newcastle. By 1864 the *Hunter* (a 105-ton paddle steamer), *Mynora* (a 117-ton paddle steamer) and *Kembla* (a 325-ton iron steel steamship) were also being operated by the company.

From 1878 the size of the vessels increased significantly: the *Illawarra* (II), which joined the fleet in 1878 was a 522-ton iron paddle steamship, the *Allowrie*, which joined the fleet in 1880 was a 504-ton ship, the *Kameruka*, built in 1880 was a 515-ton steamer, and the *Bega*, which joined the fleet in 1883, was a 567-ton vessel.

In 1900 the *Eden*, a 693-ton screw steamer that had been purpose-built for the Sydney-Merimbula-Eden-Tathra route, was added to the fleet. It became the first quite distinctive 'south coast' steamer – designed to transport livestock, other cargo and passengers; with twin screws; with large holds enabling the easy loading and transport of railway sleepers; with deck mounted derricks allowing the vessels to call at places with wharves and other places without wharves.

The *Merimbula*, a 1,122-ton screw steamer that was built in 1909, was the largest of the company's fleet. It included accommodation for 106 passengers and incorporated refrigerated cargo space.

The comfort of passengers was significantly enhanced with the introduction into service of this ship.

Few passenger cabins had been provided on the company's 19th century vessels; they really only started to be introduced in 1900 with the commencement of services by the *Eden*. Instead, sleeping places were set up at night in the vessels' saloons (some ships had separate saloons for men and women), separated only with privacy curtains ... and in 1880 the *Bega Gazette* had slammed accommodation

aboard ISN vessels as being 'wretched, with passengers complaining of the horrors of insects attracted by the livestock.'

(For a description of travelling on the *Merimbula* – often still a long way from a pleasant experience, even though the facilities were a vast improvement on what had been available previously! – see 'Recollections', Issue 4, available at bit.ly/Recollections4)

The loss of the *Merimbula* in 1928 resulted in a decision by the company to turn its back on providing a passenger service. It then decided to direct its entire focus to

providing a cargo service – although it did continue to carry passengers on board the *Eden* for another 19 months. (At the time the *Merimbula* was wrecked, the *Eden* was laid-up in Sydney. It was rapidly recommissioned and 36-hours later had taken over the service that the *Merimbula* had been providing.)

Over the years, around 60 ships were part of the ISN fleet (a comprehensive list of details of all ISN vessels is included in 'Pig and Whistle Run'), with some acquired to

On the earlier ISN vessels 'all passenger accommodation had been of the open type, where the dining table was down the centre of the saloon. The berths fitted around the ship's sides and were sheltered by curtains. This type of accommodation could not have been very inviting either from the viewpoint of the passenger who was in his bunk feeling ill, or for the remainder who would be at a table having a meal. It was never pleasant to be taking a meal whilst a passenger was being audibly ill in the berth behind and it would have been at least as upsetting to the sick one to have to put up with the smell of food. All this of course, being in addition to the all-pervading smell of the pigsty, as it was a rare occasion by then for a company ship not to have some porkers aboard.

The berths being around the ship's sides, it was customary for the sleepers to lie with their heads forward, so that one's head was next to the next person's feet. The story is told that on at least one occasion a steward, mindful of the cleanliness of the bed linen, requested a passenger who had just come in from the stockyard and gone to bed fully clothed, to take his boots off. When he did there was an immediate outcry from the man sleeping in the next bunk, insisting that he be made to put them on again.'

—from "Pig and Whistle Run: Men and Ships of the N.S.W. South Coast"

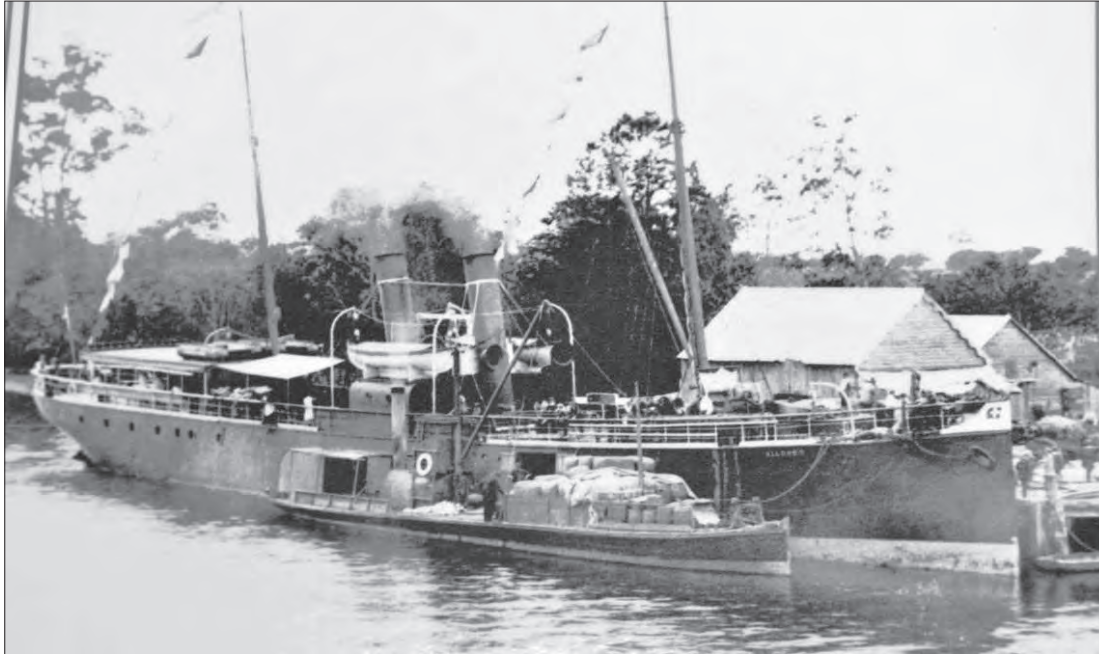
serve specific purposes. The *Benandra* and the *Bodalla*, for example, were introduced in 1914 specifically to transport timber (especially wooden sleepers) from south coast ports, and the *Duroby* was purchased in 1921 specifically to transport silica from Ulladulla to Sydney and Newcastle.

Some of the company's vessels had unexpected roles. The 446-ton cargo ship *Otway* was berthed in Darling Harbour

in Sydney, a phone was connected, and it served as the ISN's office in 1900 when the bubonic plague closed the port around the company's Phoenix Wharf. And during World War I the ISN's *Bodalla* was requisitioned by the navy and converted to a minesweeper. In World War II the *Bermagui*, *Narani*, and *Kianga* also served as minesweepers.

The ISN, during much of its operating life, seemed to have had two major challenges – suitable berthing facilities on the south coast (in contrast to having outstanding facilities in Sydney Harbour – see accompanying story from 1882) and a regular loss of vessels due to their sinking or running aground.

Apart from Jervis Bay and possibly Eden, none of the 'ports' at which the ISN berthed were safe havens. In anything but ideal conditions, either a dangerous bar at a



The ISN coastal steamer 'Allowrie' and a riverboat at the Nowra Wharf, 1903



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river mouth needed to be crossed or ships were required to attempt to dock at exposed sea wharves. In the case of Tathra and nearby Merimbula, both had open-sea wharves – the Tathra wharf facing north and the Merimbula wharf facing to the south, and both were totally exposed to massive sea swells and prevailing weather conditions. So it was not unusual for scheduled ships to have to by-pass one of these stops on any voyage because of unfavourable winds or seas – much to the exasperation of those in the district who were totally dependent on the ships that were transporting their produce.

‘Frequently, owing to a very heavy north-easterly swell running, the S.S. Bega could not look at the wharf, and passengers had to be taken to the steamer in boats, whilst at other times boats failed to disembark passengers at all. Oft-times Merimbula had to be used instead of Tathra, and the larger vessels were unable to sail across the bar (at Merimbula). They had to lie offshore and transfer their cargo to lighters or droghers, which took the freight up to the wharf. It was not until 1901 that the Government deep water jetty was constructed. At times when boats missed Tathra the coaches raced down the coast road at full speed to Merimbula and, although the boat may have passed Tathra at 9 a.m., the passengers would not reach Bega until 8.30 at night.’ (W.A. Bayley, *History of Bega*)

But the wharves and ports were essential facilities for the local area (as late as the 1920s it took up to three days to travel to Bermagui or Bega from Sydney by rail and road), and a number of the wharves used by the ISN were actually erected by local communities. The original Tathra wharf, for example, was at least partly funded by local farmers such as Daniel Gowing (who farmed the Jellat flats just inland from Tathra), and a wooden jetty was constructed at Ulladulla in 1859 to ensure ISN services continued to call at that town after the Company had informed local farmers that it would not call again at Ulladulla unless better mooring facilities were provided (this wooden jetty was replaced by the government about seven years later, at a cost of £11,000, with a stone pier built on a natural reef; a 4’ gauge tramway was added to this in the 1890s).

Before wharves were built, ships would simply lay off the beach or river mouth and goods would be ferried to and from the shore. And timber, for example, would often be floated out from the beach and be hauled by cable to the waiting vessel.

In just under a century, the ISN lost 15 of its vessels:

- the *Mimosa* was wrecked on 19th September, 1863 on a rock north of Tathra (with 2 fatalities);
- the *Mynora* struck a reef off George’s Head, south of Jervis Bay in foggy weather on 6th April 1864. She managed to free herself, but was so severely holed she was deliberately run ashore three miles north of George’s Head;
- the *Monaro* was wrecked on Binge Binge Point (south of Moruya) on 10th May 1879;
- the *John Penn* was wrecked after hitting Burrowarra Head in heavy fog on or about 8th November 1879 and sank at Broulee Bay while under tow;
- the *Coolangatta* was wrecked after a flood swept it from

the Shoalhaven River on 27th February 1873;

- the *Blackwall* was wrecked after her anchor dragged on Shellharbour Reef on 20th July 1876 (she was eventually refloated);
- the *Kameruka* sank on 16th October 1897, after striking Pedro’s reef near Moruya. When the ship struck the rocks, a rope was tied around a pig. It swam to shore and the 48 passengers and crew followed along the line;
- the *Alexander Berry* foundered off Bass Point, south of Shellharbour, on 1st July 1901 (with 4 fatalities);

SHIP RETURNS TO SYDNEY WITH CARGO TATHRA LABOURERS LAY DOWN LAW

In an attempt to speed up cargo delivery on the Far South Coast, the I.S.N. Co. sent the “Bergalia”, in addition to the “Cobargo”, down to Tathra last weekend but, because of the attitude of the Tathra wharf labourers, the “Bergalia” returned to Sydney with her Tathra cargo still undischarged.

Tathra wharf labourers have the Far South Coast wharfs sewn up, working Merimbula and Eden in addition to Tathra.

The Company had planned that, as the Tathra men would be busy on the “Cobargo” at these three ports for approximately 40 hours, a gang of men would be brought down to Tathra from Bermagui to work the “Bergalia”. They were to travel in a hired car at the expense of the Company.

On Friday evening the Bermagui men were told by their union that they were not to go to Tathra to work the “Bergalia”. Captain Benson of the “Bergalia” was informed when he arrived, that he had to wait off Tathra until the Tathra men had finished with the “Cobargo”.

This would have meant holding the ship off port for a period of about 40 hours while the Tathra stalwarts worked their leisurely way through the Tathra, Merimbula and Eden cargos in the holds of the “Cobargo”.

The fact that the “Bergalia” cargo would have been worked by the Tathra men at the special rate of 13/5½ per hour may have some bearing on the trouble.

Captain Benson took his ship back to Sydney with the Tathra cargo still in the holds. He said he was not going to anchor in the open sea for 40 hours, wasting the time of his crew of 16 men, just to have the ship worked when it suited a handful of wharfies.

Fortunately, Moruya wharf labourers are a bunch of willing and decent men and it is believed the Bermagui men fall into the same category but the crowd at Tathra are notorious and have been for years past.

—from *Moruya Examiner*, 3rd February 1950

‘In 1955 they could load about 200 tons of sleepers on the Bergalia in about 19 hours, with crew and local staff pulling them off the bank. They’d work all night. They put a stop to that. They got three carloads of blokes down from Port Kembla and I can remember my father tearing his hair out. They’d put two slings of sleepers on the boat and knock off for morning tea. They fiddled and played around and they reckoned the wire was in a dangerous position, and they wanted another block on it here and another block there. Old Captain Miles said, ‘I’ve had enough of this’, and he went off to Sydney with about 100 tons instead of 200 tons. They were working to union regulation.’

—from “*Ships and Shores and Trading Ports*”

- the *Bega* capsized and sank off Tanja Beach on 5th April 1908, with the death of one passenger (a description of the sinking of the *Bega* is included in 'Recollections', Issue 4);
- the *Vision* was wrecked in a storm off Montreal Goldfields, just north of Bermagui, on 13th January 1911;
- the *Tilba* was wrecked after running into rocks off Summercloud Bay (near Wreck Bay, Jervis Bay) on 18th November 1912;
- the *Duroby* caught fire while at anchor in Sydney on 14th March 1923;
- the *Bodalla* was wrecked on 19th January 1924 at Narooma, when she ran aground at the entrance to Wagonga Inlet;
- the *Benandra* was lost off the Moruya River at Moruya Heads after hitting a sandspit on 25th March 1924, resulting in one death; and
- the *Merimbula* ran aground on Whale Point at Currarong, just north of Jervis Bay, while heading south on 27th March 1928.

So, what sort of service did the ISN provide to the south coast?

The shipment of cargo and livestock—beef cattle, sheep,

timber, butter and cheese, wattle bark, corn and most importantly, pigs—provided the primary source of income to the company and so was the major focus of the company.

Its vessels ran to regular timetables, with the *Bega Gazette* at one stage noting 'Rixon's wagon would leave the *Bega Post Office* for Merimbula every Wednesday, and to Tathra every Monday and Thursday, conveying mail and passengers to and from the Sydney steamer.' Tight schedules were followed regardless of conditions: approaching port, the ships would sound long blasts from their sirens as a warning for handlers to be ready for landing.

By 1866 a regular weekly service was being provided from Sydney to south coast ports; in 1905, for example, the company ran services to Wollongong, Kiama and Nowra on Tuesdays and Fridays departing Sydney at 7pm, to Shellharbour every Friday departing Sydney on Fridays at 4pm, to Ulladulla, Batemans Bay and Nelligen leaving Sydney on Mondays at 4pm and on Fridays at 10am, to Moruya on Fridays leaving at 10am, to Bermagui, Tathra, Merimbula and Eden on Mondays at 2pm and Thursdays at 10am and ran an extra service to Bermagui and Tathra leaving Sydney on Fridays at 10am.

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S.S. 'Merimbula' – from ISN Illustrated Handbook 1912.

(Whilst the ships sailed to a schedule, it was somewhat elastic. In the 1920s, for example, the only timetable the company attempted to meet was a departure times from Eden at 7am. Arrival and departure times at Merimbula, Tathra, Bermagui – and ultimately Sydney – varied significantly, depending on weather and sea conditions and the times it took to dock and then load and unload cargos and passengers in each port of call.)

'Bergalia performed an unplanned but very welcome

service in the district in her later years. She was tied up at the Ulladulla wharf when severe bush fires broke out in the district on 14th January 1939. Water was not laid on at the time, and things could have been much worse than they were if the ship's crew had not started the pumps and filled 44-gallon drums with sea water. The filled drums were taken by lorry to the fire fronts.' – from *'They Came to Murramarang: A History of Murramarang, Kioloa and Bawley Point'*.


But the company could not survive. After World War II, the Illawarra and South Coast Steam Navigation Company's fortunes declined (the last year in which the company made a profit—of £337—was in 1945), with the *Bergalia* and the *Cobargo* being the only vessels that were then working the south coast. By 1948 the Company was unable to pay a dividend to its shareholders, and in 1950 was placed into voluntary liquidation. It was delisted from the Australian Stock Exchange in 1955.

Its demise was due to substantial competition from road transport, which was able to offer a door-to-door service that a steamship company could not do, the costs of replacing ships and rising operating costs. Numerous costly waterfront disputes, like the one described in the accompanying newspaper report, hammered the final nails firmly into the company's coffin.

'The ships never received a subsidy, but we allowed them to die out. The blame does not lie with any one section of the community, and unions, management, shareholders, shippers and consignees must share the blame; the politicians simply officiated at the funeral.'

– from *"Pig and Whistle Run"*

Note: Different sources quote different tonnages of the vessels mentioned above. Where available, information from *'Pig and Whistle Run'* or *'Flotilla Australia'* records has been used.

Sources: *Pig and Whistle Run: Men and Ships of the N.S.W. South Coast* by Mike Richards; *Ships and Shores and Trading Ports* by Mary Shelley Clark; *South Coast Steamers* by Graeme Andrews; *Pictorial History Bega Valley Shire* by Helen Swinbourne and Judy Winters; *Illawarra and South Coast Steam Navigation Co's Illustrated Handbooks 1905 and 1912*; *History of Bega* by W.A. Bayley; *They Came from Murramarang: A History of Murramarang, Kioloa and Bawley Point* by Bruce Hamon; *Flotilla Australia* website— <http://www.flotilla-australia.com/> ; *Sea Transport to Illawarra and the South Coast*, Illawarra Historical Society Bulletin October 1973; Tathra Wharf Museum. 

More Flotsam & Jetsam

In those days many schoolchildren attended high schools as boarders in Sydney. When the holidays came around, the ships were transformed into school specials and many remember these trips with affection, but the ships companies, especially the stewards, might not have felt the same!

The old Coomonderry had always been a busy ship and, at the end of her time with the Pig and Whistle, she was still doing two trips a week, one to Shoalhaven and the other to Moruya and Narooma. She was only licensed to carry a dozen passengers, six of each sex, but on one voyage from Sydney, just prior to Christmas, she had no less than 44 on board.

The Harbourmaster came down to the ship and told Captain Canty that he would have to put 32 of them ashore again. The Captain said there will be many sad hearts in the Moruya this Christmas. Thereupon the Harbourmaster, who was a kindly man, indicated he had a poor memory for figures and all 44 landed safely for the festive season.

It was possibly on this occasion that Stephen Canty gave up his cabin to two elderly ladies and spent the trip himself sleeping on a hard bench on the bridge.



Patrick John Clinch claimed 40 years' service with the I.S.N. Co when he retired in 1920. He was appointed manager of the Merimbula branch in the 80's, on a commission basis, having started out as a clerk in the head office, followed by a stint at the Kiama branch. While there, part of his duties entailed the job of cream grader, responsible for testing each batch of cream.

Many interesting things were found in the cans. On one occasion a rat was found to have committed suicide in one of the cans of cream and in its death throes it churned the cream to butter! He always swore that he removed the rat but still sent the cream on to Sydney.

He took up residence in a large stone house on the hill above Merimbula, from which he could look out to sea and watch for arrivals. The ship would sound the whistle and P.J. Clinch would harness the horse (which was kept yarded on steamer days) and drive the three miles to the wharf to light the lamps that would guide the vessel in. He would never trust this duty to anyone else.

The biggest threat to the company was the impending competition of the railway, which had now reached Nimmitabel. P.J. faced this threat calmly: knowing that graziers had an eye for good horses, he purchased 'Shareholder' a thoroughbred race horse with a short racing career, and rode him through the high country, offering the graziers handsome discounts on their freight rates if they would sign up with the company to consign all their freight by sea for some years. Most signed, and all honoured the agreement, so that the railways had a lean time of it, and never extended the line.



When the Merimbula sank she was hard aground. The saloon bar was half full of water, and the bartender, his name was Salvation

Army George – he was still charging for drinks. In the bar they were up to their knees in water and Salvation George said, 'This company's in too much trouble at present to be giving away free drinks!'



They'd brought these bulls from Tathra to Sydney. They'd been standing in horse boxes for more than 24 hours and they were very angry. They unloaded them and they started them up the race at Pyrmont. One of them went so far up the race and just lay down and wouldn't go any further. A young constable came along and said, 'That animal's in distress, it has to be destroyed!' My father said: 'He's just angry. He's been on the boat for 24 hours.' But the young constable had to take the law into his own hands, so he walked right up to the bull's forehead to pull the trigger. Well, the bull got up quicker than he'd ever got up before, he threw the policeman over the fence, charged up the end of the laneway, charged out through the barricade, knocked the gateman over at the end of the wharf and went up into George Street. And now there was the crew off the boat, someone else on a pushbike, a bloke on a horse and cart, chasing this bull gone mad up George Street. And he caught the reflection of himself in Anthony Horderns' window, and he thought to himself, 'Oh, there's one of my friends over there,' so he charged straight through the window into Anthony Horderns' on Sunday morning.



With the Illawarra came the horn instead of the whistle, she being an up-to-date steamer. The skipper, Captain Garde, got much merriment at Greenwell Point out of seeing the owners running to catch their horses when the horn was blown. Many a bolting horse started from the blast of the horn. Whether it was the uphill pull or not, most of them would stop when abreast the hotel.

—Edited extracts from 'The Pig and Whistle Run' and 'Ships and Shores and Trading Ports'

For local history lovers

Available Narooma Newsagency, Visitors' Centre, ABC Cheese Factory, Bodalla Bakery, bookshops and galleries from Bega to Moruya, or online from author.

www.paceymedia.com.au





This project will identify 101 Objects from the Bega Valley Shire that illustrate the area's history and heritage, comprehensive 'libraries' of information will be assembled about each, and then the objects will be publicized and the assembled information will be made widely available AT NO CHARGE.

Funding has been provided for this valuable community initiative by Heritage Near Me, part of the NSW Office of Environment & Heritage.

The project is co-ordinated by a group of representatives from local museums, schools, the local Aboriginal communities, the local tourism sector, Council, local heritage advisors and South Coast History Society. Three local heritage advisors are helping select the 101 Objects and will assist with the compilation of the 101 'libraries' of information.

YOU are now invited to suggest items of historic or heritage significance within the Bega Valley Shire that should be considered for inclusion on this important list of 101 Objects (email your suggestions to southcoasthistory@yahoo.com) ... and we are looking for 101 volunteers willing to research and write up information about each of the items (again, if you're interested in assisting, email southcoasthistory@yahoo.com).

This project is assisted by the NSW Government through the Heritage Near Me program.



Tathra Wharf

Tathra Wharf is the only surviving open sea wharf on the eastern seaboard of Australia. In NSW alone, there were once fifteen of them.

The wharf evolved over time, and has an interesting history:

Farmers near Bega needed to get their produce to market as quickly and economically as possible. Coastal shipping called at Eden and, sea conditions permitting, at Merimbula. But taking goods to Merimbula from the Bega area involved a 30 kilometre longer return journey over steep, rough tracks than did the trip to Tathra ... and Eden was even further away. So Tathra presented a very much closer, more enticing alternative.

Initially coastal vessels anchored offshore of either Kangarutha or Kianinny (inlets just south of Tathra) and

local goods were taken out in small boats to coastal vessels anchored offshore.

Around 1860, at the initiative of Daniel Gowing, a farmer at Jellat (between Tathra and Bega), a small wharf was built at Tathra. A more substantial jetty was erected at the same site in 1862. (Gowing also built the first road from Jellat to Bega and to Tathra, and in 1859 built a store at Kianinny that held goods for shipping.)

This wharf was gradually extended and improved: for example, a cargo shed was added in 1866; the wharf was widened in 1873 and extended in 1874, extended again in 1889 and 1903; cattle and pig yards were added in 1903; a new, two-storey cargo shed was erected in 1903; a crane, cattle races, loading ramps and a passenger shelter shed were built between 1907 and 1912.

The town of Tathra was established and grew as a result of the activity surrounding the wharf, and coastal shipping—particularly that provided by the Illawarra and South Coast Steam Navigation Company—regularly used the wharf and its associated facilities.

The last regular ISN vessel to call at the Tathra wharf was the *Cobargo* in 1954. Later that same year, the *Bergalia* called at the wharf to remove remaining slings, ropes, barriers, buoys and a crane.

The wharf then fell into disrepair and in 1973 the NSW Department of Public Works declared that it was unsafe and proposed to demolish it.


This sparked community outrage and, in 1977, ultimately led to the establishment of a Tathra Wharf Trust (a combination of a local Tathra Wharf Action Committee, the National Trust and the Bega and Imlay Shire Councils) that succeeded in leasing the wharf from the Department of Public Works so it could be restored.

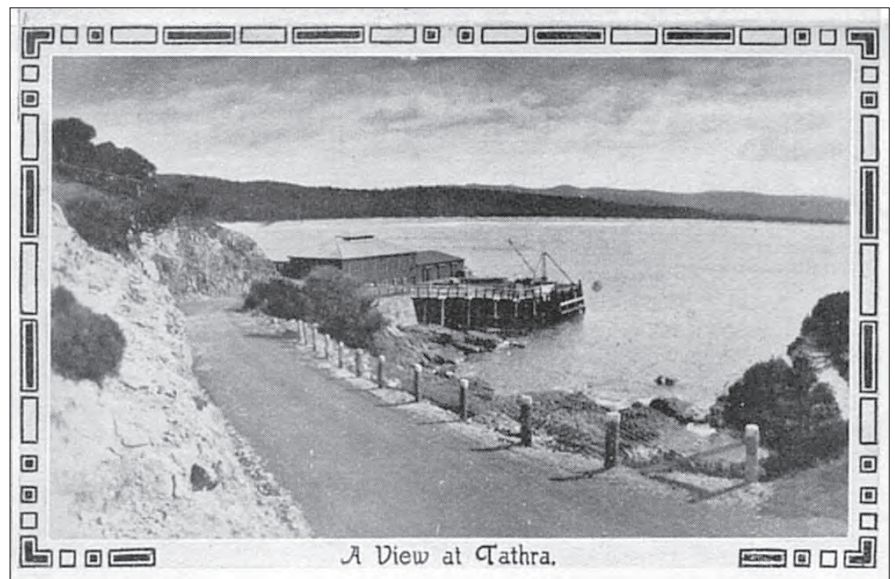
This occurred, and the wharf was officially reopened in December 1988. It has since become a popular fishing and tourist attraction, with a café and a well-presented, interesting museum now occupying the old cargo shed.

Apart from the Tathra Wharf being the sole remaining open sea wharf on the eastern seaboard of Australia, it has other significant heritage values:

- it is a relic of a transport system that played an integral role in the settlement and development of the colony of NSW, and in particular, the towns of the Bega Valley and those of the Monaro;
- it was the main shipping point on the NSW far South Coast for produce from the rich Bega Valley and reflects Tathra's importance as the area's prime transport access point during the era of coastal shipping;
- it was a barometer of the economic development of Tathra, the Bega Valley and the Monaro District when shipping was their only real trade and communication link to the outside world;
- it is an important example of a timber wharf from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It reveals aspects of construction and design practices in the engineering of timber marine structures over a 150-year period from the 1860s. Although of simple design the cargo shed is a fine

example of marine architecture and displays elements of high quality workmanship and timber construction methods;

- wharf and cargo shed are important relics for those researching the construction of heavy timber maritime structures and their maintenance;
- it is evidence of a working wharf from a bygone era;
- it is an example of the successful conservation of a timber marine structure in a harsh environment;
- it was constructed under E O Moriarty one of the most important colonial engineers and was extended by E M de Burgh another eminent colonial engineer, both of whom were at one time Engineer-in-Chief of the Harbours and River Navigation Branch of the NSW Department of Public Works;
- it is an excellent demonstration of what can be achieved through determined local heritage advocacy and activism. 



The road in the foreground of this postcard of Tathra Wharf was washed away by heavy seas in the 1970s. Suggestions that it should be reconstructed are regularly made today. Access to the wharf has always presented a problem. The road down to it was so steep that bullock or horse teams taking goods away from the wharf often needed to double up (use two teams in tandem) to haul heavy loads up the hill.

Mumbulla Mountain

The 13,750 hectare Biamanga National Park, north of Bega, is dominated by Mumbulla Mountain (or Biamanga) which rises almost 650 metres above the surrounding hilly coastal terrain.

The mountain is actually a mass of granite rock that solidified under the earth's surface from magma over 360 million years ago. This granite is evidenced by large boulders and rounded tors on the slopes of the mountain.

Perhaps the most visited feature in Biamanga National Park is the secluded picnic area at Mumbulla Creek Falls. Here a 225 metre walkway leads to a viewing platform

overlooking the falls and numerous impressive natural waterholes.

Over 400 plant species have been recorded within Biamanga National Park. It is also home to over 250 species of birds, 50 mammals, 20 reptiles and 14 amphibian species. Its wildlife includes platypus, echidna, antechinus, wombats, gliders, potoroo, kangaroos, wallabies, bush rats and some 15 species of bats.

Mumbulla Mountain is sacred to the local Yuin people as it includes a complex of important initiation sites linked by pathways.



The highest point on Biamanga was the Dreaming place of the Yuin leader Jack Mumbulla (whose 'tribal' name was Biamanga). He used to sit and meditate on top of the mountain and communicated using smoke with his people in the valleys below.

Mythologically Biamanga is linked to Gulaga (Mt Dromedary) near Tilba. The Aboriginal people view these two landmarks as a single cultural landscape.

Gulaga is considered to be the Mother Mountain by the Yuin people. It has traditionally been a woman's place and it includes sacred sites where Aboriginal women visited for storytelling, for ceremonies and for childbirth.

Biamanga, on the other hand, is the traditional men's mountain,

particularly as it contains initiation sites where Yuin boys became men (the last of these initiation ceremonies held on this mountain was a century ago, in 1918).

The Mumbulla Creek Falls were of particular significance because the boys, having been decorated with red ochre for their initiation, would wash this ochre away in a sacred pool at the end of their ceremonies, to then be accepted as a man by the women and children.

Because of the spiritual significance of these falls in Yuin culture, it is understandable that visitors to the area are today asked not to swim or slide down the rocks at the falls.


Extensive logging of Mumbulla Mountain in the late 1970s motivated Guboo 'Ted' Thomas, a Yuin elder (see accompanying story), to organise his people in protest against this logging. These protests focused attention on the significance of Biamanga to Aboriginal people and resulted in the area in and around what is now Biamanga National Park being declared an Aboriginal Place. (An Aboriginal

Place declaration recognises that places are (or were) of special significance to Aboriginal culture, thereby giving the land a higher level of protection to safeguard its significance to Aboriginal people.)

Biamanga was proclaimed as a National Park in 1994. It has since been expanded by addition of State Forest land as part of the Eden Regional Forest Agreement.

In 1996 the NSW Parliament amended the National Parks and Wildlife Act to enable the return of traditional lands to Aboriginal ownership, with those lands then being leased back to National Parks to be managed as a formal protected area.

In 2006, the NSW Government formally handed back Biamanga (and Gulaga) National Parks to the Yuin people in recognition of the significant cultural sites they contain and the living links they have with local Indigenous people.

Sources: NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service; ABC News and Sydney Morning Herald reports; The International Union for Conservation of Nature 

Guboo (Ted) Thomas

Guboo (Ted) Thomas will always be associated with Biamanga. He would walk to the summit and spend days there in contemplation but, perhaps more importantly, he led the campaign to stop logging on Mumbulla Mountain and to have it recognized and protected as an Aboriginal Place.

Edwin Thomas was born in January 1909 at Jembaicumbene near Braidwood. His birth name was Edwin, which was contracted to Ted, although he became better known by his tribal name Guboo which means 'good friend'. His father and grandfather were both Yuin elders and his mother was part-Aboriginal, part Chinese, with French ancestry. He was the third of ten children. He was recognised as a future spiritual leader by the elders of the Yuin before he turned ten years old.

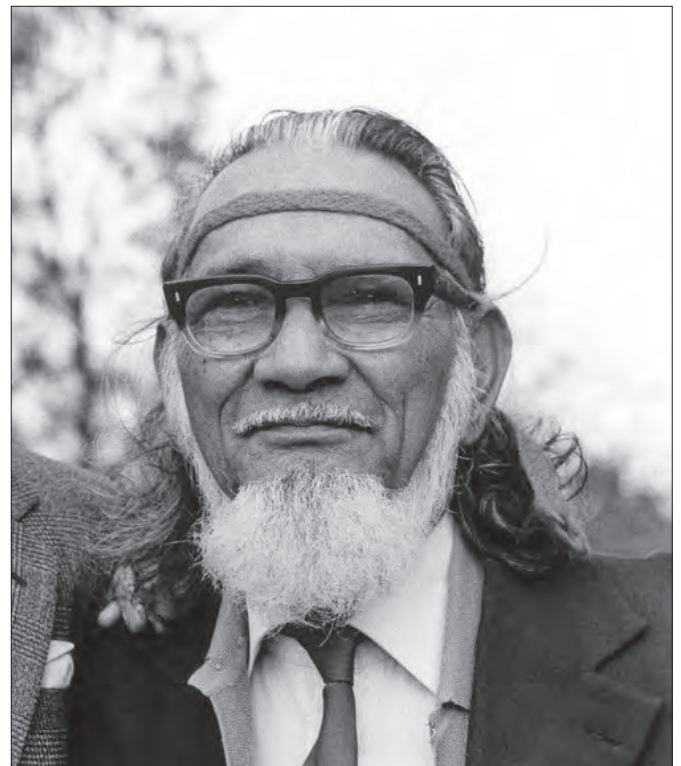
Guboo grew up on the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Reserve where he attended the tiny local school until he was eight years old. He recalled this time: *All I was taught at school was to knit, sew, make little johnnycakes and tend a garden. In those days, no-one bothered to teach the Aboriginal children the three Rs.* He was withdrawn from school by his parents and his education in his "Dreamtime culture" then began. When he was nine, his father, uncle and other Yuin elders took him on a Dreamtime walkabout from Malacoota to the Hawkesbury River showing him all the Aboriginal sacred sites along the way. They also instructed him in sacred Aboriginal rites, male ancestral law and Yuin customs. His grandmother, a 'medicine woman', took him on her healing rounds and taught him the Yuin Dreamtime stories. These groundings prepared him to become the future elder and spiritual leader of the Yuin 'Nation' which he always maintained was made up of many individual tribes.

As a teenager and a young man he was a member (as was his father, his uncles and three of his brothers) of the Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band that toured southern NSW and Victoria, and performed at the opening of the Sydney

Harbour Bridge in 1932. During visits to Aboriginal missions he would talk to the old people to learn more about their customs and beliefs, tour their sacred sites and talk about protecting the land and the Great Spirit that sustained it.

After his music career, Guboo worked as a jackaroo, shellac collector, railway sleeper cutter and was a member of an Aboriginal work-crew that felled timber ahead of the rising waters when Warragamba Dam was constructed. However, for most of his working life, he was a commercial fisherman on the South Coast.

In 1967, following the Australian referendum that gave



Guboo (Ted) Thomas, the last initiated tribal elder of the South Coast, in 1984

citizenship to Aboriginals, Guboo and his family moved back to Wallaga Lake to concentrate on his responsibilities as a tribal elder. He also became committed to Aboriginal land rights and culture, his catch-cry being “*Land rights, self-determination, and cultural identity.*” He hitchhiked to Canberra to pressure the Government to make the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Mission into a reserve and to seek protection of the sacred sites. Work he undertook with the Institute of Aboriginal Studies, recording all the Aboriginal sites in coastal New South Wales, became the basis of all future land claims along the South Coast. In 1978 he helped prepare land claims that were presented to the New South Wales Government and which ultimately resulted in the Wallaga Lake community receiving its title deeds.

Around the same time, Guboo became alarmed about forestry operations on nearby Mumbulla Mountain threatening sacred sites. The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, with the help of Guboo Thomas, commenced an Anthropological and Archaeological investigation of Mumbulla Mountain which supported the claims of the *Yuin* people that Mumbulla Mountain was significant to Aboriginal people. In 1979, largely as a result of Guboo's efforts, NSW Premier Neville Wran ordered a cease to logging on Mumbulla Mountain south of Bermagui.


Guboo (Ted) Thomas died in May 2002, several years before ownership of the former Wallaga Lake National Park and the rest of the Gulaga National Park was transferred back to the area's original owners, the *Yuin* people, in May 2006.

Guboo was deeply spiritual. He wanted to restore people's unity with the land, to bring people together through a mutual love and respect for Mother Earth, and he wanted to encourage a return to selfless ancient values. For 20 years he held ‘Dreaming Camps’ throughout Australia and overseas, aimed at passing on his knowledge, renewing the Dreaming of different places, and restoring sacredness to the landscape.

He became a member of the Baha'i faith which emphasizes the spiritual unity of humankind through all religions. He also visited the United Nations, and asked the World Council of Churches to accept indigenous religions.

Guboo strove to make Australia a nation that has put conflict between white and black Australians behind it – a unified nation having respect for Aboriginal culture and a love of the land. However, it was a message that, ironically, fell flat among his own people and increasingly he became mistrusted by other Aboriginals (who portrayed him as having discovered the perks of ‘new-age guru’ to the white community).

*‘The Earth is our Mother.
When I die I'm going down there.
When you die you're going there too.
But what are you doing for the Earth?’*
—Guboo (Ted) Thomas

Sources: *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, Vol 2002 No 2, Wikipedia, *Bega District News* and ABC South East (both via google searches). 

So, which 101 historic objects do we choose?

There are tens of thousands of surviving objects that could be included on any list of 101 items with local historical significance or heritage importance.

Choosing just 101 will not be easy.

Perhaps the first 50 will choose themselves – ‘bleedingly obvious’ items that are well-known, have very significant heritage value and have played an important role in the area's history. Tathra Wharf and Biamanga (Mumbulla Mountain) would certainly qualify among these.

But, because a major aim of this project is to highlight the range and diversity of heritage-related objects that can be found throughout the community, it is likely that many of the remaining 101 objects will be little-known...perhaps unfairly-neglected objects, but ones which have a particularly-interesting history themselves or ones that lead us to (or perhaps are simply representative of) some important event in our local history.

Once such example is a simple trophy cup – currently tucked-away in one of many display cases at the Bega Pioneers' Museum – that was gifted as a memorial to Marie and Jennifer Otton, two young sisters killed in the disastrous 1952 Bega bushfires. Their deaths had a profound affect on the local community, as also evidenced by a memorial stained glass window, depicting these two girls, in St John's Church in Bega.



Choosing which heritage objects are to be included in our list of 101 is (and will continue to be) an exceptionally rewarding exercise. But then the real fun will start: compiling detailed libraries of information about each of the objects and their associations with the area's rich history, and ultimately sharing each of these with the local community. 



This project is assisted by the NSW Government through the Heritage Near Me program.



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HISTORIES

Steam Australia: Locomotives that Galvanised the Nation

by Tim Fischer

My two-year-old grandson was thrilled to discover that his Grandpa had a copy of 'Steam Australia.' "Look, steam trains, Gran" he enthused, as he struggled over with this "heavy, heavy" book (it is heavy – in weight, but not heavy in reading!) to share the pictures it contains with his Gran. And he was even more excited when, a few minutes later, he ran over to her again exclaiming "Look, train crash, Gran!" and showed her several pages of photographs in the middle of the book.

The photos are outstanding (especially those of the train crashes!). They are mostly taken from a 31,000 photograph and nitrate negative collection of steam engines (the Buckland Collection) in the National Library of Australia.

Grandpa was equally impressed – not just with the photos but with the text written by ex Australian Deputy Prime Minister, ex Australian Ambassador to the Holy See, and well-known railways enthusiast ('I was never a trainspotter in the classic British sense') Tim Fischer.

The book is pure Tim Fischer—

Tim sharing his extensive knowledge about steam trains and railways in general;

Tim enthusing about the romance of steam engines;

Tim railing about the scrapping of steam engines ('all

four S Class locomotives vanished into the scrap-metal heap, in part to a clause in the VR contract for purchasing diesels which stipulated that that these four had to be destroyed. It was destructive vandalism. Today all V Line passenger trains between Melbourne and Albury are hauled by diesel-electric locomotives, but all of them with timetables that run slower than did the Spirit of Progress');

Tim playing 'marketing strategist' and even 'advertising guru'—('Castlemaine on the Bendigo main line is tailor-made to be the location of what might be called the 'Great Victoria and Castlemaine Museum'. It has plenty of space on the 'down' or western side of the existing heritage Castlemaine Railway Station, with a grand signal box in good shape and an elongated area running a kilometre towards a turntable; When the award-winning film 'The Dressmaker' was launched in 2015, it featured a section of the Maldon line. All the Victorian Goldfields railway had to do was brand its main train service for the next dozen weekends 'The Dressmaker Express', and include a lunch stop, with optional coaching in dressmaking or talks by the author, and a bonanza would have been created');

Tim reminiscing about his own train travels and the train journeys he has organised ('when on overseas trips



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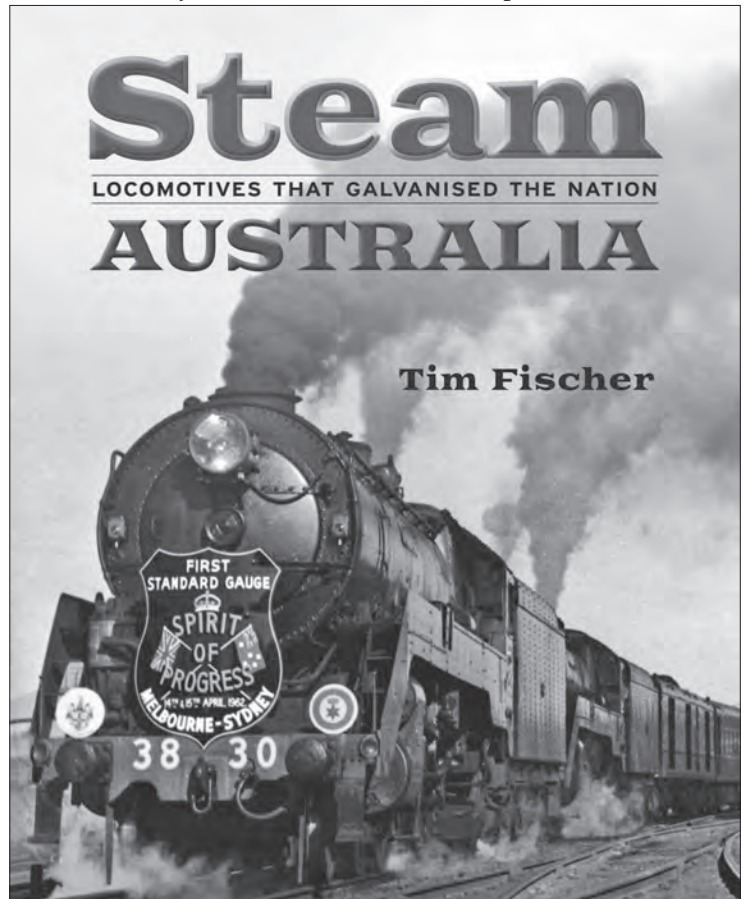


I used to make a point of visiting key railways stations ... Australian ambassadors were sometimes annoyed at this, having to make protocol and security arrangements before starting out at dawn to see the early rush-hour commuters at the various main stations ... on one occasion I had to run down to Pretoria Station ... later that day I asked then South African Deputy Prime Minister Thabo Mbeki when he last visited Pretoria Station ... he replied that I should not ask as 'it was 20 years ago and I was trying to blow the place up'; 'in 2011 [whilst Australian Ambassador to the Holy See] I helped create the Caritas Express, a steam train from the Pope's platform in the Vatican Gardens to Tuscany');

Tim even providing advice on how to best sleep on an overnight train ('my great tip is always get on board having had at least one, but no more than two, nips of Scotch – or one or two beers – to allow the body to ease into the rocking motion of the train and hopefully sleep through the various noisy whistle stops between Harden and Goulburn in the middle of the night.');

Tim's penchant for the ridiculous and the humorous ('now, if you were driver of the 'fast goods' due out of Wodonga, southbound, at 4.15 pm on a weekday, you knew you had to cross the northbound Spirit of Progress before you reached double track at Mangalore. With just a minute or two of slow running for each southbound section, suddenly the planned efficient cross with the Spirit at Euroa was not achievable, as the 'fast goods' ended up being put into a loop further back at Benalla. This meant a good 45-minute extra break and smoko for the crew ... Furthermore, hot pies were available at Benalla, if not at the station then across the road at the Terminus Hotel. Now, if the signalman was in on the act, then suddenly the 'fast goods' was running over and hour

or more late, and the driver would be paid extra overtime'; the book ends with Tim quoting 'a British steam railway enthusiast, the Reverend Wilbert Vere Awdry, creator of the 'Thomas the Tank Engine' series of books, who once compared the Church of England to British Railways: both had their heyday in the mid-19th century; both own a great deal of Gothic-style architecture which is expensive to maintain;



SOUTH COAST HISTORY SOCIETY Inc.

Who Are We?

We're just a bunch of locals committed to sharing the fascinating history of the NSW South Coast with anyone and everyone who is interested — putting many of the dramatic old photographs of the area out on public display — learning what we can about region's history — helping uncover things from our past that we didn't previously know — and, along the way, hoping to enthuse others who have similar interests.

Currently we are doing this through *Recollections*, our free magazine that's published every second month, through our website,

You can help us most by:

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on our Facebook page, at our informal 'talking history' morning teas, and at seminars we hold in the area from time-to-time.

Email us with "Send Recollections" in the subject line and we will send you future issues of *Recollections* as soon as they are available.

We're a local community-based, incorporated, not-for-profit organisation which simply aims to benefit our community. Our ABN is 42 492 574 578 – so we're legally established, with clearly-defined responsibilities. And we're also currently actively seeking funding to enable us to progress some other innovative local initiatives.

* Back issues of *Recollections* are at www.bit.ly/RecollectionsX. where X is the issue number (1 to 10, except issue 3 which is 3- and issue 10 which is 10-).

both are regularly assailed by critics; and both are firmly convinced that they are the best means of getting man to his ultimate destination.' Boom-boom! ... or, perhaps more appropriately, that should that be toot-tooooo!!)

Basically, this is a history of railways, in the age of steam, in each of the Australian states and of the Commonwealth Railways. This information is preceded by and followed by observations about the important roles that the railways played in the development of Australia (a popular portrayal of Australia being that the country rose to wealth on the sheep's back, but Tim persuasively argues that it more accurately rode to wealth behind the locomotives of our railways) and Tim's thoughts about the future that steam railways – with some imagination and funding! – could play in the country's future.

'*Steam Australia*' is a very readable, extremely interesting book. But it's also inspiring. Tim is not hesitant about recommending the best Australian steam railways that still operate, the best Australian railway museums to visit, detailing (in detail!) collections of steam engines and rail stock that could/should be made functional and opened to the public, and even lamenting (and sometimes criticising) several significant collections of Australian steam rail stock that are now not publicly accessible, even after having been given substantial government funding. (This is an exact parallel with other Australian volunteer-run local museums: some are exceptionally good and well-worth visiting, others can only be described as embarrassingly woeful, especially when they charge an admission fee.)

But – as is often the case with histories such as this – the thing I most enjoyed about 'Steam Australia' is the 'trivia' it includes: that Australia has had 22 different railway gauges (10 of which are still operating), the most on any continent in the world; that railway engineers somehow believe that no railway is complete without having a tunnel, and so a (totally unnecessary) tunnel was included when the (now defunct) Queanbeyan to Cooma railway was constructed; that 'decades ago, one engineer wrote down a '3' instead of a '4', and this resulted in a 3 ft 8½ inch gauge railway being built near Wollongong'; that the first coal railway in Newcastle ran downhill from the pit, across Hunter Street, to the wharf and required no engine ('two horses were carried in the last wagon: once the train had been unloaded, these horses would be hitched up to drag the train back to the coal pits for reloading'); that during World War I Australia's brilliant General Sir John Monash – a highly successful civil engineer prior to the War – ordered that the 1 foot 11½ inch Decauville narrow gauge railway commonly used near the front lines be laid on standard-gauge 4 foot 8½ inch sleepers, enabling these lines to, later, be easily converted to full standard gauge which was capable of handling vastly bigger loads and to be seamlessly connected to the French SNCF standard-gauge network (the Australian War Memorial has one of the small British-built Hunslet locomotives that operated on the Decauville tracks in its collection); etc.

'*Steam Australia*' is available in paperback, is issued by NLA Publishing and is available from around \$30.

Peter Lacey

How 'Healthy' is our Local History?

We asked this question at our 'Talking History' morning in late September. I started by outlining seventeen conclusions I'd reached during my involvement with the South Coast History Society over the past two years:

1. There is CONSIDERABLE interest in the local community in local history.
2. This high level of interest is not always immediately recognized – by individuals themselves, by the community, and even by those entrusted with providing history to the community.
3. I'm astounded by how many people have local history stories to tell – and want to tell them – and I'm astounded how many people have significant historical artefacts scattered in various places around the community, often 'hidden away'.
4. I'm amazed at how much interesting local history has already been written, how much has been documented. Much of this now needs re-promoting and re-promoting ... because much of it is in danger of becoming 'lost'. So, in summary, I'm astounded at how many great local history stories there are 'out there' to be told – or retold.
5. I'm disappointed at how little essential support is given to local history by governments, Councils, businesses, even the local community, and especially from grant-providers who rarely support something as basic as our local history and heritage.

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- Regrettably, usually funding is directed to bricks and mortar, or 'acceptable' fashionable pursuits such as music, dance and the visual arts, but history rarely gets a look in. (The one exception to this generalization is the funding that has been available from Heritage Near Me – but even that is now drying up because the valuable Heritage Near Me initiative ceases from 30.6.2019). And funding organisations make it RIDICULOUSLY difficult to access or even apply for funding (even for relatively small amounts like the local Mumbulla Foundation provides). So,
6. I think 'arts funding' needs significant rebalancing, so that local history gets something of a look-in and the application processes are dramatically simplified.
 7. I'm gratified at the support SCHS has received from the grass roots level in our community – we've received a little from a lot of people, which has at least allowed us to keep our heads above water and regularly print and distribute 'Recollections'.
 8. There is still a fertile field out there for anyone wanting to research and write histories – but, anyone who does, don't expect to get rich any time soon!!
 9. I think we need to bring some 21st Century thinking about how we write, store history and share our local history. We need to bring access to history into the 21st Century – for example by digitizing as many old newspapers and books as possible (having past issues of local newspapers on microfilm is 20th century thinking; it should now be available digitized and readily available on platforms such as the National Library's Trove website); by not restricting history scholarship with constraints like library opening hours; by re-shaping written histories so they are more engaging and appealing (which might mean presenting histories in formats other than just the traditional written format).
 10. Regrettably history has become and is seen as very much an old person's pursuit, an old person's interest.
 11. Our challenge is to make local history more exciting, more interesting, more 'alive' – which might be something as basic as organizing history-based tours of the area.
 12. I'm astounded at how poorly we promote aspects of our history, our heritage – for example, Bega has absolutely no street signage or explanatory signs relating to its history. WE SHOULD BE PROUD OF OUR HISTORY – WE SHOULD DEMONSTRATE WE ARE PROUD OF IT!
 13. History, and our local history, has some quite unappealing 'shopfronts' that include libraries with limited opening hours, and museums which charge admission charges and research charges. I believe history belongs to everybody and therefore should, as much as possible, be freely available to everybody; the internet, where a huge amount of history is freely available, has – thank goodness – emerged as a significantly more appealing, more modern 'shopfront' for history and historians, but its benefits are yet to be fully appreciated, even by historians.
 14. I understand local history resources in our local schools are woefully lacking.
 15. I'm astounded at how few local history books there are in our local libraries that can be borrowed. (The reserve collections are adequate but not as accessible.)
 16. We're not taking advantage of many opportunities that are already there to promote history. For example, locally we don't participate in History Week.
 17. SCHS has done a little to help share local history – but there is an enormous amount more we could or should be doing.
- Local historian Fiona Firth and librarian Samantha Fenton (and the enthusiastic audience!) then joined the conversation. Fiona highlighted that local history is still considered a very distant cousin to other more-mainstream history among academics and most professional historians, and Samantha outlined the significant challenges faced by libraries when underfunding occurs (including being unable to replace history books, which not-infrequently are simply not returned!). The general conclusions from the morning's discussion were that not enough value is given to local history, that insufficient public funding is available to appropriately support it (the increasing value of digitization of histories, the cost of doing so, and the lack of funding to be able to do so, was particularly noted), that some sort of 'census' could profitably be undertaken to identify and list exactly what histories relating to the South Coast have been compiled and still survive, and that the efforts/outputs of the numerous small local history-related organisations (such as history societies, museums, libraries) in the area need to be better co-ordinated and, in particular, deserve to be more widely promoted.

Peter Lacey

and finally...

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