

South Coast History Society Inc.

RecollectionS

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Issue 24

The World's Best Value Magazine! It's FREE!



Batemans Bay Bridge Raised...Counterweights Dropped. Note Bridge Operator standing to left of control house. Photograph by Ted Richards.

HERITAGE LISTED

The Batemans Bay Bridge

It is heritage listed, and parts of it (such as its towers) are considered to have 'exceptional' heritage significance, and it is an iconic 'gateway' to the town... but the Batemans Bay Bridge will soon be demolished. As happened with its predecessor (a motorized car ferry), the bridge is no longer capable of adequately handling the traffic flow – so it just has to go!

The main coastal road between Sydney and Victoria (now called the Princes Highway) once included several crossings of waterways by ferry. As funds became available, bridges were constructed to replace all of these ferries.

The ferry crossing of the Clyde River at Batemans Bay was installed in 1871 and, subsequently, was upgraded on several occasions. By the time the Batemans Bay Bridge was opened in November 1956, the Clyde River ferry had become the last remaining vehicular ferry on the Princes Highway in NSW and was carrying over 233,000 vehicles per year. Delays experienced in crossing the river not infrequently exceeded one hour...and, for those travelling to or from Canberra, that was on top of significant delays also experienced crossing the Clyde River by ferry at Nelligen.

Preliminary work to construct the Batemans Bay Bridge

Fantastic Reads

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The Batemans Bay Bridge (still under construction) and the vehicular ferry it replaced in 1956 © Batemans Bay Heritage Museum

started before World War II but was put on hold when essential war-related industries resulted in shortages of materials and skilled labour. Tenders for construction of the bridge were finally sought in October 1947.

But continuing post-war shortages of materials and skilled labour meant that construction of the bridge then proceeded at a snail's pace.

In the early 1950s almost all of the piers had been driven down to rock foundations – in some cases to more than 60 feet below the river's high-water mark. Headstocks (the reinforced pads that sit on the piers and which carry the structural steel of the bridge) were gradually added. But it was not until the mid-1950s, by which time the post-war shortage of materials had eased, that construction of the bridge began in earnest.

The bridge was finally opened to traffic on November 21st, 1956. It had cost £350,000 to build.

The impact on Batemans Bay township (and on townships further south) was profound. One wonders whether the thousands of people who attended the official opening of the bridge actually realized how much difference the bridge would make to their community: the pace of life in town rapidly changed and, as one resident observed 'new people came to town, we had more visitors, we started locking our doors and locking our cars – we had never done that before!'

The Batemans Bay Bridge is what is termed a 'Vertical Lift Bridge'. It has (very obvious) counterweights that move down when the central section is raised (a quite different arrangement to the other common form of moveable bridge, the Bascule Bridge [the modern equivalent of the

old castle drawbridge] – of which the Narooma Bridge is an example – which often has a counterweight rigidly attached to the end of the structure that is raised, but which is not an immediately obvious feature of the bridge). The Batemans Bay Bridge can be lifted to provide a clearance of 75 feet above the river's high-water mark.

The Batemans Bay Bridge is basically the same design as was the Hexham Bridge (spanning the Hunter River upstream of Newcastle, although Hexham's lift is higher than that of the Batemans Bay Bridge), the Ryde Bridge at Meadowbank in Sydney, the Wardell Bridge over the Richmond River, and the Clarence River Bridge at Harwood.

Records indicate that the Batemans Bay Bridge was



A bird's eye view of the Batemans Bay Bridge control house and traffic. Photograph by Ted Richards

raised, for example, 664 times during 2011 (almost twice a day) to enable shipping to proceed up or down river, under its lifting span.

In May 2012 the *Bay Post* recorded the retirement of the bridge operator George Merceica, who had held the position for 20 years. One memorable 'near miss' that he related occurred when the automated vehicle gates wouldn't close and Mr Merceica had to stop the passing traffic by placing traffic cones across the bridge before climbing the ladder to the engine house atop of the bridge. One motorist, however, was reluctant to wait and, just as Mr. Merceica commenced lifting the bridge, the driver accelerated and attempted to cross the bridge before it had been opened. Fortunately, he was able to brake hard, just in time to avoid plummeting into the river!!

The construction of the Batemans Bay Bridge, together with the concurrent construction of the Tuross River Bridge

near Bodalla (replacing a temporary bridge that had been installed when an earlier bridge collapsed during floods in April 1945), coincided with the demise of coastal shipping along the South Coast.

Its opening, therefore, had a significant impact on transportation to the area. Road transport along the coast became quicker and easier – and this instantly became the dominant form of transportation to the area – and an increase in town and village development resulted along the full length of the South Coast. **R**

Sources: RMS 'Moveable Span Bridge Study'; State Heritage Inventory listing; 'History of the Bridge over the Clyde River on Princes Hwy at Batemans's Bay' in *Main Roads Journal*, March 1948 and December 1956; 'Princes Highway History and Development' at ozroads.com.au; information supplied by Clyde River and Batemans Bay Historical Society.



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FEEDBACK

The photo of the headstone on the grave of Leonard Pratt in Moruya Cemetery, included in Recollections 23 and Recollections 22, resulted in our receiving more information about the family from North Narooma genealogist Penny Ferguson.


At the time of his death, Leonard was working at the Bank of NSW in Moruya. He was killed at nearby Gundry on New Year's Day 1889 'though his horse falling on him, crushing him to death in a shocking manner.' A newspaper report at the time described Edward as 'a young man so full of promise and so generally esteemed for his unobtrusive good qualities' and 'the esteem in which he was generally held was evidenced by the large and respectable attendance at his funeral.' He was 18 years old.

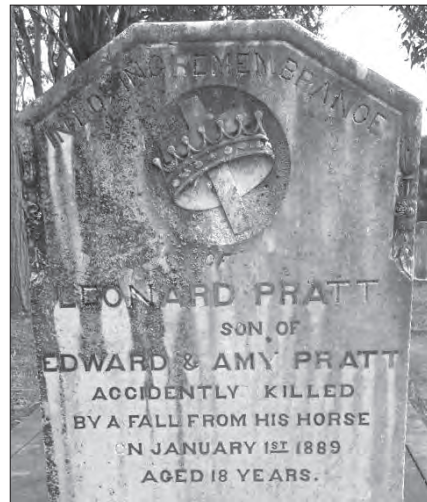
Leonard was the son of Edward and Amey Pratt. Edward had graduated with a MA from Cambridge University as the 9th Wrangler in the Mathematical Tripos (if these terms are unfamiliar to you, do Google them. The history of the Cambridge mathematics course is absolutely fascinating.) He arrived in Australia in 1857 to take the position of Senior Mathematics Master at the newly-established Sydney Grammar School.

Amey also arrived in Australia in 1857 under the care of the wife of Rev. George Macarthur who was to become the Headmaster of The Kings School, Parramatta. Rev. Marsden married Amey and Edward in the Church of St Mary the Virgin at Denham Court on December 21, 1858.

In 1872 Edward purchased 'Myalla', Cooma. By 1885 'Myalla' was 13,000 acres and ran 20 horses, 450 cattle and 15,200 sheep.

Edward Pratt wrote the most incredible diaries, detailing his day-to-day life and his thoughts, that are now in the collection of the National Library. In these he details the shock and grief felt by the family on learning of Leonard's death.

Leonard's brother, Fred, became a Reuters journalist and confidant of President Chiang Kai-shek of China. He accompanied Madame Chiang Kai-shek to the USA and ended his days in China. 



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Eden, though a beautiful spot ... is about the worst place for astronomical observations that I ever visited'

Transits of Venus (where Venus passes across the Sun, as seen from Earth) are rare and they only occur in pairs once every 100 years or so. One occurred in 1874 and another in 1882.

The 1874 transit was of particular interest and generated international excitement because it presented the first opportunity to astronomers to photograph the phenomenon.

As had occurred on previous occasions (including when Captain James Cook was despatched to Tahiti to observe the 1769 Transit, before he then sailed westwards to 'discover' the east coast of New Holland), numerous expeditions were planned and equipped to observe the transit from locations around the globe (one of these expeditions, financed by the United States Congress was to Hobart and another to Queenstown in New Zealand).

In Australia, the Transit was to be watched from a number of observatories, including those in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide.

Sydney Observatory received a Government donation of £1,000 to observe the 1874 transit and three additional observation sites were selected to supplement the data that would be obtained at Sydney Observatory. These three sites were determined to have desirable geographical positions, reliable weather, and "telegraphic convenience for determining longitude".

Woodford (in the Blue Mountains), Goulburn and Eden were selected as these sites.

The Eden expedition leader was Rev. William Scott who had previously been Government Astronomer at Sydney Observatory. He was, in the months following the Transit, to detail his experiences in a paper that was read to the Royal Society in January 1875.

'We left Sydney on Tuesday, November 24th, and arrived at Eden the next morning. Having landed our observatory, tents, and instruments, together with a good supply of bricks and cement for building piers for the instruments, my first care was to find a suitable spot for the observatory.

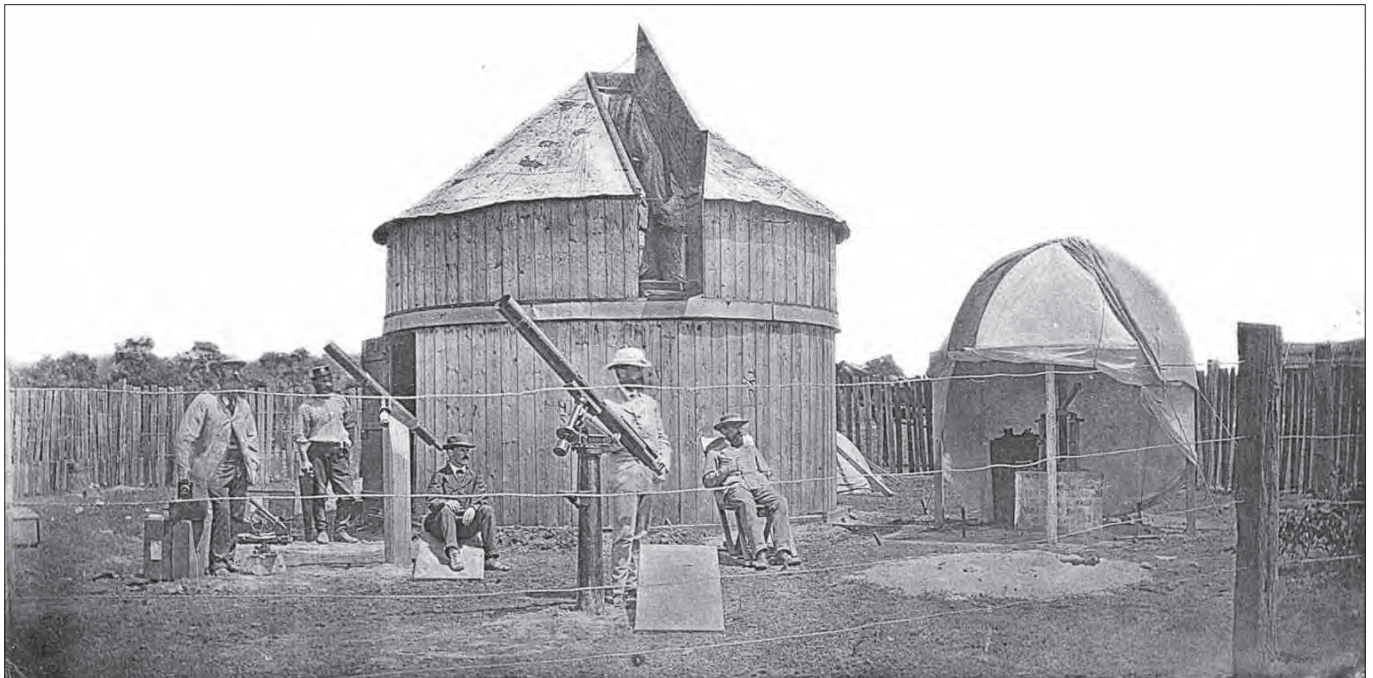
I was not long in selecting an open space known as the Market-square [now the carpark of the Eden Fishermen's Recreation Club] on a hill overlooking both bays. This site has the advantage of being near the telegraph line, and commanding uninterrupted views of the ranges at some miles distance to the south and west, the wooded sides of which I saw would afford good reference marks for the adjustments of the transit instrument in the meridian and prime vertical.

The day was nearly over before we had carted all our luggage to the top of the very steep hill which forms the principal street. A commencement however was made of setting up the observatory in which we were most effectively assisted by Mr Russell [the then Colonial Astronomer], the harbour master, and his boat's crew.'

A system was devised to cover the bottom half of their telescope with a large bag 'so that the whole observatory answered the purpose of a dark room for photographic work. This arrangement, though very convenient, was, I think, the least successful of Mr. Russell's contrivances as the bag was liable to be influenced by the wind, and interfered with the steady motion of the [mechanically-driven] telescope'.

On the day of the Transit, things did not go well for Rev. Scott, leading him to ultimately conclude *'that Eden, though a beautiful spot, and in many respects a most desirable place to inhabit, is about the worst place for astronomical observations that I ever visited'.*

As they waited for the Transit to commence, clouds had



Waiting for the Transit of Venus at Eden in 1874. Seated at right is William Scott

moved in and the wind had picked up. However, before Venus moved into the sphere of the Sun, 'I could see clearly the whole of the planet's outline. In fact, it presented exactly such an appearance as might have been expected from a planet possessing an atmosphere.'


The party was also able to follow the path of Venus into the sphere of Sun until 'I regret that the action of the wind on the telescope rendered it impossible to keep the micrometer wire in its true position' and 'the quality of the pictures (was) affected by the clouds which were continually moving over the sun's face: indeed there were very few minutes during which the sun was not more or less obscured... At one time we had to stop for 20 (minutes), and at another time for 80 minutes,

The above article first appeared in the on-line Recollections 22 (www.bit.ly/Recollections22)... which led to our learning that

Merimbula also once had an Observatory

The short-lived observatory at Eden played a role in the observation of the Transit of Venus in 1874. But a longer-lived meteorological observatory in Merimbula, which operated during the last years of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th century, played a pivotal role in a project which, according to a history of the Australian Bureau of Meteorology, 'helped to establish in the minds of the public, as well as the politicians, the necessity for inter-colonial cooperation and for meteorology to be a national responsibility' following Federation.

This Merimbula observatory was established in 1898 by a leading meteorologist of his day, Clement Lindley Wragge. It was a 'twin' to an observatory that he erected on the very

the sun being entirely obscured...(ultimately) we took about 60 photographs, very few of which I fear are of any value.' 

Sources: Royal Astronomical Society's Science Photo Library's website; *Sydney Morning Herald* 23.1.1875, accessed from Trove; 'Transit of Venus' by Steven van Roode; Wikipedia; Information supplied by John Sandefur.

We thank John Sandefur for suggesting this topic be included in 'Recollections'. If you have a South Coast history topic you would like us to feature and can provide some basic information, please contact us: southcoasthistory@yahoo.com

summit of Mt Kosciusko, in a belief that simultaneous weather readings (208 'notes' every day) from observatories on mountain tops and nearby at sea level would provide valuable weather forecasting information; previously Wragge had set up similar stations on Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in Britain, and Fort William in Scotland (he received a Gold Medal from the Scottish Meteorological Society for his work from these observatories), at Mt Lofty and Walkerville in South Australia, and on Mt Wellington and in Hobart in Tasmania.

In 1887 Wragge was appointed as Queensland's Government Meteorologist. He also pioneered research into tropical revolving storms (including cyclones) in the



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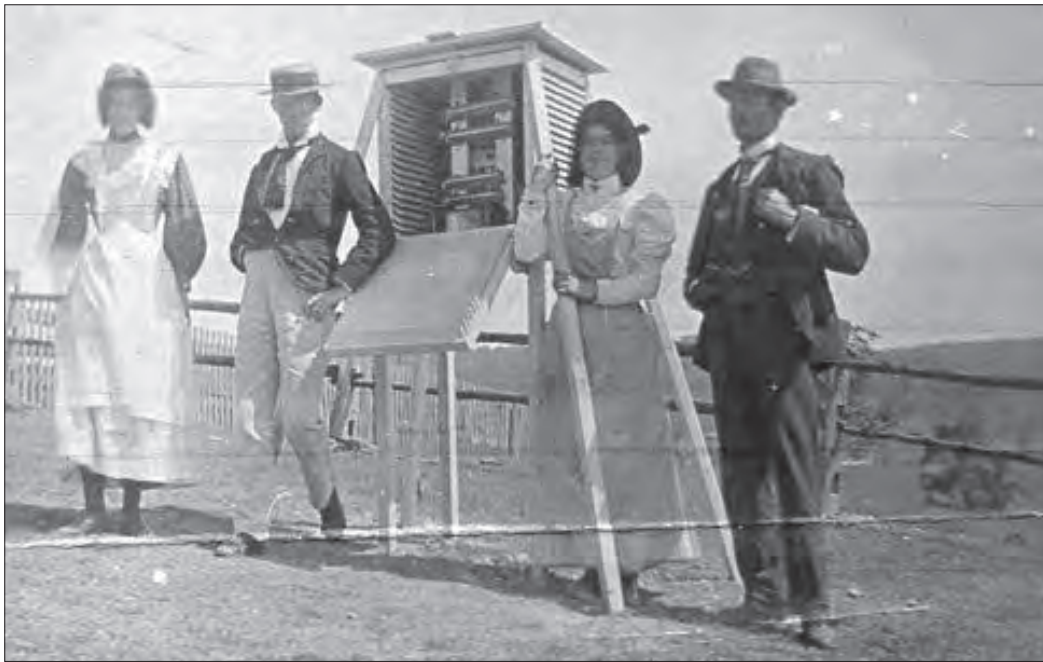
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'Observatory Hill, Merimbula. Direct line with Mt Kosciusko. Clement Wragge's son and Mr J J Russell, Tanja'. Photo: Bega Valley Historical Society

south-west Pacific and is credited with having instituted the practice of giving classical, biblical or personal names to cyclones. His forecasts for heavy rainfall in Queensland earned him the nickname 'Inclement Wragge'...but the Australian Dictionary of Biography adds that he had a *'mop of flaming red hair and explosive temper to match'* and possessed *'the adjectival luxuriance of a bullocky'*

Very little is known about his Merimbula observatory. However, a great deal of information about, and numerous photographs of, the Mt Kosciusko observatory have survived (see adjacent story). This probably is not surprising, considering the newsworthy challenges of maintaining an observatory on Mt Kosciusko when compared to far more mundane 'challenges' that would have been involved in manning an observatory in Merimbula!

The Kosciusko observatory was initially funded by Adelaide businessman and philanthropist Robert Barr Smith (a partner in Elder Smith and Co, now Elders Ltd) who had a particular interest in exploratory work. The Merimbula 'observatory' (probably more accurately the site of a small collection of meteorological instruments) was – at least at the start – in the grounds of 'Courunga' (today better known as 'The Tower House'), the home of leading local businessman Armstrong L. Munn. Munn may well have helped defray some of the costs of setting it up.

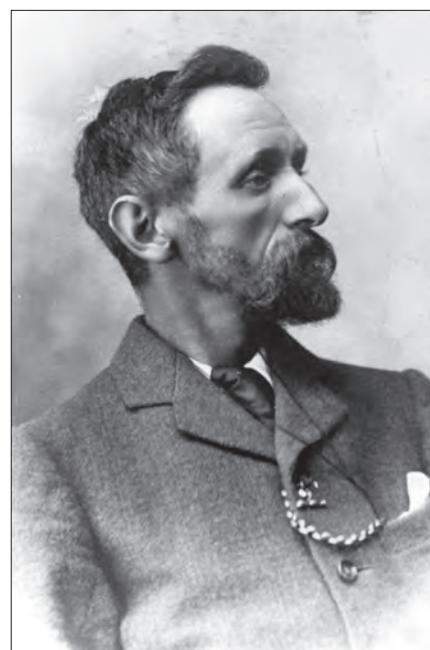
Clement Lindley Wragge's son, Clement Egerton Wragge, was initially in charge of this Merimbula facility – and he, undoubtedly, enjoyed a much more refined lifestyle at Munn's impressive house in Merimbula than did his fellow Observers who were isolated and secluded atop of Mt Kosciusko! Egerton was to become the project's longest-serving Observer, initially at Merimbula and then, from 1899 through to the closure of the observatory in 1902, at the Mt Kosciusko observatory where he held the position of Chief Observer.

Armstrong Munn was to become the Merimbula facility's 'General Manager' and two of his sons were trained to become 'Assistants', or meteorological 'Observers'.

Unfortunately, there are virtually no newspaper reports from that time specifically about Wragge's Merimbula meteorological station. There were mentions that readings were consistently being taken in Merimbula at precisely the same times as they were taken on Mt Kosciusko, that the readings were producing useful results, that personnel changes at various facilities had occurred (additional low-level monitoring stations were also established in Sale in Victoria, and at Glebe Point and Manly in Sydney), and that the NSW Premier (who was

obviously supportive of Wragge's endeavours) approved funding totalling £2,231 between 1898 and 1902 to support the Kosciusko and associated low-level monitoring stations.

Clement Lindley Wragge's Mt Kosciusko and Merimbula observatories survived until mid-1902. The meteorological monitoring equipment was then removed. Some time after 1907 Clement Lindley Wragge moved to Auckland in New Zealand where he set up the 'Wragge Institute and Museum' that housed much of the original equipment and records from his Mt Kosciusko/Merimbula stations. Tragically, the Institute and Museum and all of Wragge's historic records were lost in a fire in 1928 – leaving us today with scant details about history of his pioneering meteorological station in Merimbula. **R**



Clement Lindley Wragge (1852–1922), c 1901

Sources: Australian Dictionary of Biography; Canberra Times 19.10.2019; Australian Science and Technology Heritage Centre (www.austehc.unimelb.edu.au); maas.museum; Mt Kosciusko Centenary Mass Souvenir Booklet; Extensive unpublished research undertaken by Adrian Ingleby of Otford which is contributing to a book being compiled on Clement Lindley Wragge for release later this year or in 2021; Valuable assistance also provided by the Merimbula-Imlay Historical Society.

The Kosciusko Observatory

On 2nd December 1897, a party of 14 men, 18 horses, and a dray loaded with equipment left Jindabyne to establish a meteorological monitoring station on the summit of Mt Kosciusko. The men arrived two days later (it took the dray several additional days to complete the ascent) and *'the jubilant Wragge and his companions saluted the stone cairn, and drank Kerry's health.'* (Charles Kerry was a well-known Sydney photographer and Snowy Mountains publicist. He was also the first European to make a winter ascent of Mt Kosciusko. His inclusion in the party would have been deliberately orchestrated by the ever publicity-conscious Clement Wragge. And one of the other members of the party was a Sydney *'Daily Telegraph'* reporter!).



Charles Kerry's 1897 photograph of Wragge's first observatory on Mt Kosciusko. The cairn on the mountain top is at left, the ill-fated provisions tent at right. Image: Powerhouse Museum, 85/1284-2848

By December 10th an arctic tent had been erected and the meteorological station was operating. Three Observers remained behind to take various readings. Their reports were to be regularly posted from Jindabyne to Clement Wragge in Brisbane, after an earlier proposal to erect a 25-mile long telegraph line from the summit of the mountain to Jindabyne (which would have required burying it underground in snow-affected areas) was found to be too costly.

The camp, however, did not survive long. On 12th February 1898, winds of 160kph ripped apart the provisions tent (the same storm also sank the brigs *'Amy'* and *'Malcolm'* just north of Wollongong), so the three resident Observers collapsed the remainder of the camp and retreated to the comparative shelter of Jindabyne.


The NSW Government then decided to support Wragge's project and paid £336 for the construction and maintenance of a very-basic timber hut at the summit. It seems their involvement was largely influenced by a desire to open up the Kosciusko area to tourism...and, in summer months over the next few years, parties

of visitors did, indeed, regularly call at the hut.

Wragge's Kosciuszko observatory functioned until June 1902 when the N.S.W. Government withdrew funding, apparently because the volatile Clement Wragge had antagonized NSW (and probably other states) by issuing his forecasts from the *'Chief Weather Bureau, Brisbane'* [at the time he was advocating the establishment of a national weather bureau and was, perhaps quite reasonably, expecting to be appointed to head it] and because of disagreements over the cost of his projects. The Tourist Bureau then took over the hut which ultimately burnt down on Christmas Day, 1913. It is suspected that it may have been struck by lightning.

Wragge's Observers at Mt Kosciusko were working in one of the harshest environments in Australia and were required to take meteorological readings every four hours, day and night, throughout the year. In winter they would often have to climb out of a trapdoor in the roof and then, tethered by a rope to the building, would walk or crawl to the instruments to take the necessary readings. Journeys to Jindabyne, to transmit their records and to re-provision, involved skiing down (on what were then called *'snow shoes'*) to the Thredbo River Valley (and on their return, climbing back up to the hut) and then walking to Jindabyne – a distance of 28 miles (46km) each way. In the four years that the observatory operated, Observers were caught in fog, wind, rain and snow on numerous occasions and several almost perished. As one Observer observed, *'Man proposes and God disposes on Kosciuszko.'*

Fifteen different Observers worked at the Mt Kosciusko meteorological station during the four years it operated. Only recently have they all been identified. Two were Candelo residents – Basil de Burgh Newth (who was the longest serving Kosciusko Observer) and Robert Leslie Burcher (who was a *'volunteer'* who expected to be paid but, as he testified later in a bankruptcy court, *'the Government closed the Observatory down, and he received no remuneration'*).

Wragge's Creek, which crosses the Kosciuszko Road just below Smiggin Holes, is now a permanent reminder of Clement Wragge's meteorological work at Mt Kosciusko. 



Wragge's Hut at Mt Kosciusko almost covered in snow in the winter of 1899

SPORT REPORT

CRICKET

Mount Kosciusko, 11th January 1902

A cricket game was played in the picturesque valley at the bottom of Mount Kosciusko between teams comprised of the *Officials*, *Guides* and *Visitors* to the Observatory situated there.

The Kosciusko team scored 123.

(F. H. Clancy, 45; B. Rixon, 22; D. McGregor, 19; H. D. Jocelyn, 11)

The Visitors team scored 104.

(J. Hughes, 32; C. Hall, 20; F. Goetze, 18)

The mountaineers thus won by 19 runs.

The rest of the afternoon was devoted to sight-seeing, some of the visitors being unable to resist the temptation of having a dip in the beautifully clear, but somewhat cool water of the *Cootapatamba Lake* (*Cootapatamba = the place where eagles drink*). Some amusement was caused by a swimming match between C. Hall and F. Goetze, and after a close struggle the latter won by a touch.

Sources: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/14449163> & 100611489, 80869762, 113872493



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SOUTH COAST PERSONAGE

With the assistance of funding from Essential Energy Community Choices, a regular 'South Coast Personage' column has been added to 'Recollections'. The first person to be featured is Daniel Gowing, a Bega Valley Pioneer. Your suggestions for future inclusion in this feature will be greatly appreciated – simply email your suggestions to southcoasthistory@yahoo.com

Daniel Gowing – 'The Father of Tathra'

Daniel Gowing, born in 1812, left Norfolk, England for Australia in 1841. His wife, Mary, four-year-old daughter, Ellen, and 9-month-old son, John, accompanied him.

Daniel settled for 15 months on a clearing lease at Bong Bong (now Moss Vale). He also spent time as a nurseryman near Sutton Forest. For the last six years, before arriving in the Bega Valley, Daniel leased a substantial property called 'Glenfield' south west of Sydney.

While market gardening at Sutton Forest, he initially took produce to market by wheelbarrow. Through hard work as a market gardener, and by dealing in horses and livestock, he accumulated funds to purchase more extensive property.

Daniel and his son John, then aged about 14, travelled to the Monaro to look over a property he intended to purchase. On arrival, after the cattle were mustered,

Daniel thought the cattle were not according to contract and objected to taking the stock. The sale did not go ahead. They started for Twofold Bay, with the intention of going back to Sydney, but heard that the Government was selling a quantity of land near Bega.

The rest is history. Daniel bought 500 acres at Jellat Jellat (to the east of Bega township) in February 1855 and made this his home for the rest of his long life of 93 years. His 500-acres grew to around 3,000-acres by the time of his death in 1906.

After initially camping on his land, he built a modest home close to the river. However, after being affected by flooding, he selected a site for his house (adjacent to today's Bega-Tathra Road) and built a small dwelling in 1860. In 1876 he built a two-storey lath and plaster (wood strips coated with plaster) homestead adjacent to the original home. Over time he added offices,



Daniel and Mary Gowing

stables, a blacksmith's forge and other buildings.

With horticulture being a passion, he surrounded his house with extensive flower gardens and an orchard of approximately eight acres. Within this hedged area he grew many varieties of flowers, ornamental trees and orchard fruits, including exotic varieties. He also erected a gardener's cottage, hot house with a boiler room for steam heating, and a glasshouse.

Daniel named his property the 'Garden of Eden'. It was to become a show piece of the district. Guests were very welcome at the property and garden parties were held to raise funds for the local hospital and various Bega charities. An annual picnic was also held for school children.

When Daniel arrived in the area, the river flats were heavily timbered. They were eventually cleared, after which crops were grown on the land.

Daniel imported milling machinery from England in 1858 and built a flour mill in 1860. After a number of years, he discovered that growing wheat on the coast wasn't successful as rust destroyed the crops.

The growing of maize was much more suited to coastal conditions. Daniel had much success with his maize crops which played a major part in building his fortune. In the drought of 1885-86, his was the only corn that could be bought in the district.

Several prizes were won in maize competitions at the International Exhibition at Amsterdam in 1883, London in 1886, and also in Sydney.

Daniel Gowing's Jellat Jellat sawmill supplied first class timber used in building Sydney's General Post Office in

1872. He later set up sawmills at Reedy Swamp and Tanja.

He introduced the cream separator to the district in 1885. Illawarra Shorthorn cattle were mostly used for milking. It is believed that butter was made from the cream, and the milk was used to feed the many pigs produced at Jellat Jellat.

Daniel also owned teams of draft horses which were well looked-after and were well bred. It is understood that he bought horses for breeding into the district, one of which was a stallion from Carlton Draught. The horses were used to work the ground and cart produce to Tathra for shipping.

Daniel Gowing has been acknowledged as the 'Father of Tathra' due to his endeavours, primarily in the 1850s and 1860s, to provide access to shipping for the produce from his own and the other farms at Jellat Jellat.

Daniel was involved in building the first road to Tathra. He also built the first Store and Post Office in the town.



Daniel Gowing's 'Rose of Eden'



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In 1858 Daniel and the other Jellat farmers built a small jetty and store shed at the present site of the Tathra Wharf, having first tried less suitable shipping sites at Kangarutha and Kianinny. In 1860, with financial assistance from the Illawarra Steam Navigation Co, they became involved in building a more substantial wharf. This was added to and improved over time, facilitating the growth of trade and passenger services for the district up until the 1950s.

Befitting his role in the establishment of the Wharf, Daniel was elected the first Chairman of Trustees of the Wharf.

Daniel Gowing bought approximately 3-acres of land in Carp Street, Bega in the late 1800s to build retail shops. Many of these remain in use today.

The Central Hotel in Gipps Street was built by Daniel in 1895. It had 40 rooms, including 20 large bedrooms, 2 dining rooms, pantry, meat room, scullery and storeroom and 2 large shops underneath. The parlour and dining room could seat 60 to 70 people. At the back there was a splendid brick stable of 10 stalls and 3 other stables. It was said 'Mr D. Gowing has not been sparing of expense in providing an up to date hotel.'

Daniel was instrumental in establishing the Bega Agricultural Society. He built four almshouses in Peden Street (now demolished) and supported the Anglican Church. He was a member of the national school's board, the hospital and the school of arts. He was vice president of the Bega AP and H Society for many years. To start operations of the Bega Cooperative Creamery Company, he and John D'Arcy became guarantors to the bank for the necessary amount.

From his early days, it was evident Daniel had an affinity with machinery and a willingness to try new technology.

While farming at 'Glenfield', he bought a Garrett thrashing machine as well as reaping and sowing machines. By 1860, having become established at Jellat Jellat, he had purchased a 7hp Garrett portable steam engine and thrashing machine, as well as milling stones to value-add his wheat crop for his four-storey flour mill.

Over the next 20 years a large amount of machinery was acquired, particularly steam-related gear, including a 10hp Ruston Proctor portable, Ransomes Head and Jefferies 8 hp portable, Fowler Traction Engine and a 6hp Robey hoisting engine.

In 1872 Daniel exhibited a large quantity of machinery at the first Bega Show. The *Bega Gazette* reported at the time, 'we venture to assert that no town in the Colony can show such an extensive collection of scientifically made machinery.'

The *Bega Gazette* also reported in June 1872 'Mr Gowing had added a 6-ton planing apparatus capable of turning planed tongue and groove flooring for the local and Sydney markets.'



Daniel Gowing at the entrance to his glasshouse at the 'Garden of Eden'

In 1882 Daniel purchased an 8hp Ruston Proctor Traction Engine and a set of Barford Perkins Round About Ploughing gear. He demonstrated its use on Jellat Jellat flat and invited the public, some of whom turned up believing Gowing's new way of ploughing was little more than a whim or a hobby. By the end of the day, with 12 acres worked, his innovative approach was declared a spectacular success, the *Bega Gazette* observing 'The words are not too big for the occasion when we say that Jellat and its speculative owner will have a place in Australian History.' (Further information on this steam engine and plough is at www.bit.ly/begahh50)

Daniel's interest in steam engines even extended to the importation of a steam launch, the 'Rose of Eden' that was built to his specifications in 1886 at Millwall, London. It was unloaded at Eden as deck cargo and was towed to the mouth of the Bega River by an ISNCo ship, arriving there on February 19th 1887.

However, the launch capsized in waves and suctioned upside down in the sand. Stories vary, but Daniel Gowing used an axe and/or removed a metal plate to make a hole in the bottom of the vessel and then used teams of bullocks to tow it into the river.

The 'Rose of Eden' was mainly used as a pleasure craft for the family, but was also useful in times of flood.

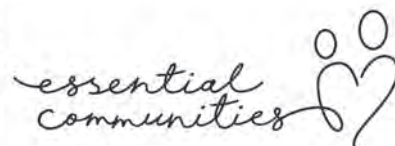
Daniel and Mary were survived by eight children: Ellen, John, Eliza, Mary, Daniel, Sarah, Rebekah (Rebecca) and Benjamin.

Unusually for the time, Daniel willed a substantial legacy of his town properties to his two surviving daughters and six granddaughters.

Many of Daniel and Mary's descendants still live in the Bega/Jellat Jellat area.

—The Gowing Family History Group

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RADIO GIRL

by David Dufty

This is an interesting, easy-to-read, biography of 'Mrs Mac' (Violet McKenzie), *'the famous Australian radio engineer you've never heard of'*, as Dick Smith describes her.

'Mrs Mac' was an Australian pioneer. She was the first woman in Australia to receive a Diploma in Electrical Engineering, the first Australian female certified radio telegraphist, the first female member of the Wireless Institute of Australia, the first Australian woman to hold a Wireless Experimenter's Licence, the author of the first Australian cooking-with-electricity cook book, one of ABC Radio's first presenters, the first Treasurer of the Australian Women's Flying Club (which partly trained then provided recruits to the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force throughout World War II).

She ran a successful radio sales and repair shop (an early type of Dick Smith Electronics store) and established a popular Australian Electrical Association for Women (it had thousands of members). But her greatest achievement was that she voluntarily taught morse code and visual signalling to thousands of female would-be wireless telegraphists in the months leading up to and throughout World War II (she recognized there would be an increasing need for telegraphists, realized that when war broke out that trained women could enable male telegraphists throughout

the country to be redeployed to other duties, and she believed telegraphy was *'a perfectly respectable, feminine activity that was suitable for your daughters'* and *'even if their services as signallers are never needed, their training will be useful when*

married. Such pretty girls are sure to get married. They will be able to mend the wireless or the iron, fit up extra lights, and understand the workings of electric stoves'), then taught morse code to thousands of men and women during the war, and then to thousands of Australian aircraft crew and seamen after the war. The acceptance of, initially, 14 women telegraphists that she had trained into HMAS Harman (near Queanbeyan) in April 1941 led directly to the establishment of the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (with the author sardonically asking: *'Who on earth talks a navy into establishing a new defence service?'*).

So, there is certainly quite a bit of fascinating 'sizzle' in Mrs Mac's life story.

But this book is also worthwhile because it documents many of the dramatic changes in attitudes towards women that have occurred in

Australia over the past 100-or-so years...and Mrs Mac was certainly no shrinking Violet when it came to proverbially battering down doors to give women more opportunities!

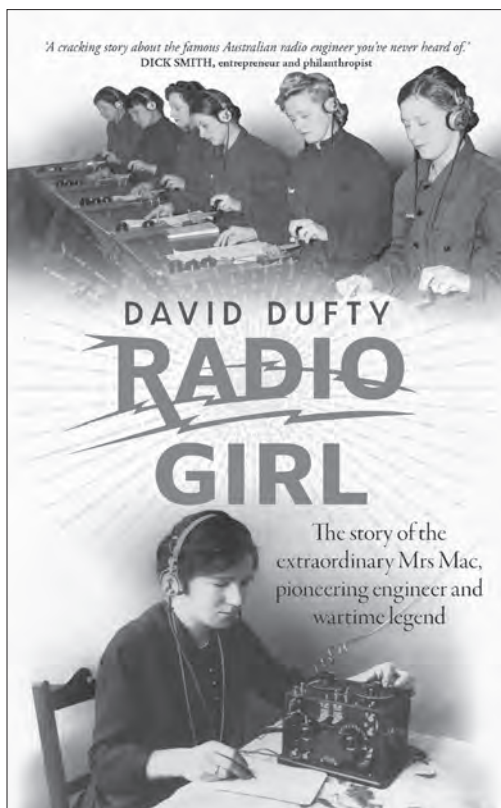
The first major obstacle she encountered as a woman was when she attempted to enrol in the Engineering Diploma course at Sydney Technical College. To be able to do so, she needed to be apprenticed – but, at that time, no one would give a female an apprenticeship. Violet's solution: she purchased a struggling engineering company and apprenticed herself to her own firm...and was promptly accepted into the course!

In many respects Mrs Mac was just 'an ordinary Australian', but is one that deserves to have had this interesting book written about her (there is certainly enough information about her life available to justify and to fill this book, and, fortuitously, this book was written whilst some of 'her girls' [those she trained] were still alive and could be interviewed by the author).

Which made me wonder, how many other 'famous Australians you've never heard of' deserve to have a book written about them? (If it's any indication, the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* currently has entries relating to over 13,000 'significant and representative persons in Australian history'...and Florence Violet McKenzie's story is one of them. So the answer is, potentially thousands!)

'Radio Girl' is available in paperback from around \$19.50.

Review by Peter Lacey



Remarkably, Mrs Mac's Diploma in Electrical Engineering from Sydney Technical College has survived and is now in the collection of Sydney's Powerhouse Museum. She had to purchase a company to become eligible to enrol in the course! Image: Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences, Sydney, accessed 8 September 2020, <<https://ma.as/262414>>

Australia's First Native Born Poet

There is a plaque at the bottom of a steep, rugged hillside, alongside a cutting on Eurobodalla Road near the junction with Nerrigundah Mountain Road, Eurobodalla, which was installed in 1988. It simply (unhelpfully) reads 'Charles Harpur, 1813–1868, Australia's first native born poet'. Adjacent to it is a similar size, self-congratulatory (and even less-helpful) plaque reading 'Charles Harpur Grave Restoration. A project funded by the Local Government Bicentennial Initiative Grants Program'.



Charles Harpur (1813-1868), by unknown photographer, 1860s. Photo: National Library of Australia, nla.pic-an23436164

Charles' resting place is at the top of that very steep hill. Regrettably, whatever 'restoration' may have occurred in 1988 is far from evident today.

As the first plaque acknowledges, Charles Harpur was the first Australian born poet of consequence. He is lauded as having been as important a poet as his contemporaries Henry Kendall and Adam Lindsay Gordon.

A 1962 biography suggests *'he died knowing that he had not been acclaimed widely, but confident that in the future Australians would value the work of their first poet.'*

Once more a melancholy procession formed and toiled its way up to the lonely grave on the hill. It had been re-opened and now the wearied body of the poet was laid to rest beside that of his son, both of them safe... Once more the grave would have to be opened, to receive the body of the wife and mother – but that time was a long way ahead, thirty years!...

For Charles it was altogether fitting that his admiring and

ever faithful friend, Henry Kendall, should write the requiem. It was published in the "Herald" and reflects the love, admiration, and sympathy of the writer for the Australian poet at whose feet he was content to sit.

So let him sleep! The rugged hymns
And broken lights of wood above him!
And let me sing how sorrow dims
The eyes of those who used to love him...
But now he sleeps, the tired bard,
The deepest sleep; and lo, I proffer
These tender leaves of my regard
With hands that falter as they offer'

Briefly, Charles Harpur's story is this: He was born at Windsor in 1813 to two emancipated convicts. His father became a government schoolmaster and parish clerk who was given patronage by Governor Lachlan Macquarie, John Macarthur and Samuel Marsden that ultimately enabled Charles to receive a rudimentary, but better-than-usual education.

As the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* records, *'he had early seen his calling as that of Australia's first poet and thenceforth his lack of interest in the mundane matter of making a living is matched by our lack of knowledge of how he lived: various jobs till 1836, letter-sorter from 1836 to 1839, possibly some newspaper work till he returned to the Hunter about 1841, first to Singleton and then to Jerry's Plains. For the next ten years he had no regular job...In Jerry's Plains in 1843 he met Mary Doyle, eldest daughter of a prosperous farmer, who on 2 July 1850 became his wife. The courtship was long because her family was opposed to a match with one who had no prospects of gaining and apparently no desire to seek material advancement.'*

In 1859 John Robertson, the Minister of Lands, appointed Harpur an assistant gold commissioner on the southern goldfields. He held this position until being retrenched in 1866, at which time he, optimistically, wrote *'This day I've lost my office, and am again a free man/With the wide world for mine oyster which I'll open if I can.'*

In March 1867 his 13-year-old son, Charlie, was killed when a rifle he was carrying accidentally discharged. This proved a devastating blow to Charles, one from which he never recovered. His health then rapidly declined. He caught tuberculosis in the harsh winter of 1867 and died at his property in Eurobodalla on 10th June 1868. It is recorded that he left his wife, Mary, with a property that was unencumbered and with no debts, so therefore she was reasonably well-off. Knowing he was dying, he wrote his own, perhaps bitter, epitaph: *'Here lies Charles Harpur, who at 50 years of age came to the conclusion that he was living in a sham age, under a sham government, and amongst sham friends...and having come to this conclusion, he did his dying and now lies here with one of his sons.'*

From 1833 local newspapers were publishing Harpur's poems. In 1845 *'Thoughts: A Series of Sonnets'* was published. These describe his up-and-down relationship with Mary Doyle and the book became the first sonnet sequence



The hilltop resting place of Charles, Charlie and Mary Harpur – sadly poorly maintained

published in Australia. In 1853, the only substantial book of his work, *'The Bushrangers: A Play in Five Acts, and Other Poems'*, was published. The play was the first from an Australian-born writer to be performed and also published (an earlier play, *The Tragedy of Donohue*, was banned because it *'might cause the riff-raff to riot'*). The forty poems (the best-known of which is probably *'The Creek of the Four*

Graves' that describes the deaths of an Aboriginal and three settlers in a night time attack on their camp) were received both favourably and unfavourably.

Because Harpur was an Australian and not formally educated, his work was ignored in England. In Australia, the prevailing attitude during his lifetime was that native Australians had little to contribute and, additionally, poetry

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and the other arts were not highly valued. So, as his biographer suggests, Harpur's work attracted few readers in Australia.

His poems remain little read today and, although he was the first Australian poet who did not write of Australia with a traditional European outlook, his works are generally lowly rated when compared to those of other

Australian writers in the nineteenth century. In many respects, his life story attracts more interest than his poetry!

Harpur considered himself an Australian patriot. A century later, Prime Minister Paul Keating suggested he should be honoured as Australia's first republican and thought he should be honoured as such – for his sentiments such as:

Not for Old World kings and queens,
Villain Slavery's outworn things!
Shall we sing of Loyalty
In this new and genial Land?
Yea – but let the paean be
Of loyalty to Love's command,
To Thought, to Beauty and to all
The glorious Arts that yet
In golden Australasia shall
Like chrysolites be set.

Charles Harpur's grave is marked with a, now-illegible, cast iron plaque which once read 'Sacred to the Memory of CHARLES HARPUR, POET, Died June 10th 1868'. His son, Charlie, is remembered with a simpler, also now-illegible, cast iron plaque. Both plaques deserve to be restored. There is, regrettably, no memorial to acknowledge that Mary is also buried there.

It would be equally appropriate for an information board to now be erected beside the two plaques at the bottom of the hillside, explaining that Charles Harpur's grave is located nearby and outlining his place in Australian history. And it would be appropriate for the wording to be provided by the local Moruya and District Historical Society.

Peter Lacey

Sources: Australian Dictionary of Biography; biography.yourdictionary.com; Wikipedia; Australian Poetry Library; monumentaustralia.org.au; Eurobodalla Historic Cemeteries Conservation Management Study Volume 2, Pip Giovanelli, August 2019; Journal of the Moruya & District Historical Society March 1996, June 1996, September 1996, and September 2005; Charles Harpur by J. Normington-Rawling, 1962; plus valuable assistance from Wendy Simes and Leslie Murphy.

We thank Trevor King for suggesting we include details relating to this grave in 'Recollections'. Your suggestions about other gravestones in local cemeteries that have interesting stories attached to them will be VERY welcome. Send your suggestions to southcoasthistory@yahoo.com or phone 0448 160 862

THIS SOUTHERN LAND OF OURS

With fools to make our laws, and knaves
To rule us as of old,
In vain our soil is rich, in vain
'Tis grained with gems and gold:
But the present only yields us nought,
The future only lours, [*lours: having lower expectations*]
Till we have a brave Republic
In this Southern Land of Ours.

What would the stupid monarchists
But all our fortunes blast,
By chaining Enterprise and Thought
To the unyielding Past,
With all its misery for the mass,
And all its tax-gorged powers?—
But we'll have a brave Republic
In this Southern Land of Ours.

And lo, the unploughed future, boys,
Is all our own as yet,
And on one great and glorious aim
Should all true hearts be set:
So sow its years with crops of Truth,
And border these with flowers,
When we have a brave Republic
In this Southern Land of Ours.

Charles Harpur



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HERITAGE LISTED

INNES' BOATSHED AND JETTY, BATEMANS BAY



Innes' Boatshed and Jetty have, as structures, little to commend them. And the 'unsophisticated, cheap and functional' boatshed (as it is described in its heritage assessment) also significantly detracts from and blocks the views of and across the Clyde River from the southern (township) side of the river.

So why does this boatshed and jetty have a heritage listing? Because they are iconic Batemans Bay structures and because they are the last remaining structures with links to the 'original' Clyde River waterfront in Batemans Bay township.


Today's riverside promenade is very different to what was once there. What is now Innes' Boatshed, for example, was originally completely surrounded by water in an inlet called Bubble Bay, it having been built on a wharf that was erected there by the Illawarra Steam Navigation Company in the early part of the 20th century. There were a number of jetties either side of the boatshed jetty that have now long disappeared, as have other sheds and buildings that catered to the needs of local maritime industries, and has a public tidal swimming enclosure that was once sited further downriver.

The boatshed was built by Bert Atwell in the late 1940s–early 1950s from local ironbark but has since been modified a number of times 'in an unsophisticated manner ... to address the changing needs of both the users and the public.' The jetty has also been extended and modified several times to cater for changing uses.

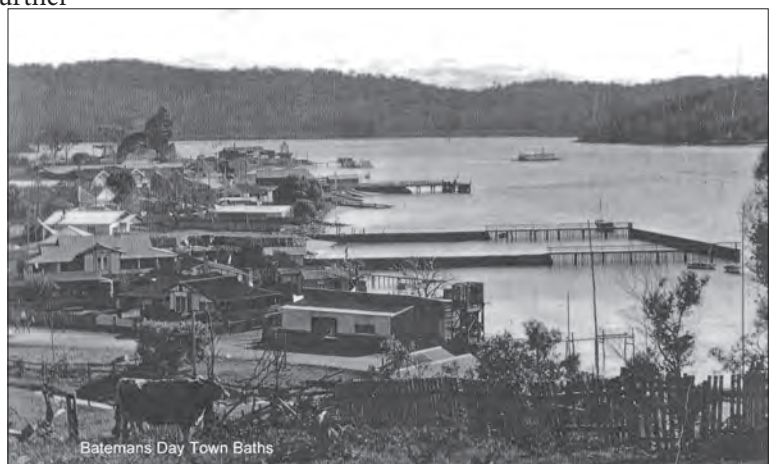
The Lease on the boatshed and wharf was acquired by Holroyd Innes in about 1958. His son, Merv, and wife, Robin, lived in north-western Sydney and, for several years, would drive down on weekends to Batemans Bay to hire out launches. They eventually moved to the Bay and converted a loft area in the Boatshed to accommodate their family.

Merv and his sons became local fishermen and

from the late 1970s–early 1980s, the Innes family started selling fish they had caught and chips from the Boatshed – ultimately transforming the boatshed/fish & chippery into an enduring, popular Batemans Bay landmark.

The boatshed and jetty have, over time, become integral parts of the bayside landscape. And now they give that important quality known as 'Place' (the historic, visual, cultural, social and environmental characteristics that provide a location with its particular uniqueness) to the area: providing a physical connection between sea/river and land/town; providing a hint at the riverside's earlier important commercial and industrial maritime-based history; by honouring the Innes family's (continuing) very significant links with local fishing, retailing and tourism activity; by suggesting or imparting a 'waterfront boats, fishing, seafood processing, and a fish and chips-style holiday atmosphere' to this area of town. 

Sources: State Heritage Inventory listing; *Canberra Times* 26.12.1997; Information from Clyde River & Batemans Bay Historical Society and Robin Innes.



The Batemans Bay waterfront in the 1930s – a very different scene to that today! Courtesy & © Batemans Bay Heritage Museum

MORUYA & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY – 50 Years Serving the Community

It's always a delight to be able to recognize a community group that has been able to provide 50 years of valuable service to the local community and which, today, is as strong an organization as it has ever been – now the commendable position of the Moruya & District Historical Society.

In early 1970, noted Australian ornithologist and historian Alec Chisholm recognized that the Moruya-Broulee area was rich in colonial history. So, at a talk he was presenting in Broulee, he recommended that a local history society be formed.

Frank Finlayson, then the Editor of the Moruya Examiner, and local dairy farmer and Shire Councillor Harry Louttit progressed the suggestion.

On 14th June 1970 the Eurobodalla Historical Society was formed. It was envisaged at that time that its activities

would focus on the history of the entire Eurobodalla area.

Within 18 months the fledgling society had mounted a display of local artefacts and old photographs at the Moruya Show and had established a small museum in two front rooms of an old house owned by the Church of England at 39 Queen Street in Moruya. Over the following (1972–1973) Christmas School Holidays, 220 adults and 180 children visited the new museum.

However, within a year, the Church sold the house. This prompted the Historical Society to initially lease and then,



Two historic objects from the Moruya Museum collection: Sign from Garlandton Store and slide which was used in the local cinema promoting Emmott's Store.



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The Moruya and District Historical Society's Museum in 1974.

in April 1976, to purchase its current museum premises at 85 Campbell Street – this being the western half of two terrace houses built by local storekeeper Abraham Emmott in 1872. (Abraham had lived in the western half [the Museum half] of the building and was able to step out from his bedroom onto the verandah to keep an eye on activity down the street at his Beehive Stores; the eastern half of the terrace was occupied by Abraham's son John, who had been shot and robbed by the notorious Clarke Gang of bushrangers while returning from Nerrigundah to Moruya in 1866. The Museum building, therefore – and very appropriately! – has a long, important, and intimate association with the history of Moruya township and its surrounding area.)

In 1978 a small lending library operated from the Museum – providing a public service that pre-dated the opening of the Eurobodalla Library.

In 1979 the Council offered to swap 85 Campbell Street for its old Council Chambers, just up the road, which was then in better repair than the Museum building. Council's intention was to demolish the historic terrace houses, but a public outcry, and the subsequent issuing of a heritage order by the Heritage Council of NSW, soon scuttled that plan.

In late 1985 a suggestion was made that the local group of people interested in genealogy be affiliated with the Historical Society and the Historical Society responded by indicating it would be 'pleased to provide accommodation'. Three years later, as an Australian Bicentennial project, the genealogists were provided with a dedicated Research Room that rapidly attracted 'crowds of people waiting to use

their resources'.

The Society has an unusually productive record of successfully enlisting the support of and working with other local community groups. For example, in 1984 the Moruya Garden Club installed the brickwork and the paving at the front of the Society's Campbell Street property; the local Rotary Club installed an old slab hut on the Society's property and were instrumental in obtaining Bicentennial grants for the genealogical group and the Society; the Eurobodalla Council has provided the Historical Society and the genealogical group with valuable equipment; and, for many years, the Society has been an active participant at community events including Moruya Shows, Australia Day celebrations and the Moruya Mardi Gras.

In 1993 the Society completed an ambitious project to compile a register of pioneer families in the Moruya district. And, from 1989 it has published a high quality, quarterly history and genealogical Journal contributing to a more detailed understanding of the how the local community has developed and changed over time.

Over the past 50 years the Museum has acquired an extensive and interesting collection of historically-significant objects and photographs. 603 of these can now be viewed on the Society's website.

The Society today is one of the more active history and genealogical societies on the NSW South Coast.

Further details about the Moruya & District Historical Society are available at www.mdhs.org.au

Cobargo's Well Thumbed Books – a 'damn-fool idea'!

'We had no idea what we were doing. We had no books, no bookshelves. No cash reserves to speak of. And none of us really wanted to work.'

That was Heather O'Connor, remembering a planning meeting in May 2010. Someone had 'some damn-fool idea' of a second-hand bookshop in Cobargo, and five women – Heather, Virginia White, Louise Brown, Annie Lee and Chris Haynes – had gathered to discuss it over lunch.

'Seriously, we weren't even through the hors d'oeuvres and there seemed to be no hope... Four months later we opened.'

Well Thumbed Books in September 2010 was one room of books in the old Cobargo Bakery. The stock was pilfered from the collections of the women and their friends, and from whatever market stalls and deceased estates they could find. But they needn't have worried. *'You open the door to a second-hand book store,'* Louise says, *'and the books just pour in.'*

As for shelves, they managed with planks on bricks at first, but soon had furniture stripper Col Rayner knocking them together.

Ten years later, Well Thumbed Books is four rooms of packed shelves. Pre-Covid, a small, amicable gathering would be settled with coffee mugs on plastic chairs on the footpath out front. A serious reader or two would be picking through the 'recommended' shelves just inside the front door. Further in, specialist collectors would be blowing the dust off obscure titles and building small wish-list stacks.

These days the five women are founders Heather, Louise and Virginia – with Linda Sang, who joined after a year, and

Nicky Hutteman more recently, to replace Chris and Annie who both moved interstate.



Selling books is almost a secondary pursuit at Well Thumbed. Virginia remembers Dave and Barb Rugendyke doing Friday morning storytime sessions for pre-schoolers in the early days. More recently a young guitarist has been using the meeting room to write songs and practice.

Often on Saturday mornings a crowd would descend upon the pews and seats in the meeting room to launch a book for a local author, and their warmth, encouragement and enthusiasm would be palpable. Only a cynic might venture that some were there more for the gourmet morning tea that followed.

'Oh, and the "Taste of the Triangle" dinner in the Hall!' says Virginia. Food has always been central. *'We all cooked, under the direction of our very own chef, Linda. And all the food was sourced from within thirty kilometres of Cobargo.'* That was in 2013, and it raised nearly \$5,000 for the School of Arts Hall.

There's also the Community Car, available short-term to any Triangle-area licensed driver over 25, for \$10 a day. It's 'garaged' at the bookshop and fully maintained, pro bono, by mechanic Chris Norris two doors down.

Linda remembers the Olga Masters Festival in 2014. The idea started life as a day of readings, a corned beef and pickle sandwich competition (food had to be in there, somewhere) and a guided walk around Olga's haunts in Cobargo, but soon Four Winds had added a second day, with jazz music and a radio play at the Windsong Pavilion, attended by the huge Masters clan – all five of Olga's surviving, hugely talented children, and their families – with a national short story competition thrown in.

Undaunted, the Well Thumbed women hosted a 'Sisters in Crime' literary festival two years later – a host of acclaimed Australian female crime-writers did readings, talks and panel sessions – and kept visitors spellbound during meal-breaks too.

'Generally, someone has an idea, then the five of us just share our different interests and abilities,' says Linda. *'It's all about books, community and food.'*

Nicky agrees. *'And between us, we manage to cover all reading genres! For instance, Heather's our political reader*

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and would be quite happy to cordon off the back room – sci-fi, fantasy and “beach fiction”. But I know there’s a place for this lighter stuff, especially since the fires.’

Those fires were the Badja Road bushfires, which swept through Cobargo on New Year’s Eve, 2019, incinerating homes and businesses and leaving the main street desolate and scarred – but sparing Well Thumbed. An anonymous handwritten notice appeared in the bookshop window the next day – *‘Post-Apocalyptic Fiction moved to Current Affairs’* – and soon gained fame in an article in the *New York Times*.

Since the fires, I for one have been amazed at how many friends and contacts from afar have enquired – timorously – about the fate of Well Thumbed Books. It highlights the pivotal place that this quirky bookshop has established for itself in the area, drawing regular customers from Canberra and further afield. Blink and you miss its deceptively narrow shopfront, but once you’re inside, you’re drawn further and further inwards, past the little kitchen and down the ramp into another room, further again into the meeting room – with the original Naremburn oven door still in the wall, then further again into the fourth.

Recently the team celebrated Well Thumbed’s tenth birthday. Virginia speaks for them all – *‘I’ve met a lot of people and made a lot of friends. And I’ve saved a fortune on books!’*

‘Yes, really all we wanted was a steady supply of books,’ says Heather. ‘I mean, for ourselves! And to have fun. Fun was stipulated, right from the start.’

Jen Severn



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Great Expectations: Emigrant Governesses in Colonial Australia

by Patricia Clarke

For several decades from the middle of the 19th century a number of philanthropic female emigration societies operated in Britain – the British Female Emigrant Society, the Female Middle Class Emigration Society, the British Women's Emigration Association, the Women's Emigration Society, and the Church Emigration Society. They were established to tackle a class issue that was of great concern at the time in Britain – a 'surplus' of unmarried gentlewomen in Britain – and simultaneously to help alleviate a perceived shortage of 'respectable' women in British colonies, including Australia.

Without doubt, these societies were also social engineering – aiming to guarantee male colonists' access to female services that might be of a domestic, sexual, or reproductive nature.

This book, *'Great Expectations'*, is interesting because it highlights the differences between the British stratified and class-conscious society, and the attitudes and expectations of the British, compared to what was to be found in Australia at that time. It does this by examining the contents of letters that emigrant governesses wrote 'home' to the Female Middle Class Emigration Society between 1861 and 1886. (The Society recruited 'suitable' unmarried young women who were brave enough – or foolhardy enough! – to travel to Australia with the intention of becoming governesses. The Society loaned the girls the money for their fares, arranged their passages to Australia, and [supposedly – because it did not always occur in practice] organized for them to be met on their arrival in Australia. The girls wrote of their experiences, usually when communicating with the Society about their loans.)

It seems this migration scheme was seriously flawed. There was little, and a decreasing demand for, governesses in Australia at the time, and many of these would-be governesses arrived without the most sought-after qualifications (the ability to teach music and drawing) – so few arrivals actually found positions as governesses. Those who did were often in for a rude shock, being expected (unlike in Britain) to undertake domestic duties as well as educate a family's

children, by having to work in remote locations where there was little normal social interaction, and by having to work for families whose ways of life and values were significantly different to those that the governess had expected. And the gender imbalance from the early days of European settlements in Australia had largely disappeared, so the secondary appeal of the scheme – that these girls might easily and successfully find a suitable husband in Australia – had become little more than wishful thinking.

But the stories of these girls are revealing. Many had little idea about the challenges of travelling to Australia: one was shipwrecked en route, but was quickly rescued; there was frequent criticism that they were travelling as second-class and not as first-class passengers (at least the Society had ensured they were not travelling steerage-class!!...and, this



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perception that these governesses were of a superior social class was widespread, kept recurring and, undoubtedly, greatly contributed to many not readily assimilating into Australian society); others were astounded that young, single, female passengers might face 'moral ruin' on the long voyage to Australia). It also seemed most had very little idea about what to expect, and how they might have to adapt, once they arrived in Australia. So, significant clashes of culture were, therefore, inevitable.

There are instances of emigration success, with some girls successfully and happily working as governesses and/or finding husbands in Australia. There are, however, at least as many examples of arrivals who loathed Australia (unable to find a job, looking on Australians as 'hordes of wild, uneducated creatures'...and most-definitely of an inferior social class, finding the climate and landscapes to be confronting) and who just wished they could afford the return passage home.

Interestingly, the different outlooks that were evident in different Australian states greatly affected the likelihood of these new arrivals being able to settle down. In NSW, for example, would-be governesses were far less prepared to accept other employment, whereas in Victoria, where



a significantly more entrepreneurial economy had developed as a result of migrants travelling from around the world to the rich Victorian goldfields, the would-be governesses proved more amenable to accepting other jobs such as taking teaching positions or, in a number of instances, even opening their own schools. In the long term, these vocations proved to be far more secure, far more satisfying, and far more remunerative.

To me, there is one thing lacking in this otherwise excellent book. That is some background about why each of these young ladies chose to emigrate to Australia (they were all well-educated, upper middle class women who, it seems, must have been totally convinced and severely depressed that they would never find tolerable employment and/or a husband in Britain) and the associated detail of the Female Middle Class Emigration Society's 'sell' to these emigrants about their likely future life in a new country at the far end of the world.

As with all National Library of Australia Publishing books, 'Great Expectations' is very well-presented and is richly illustrated. It is available in paperback from around \$24.

Review by Peter Lacey

Can You Help?

- * We are searching for information about the **Moruya and Bodalla RSL Sub-branches**. They were probably established in the mid-1920s and were amalgamated in the early-1930s – but a researcher now compiling their histories would like to have more information about them.
- * We're also interested in **Soldier Settlements on the South Coast**, established after World War I. Any information about those who received Soldier Settlement grants, where they were settled, the success (or otherwise) of their settlement, would be greatly appreciated.
- * And we're searching for **photographs of the unveiling of the War Memorial in Cobargo**. This war memorial has an exceptionally interesting history – it was erected in a different

place to where it was originally intended, it was built years after it was intended to be erected and, very unusually, it was unveiled by the Australian Governor-General, Sir Isaac Isaacs – on 16th November 1935. Surprisingly, no photograph of the ceremony seems to be in a public collection. One must exist somewhere – we'd love to locate it.

- * And we're looking for a volunteer **researcher(s)/writer(s)** to help us compile the 'Heritage Listed' and/or 'Cemetery Secrets' and/or 'South Coast Personages' column once every second month. The reward (other than having your efforts published) is that you'll discover some absolutely amazing things about our local area. If you're interested, call 0448 160 852 or email us at southcoasthistory@yahoo.com

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