TIMELINES

Welcome

Welcome to the October 2021 *Timelines*, the newsletter of Murwillumbah Historical Society.

This edition's contents:

Tweed Regional Gallery & Margaret Olley Art Centre

Our thanks to Jim Berting, former Treasurer and Board Member of the Tweed River Art Gallery Foundation Ltd. and former Shire President Max Boyd AM for this interesting history of why and how Murwillumbah came to be graced with our regional art gallery.

Many visitors to this Gallery are surprised to find such a large and sophisticated public art gallery situated near a small country town. This Gallery, with the Margaret Olley Art Centre, did not just happen. Rather it grew from the efforts and dedication of those who saw the need when there was no thought even of having a public art gallery in the Tweed.

It all began in the 1970s with the Murwillumbah Art Prize, a popular annual event supported by a growing number of local artists. However, the demolition of the old School of Arts building in 1981 forced relocation of the Art Prize competition to the Canvas & Kettle café or the Murwillumbah High School, neither of which was ideal. So, in 1985 local supporters Julia Hammond, Rob Philp and John Opit formed a committee to try to persuade the Murwillumbah Chapter of the NSW Arts Council to establish a regional gallery in the Tweed area, believing that it might attract 1988 Bicentennial funding. Conversion into a gallery of a Council-owned building in Tumbulgum Road was suggested.

Initially, neither the Arts Council nor Tweed Shire Council (TSC) were enthusiastic about this idea, and there was strong opposition from some sections of the community to the proposed use of Council funds for an art gallery.

However, at that time the Moran Health Care

The Tumbulgum Road Gallery building (Photo: Jim Berting)

Group's founder, the late Doug Moran, together with C. Itoh and AGC, was building a "Hospital of Excellence" at Tugun, developing aged care facilities in Tweed Shire and also had ideas for a convalescent centre. Moran wanted somewhere to mount a major art prize that rewarded traditional portraiture that he and his wife Greta were planning. As two state galleries had rejected his plan he then focussed on Tweed Shire as a possible home base. The first Moran art prize competition could be a Tweed Shire Bicentennial event.

At this time local funding was limited, but the Council had $47,000 of Bicentennial funds uncommitted and Moran offered a further $50,000 to help refurbish the old Council building. He also put forward $100,000 for the biennial Art Prize, plus another $100,000 to establish a Foundation to administer its organisation. TSC then agreed that the Tumbulgum Road premises could be converted into a gallery, as a Bicentennial project.

Shire President Max Boyd AM, together with Doug & Margot Anthony agreed to support Doug Moran on condition that Tweed would then have its own Gallery. (Rt. Hon. J. D. Anthony AC CH [1929-2020], former Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the National Party, and his wife Margot Anthony AM, are local landowners and farmers). The Tweed Valley Art Gallery Foundation Ltd. Was established and Moran's partners put forward a further $500,000 to assist TSC in its administration. The local MacNaughton family lent an original Tom Roberts portrait of Mrs. Katherine MacNaughton, to be used in publicity for the Prize. This painting was also adopted as the logo for the Foundation.

Additionally, many community members gave valued support in the early stages of the establishment of the Doug Moran National Portrait Prize including Sir Alexander and Lady Ross, Yvonne Rouse, Bill Stainlay, Bob Haywood, John Constable, Josie Flett, Peter Sochacki, Ron Lock and Alan MacNaughton.

Interior alterations to the Tumbulgum Road premises proceeded and in January 1988 Rod McMahon was appointed Gallery Director. An active body of volunteers, "The Friends of the Tweed River Art Gallery", was established making

The Gallery and its idyllic surrounds (Photo courtesy of Jim Berting)

visitors welcome and organising fund-raising events.

The inaugural Doug Moran National Portrait Prize, then attracting a $100,000 first prize, was organised and run by Tweed Shire Council, with the support of a small group of volunteers. National advertising and promotion attracted 1100 entries.

In February, four prominent Australian artists selected thirty entries from which the winner was chosen by an international panel of 3 judges, from USA, Britain and USSR. The final thirty portraits were displayed in the National Gallery in Canberra before going on tour across the country.

With the renovations still not quite complete, the competition winners' and finalists' works came home to the gallery being installed in the Tumbulgum Road building. The exhibition opening was a gala event, attended by over 500 people, including many of the artists. The $100,000 winning portrait became the property of TSC, while the 30 finalists each received $3,000. The 30 finalists and some other entrants' works were included in the first exhibition.

In July 1988 Kevin Oxley, now Director, took the Moran Prize on tour and devised an exhibition programme that established the new Gallery.

Oxley was succeeded briefly by Kay Jefed until Maris Morton was appointed and held the position from September 1989 until May 1999. Maris Morton guided the rest of the building fitout while also mounting exhibitions, making it a true Regional Gallery. On 31st March 1990 The Tweed River Regional Art Gallery was officially opened by Rt. Hon. J.D. Anthony CH.

Much effort was put into creating a vital gallery to attract and involve a wide range of local people, and to overcome the remaining opposition to the project. A varied programme of exhibitions followed, many of them contributed by state and other regional galleries and private art collectors. Attractions included the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Prizes, the annual Murwillumbah Art Prize and Community Print Makers shows, Sugar Town by John Millington and work by local HSC students. There were workshops for adults and children. The Friends organised musical events and catered for exhibition openings. These efforts were well rewarded, as reflected in the number of visitors growing from 9,000 in 1990 to 25,000 in

1999.

However, it had become apparent that the old timber building was a fire risk and located in a potential flood zone. It was also short of exhibition and storage space, but TSC had difficulty finding an alternative, risk-free, building. So, when Doug and Margot Anthony generously offered a part of their farmland on the edge of Murwillumbah for a new gallery building the project really gained momentum.

In 1996 that offer was accepted. TSC allocated limited initial funds for a new building and commissioned a competition based on a design brief that Maris Morton had put together. There were four finalists; in May 1998 Brisbane architect Bud Brannigan's design was selected. To be built in three stages, with an exterior like an Australian rural building, it fitted well into the site.

The entry to the complex (Photo supplied by Jim Berting)

To raise money for the proposed new construction, a fund-raising campaign with a Building Donations Fund chaired by Doug Anthony was created. The Friends also became fully active, hosting fund-raising events and attracting donations.

In May 1999 Maris Morton retired and Gary Corbett was appointed Director and had the task of overseeing the development of the new Gallery.

In addition to the Building Fund, donations large and small from the many local supporters raised a total of over $862,000 for the construction on the new gallery site. Funds from the Federal Government of $300,000 plus $250,000 from the NSW Ministry for the Arts all went a long way towards paying for the first stage of the design.

One notable event to raise money was mounted by Gary Corbett and the Friends, when ten artists were invited to visit the new gallery site before any building preparation was done and paint a view of

the landscape. When completed, the works were auctioned at the Tumbulgum Road gallery, fetching in excess of $30,000.

Between them, these funds allowed Tweed Shire Council to go ahead and commission the construction work.

Builders began preparing a working plan for the new building in November 2002, with the ceremonial turning of the "First Sod" on the site taking place on 7 March 2003.

There was still some local opposition to Council's involvement in such a bold venture, but sufficient councillors had the vision to support the project, and construction went ahead. However, although considerable funds had been donated locally, together with the Federal and State grants, the design had to be slightly adjusted to accommodate rising construction costs.

The Council provided the $2.352 million balance to meet the final cost of $3.81 million.

On Sunday 1 February 2004 the first stage of the new Gallery was officially opened by Prof. Marie Bashir AC, Governor of NSW, with a huge celebration.

The new gallery gave fresh impetus to the local arts scene with works by local artists, travelling exhibitions and music events all creating interest. Rapidly increasing visitor numbers made it clear that construction of the next stage of the architect's design was needed.

Urged by the new Tweed River Art Gallery Foundation Ltd., using the funds it now held, together with a Federal Government grant of $250,000, the Council had only to contribute a further $242,000 and it could commission the construction of Stage Two of the initial design.

Rapid progress enabled the opening of Stage Two in September 2006 by the late Margaret Olley AC (who had local connections going back many years) together with Edmund Capon AM, OBE, Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

The enlarged Gallery now had more display and storage space, allowing for a full programme of exhibitions and other events and attracted ever-increasing interest from the public. Annual visitor numbers rose to approximately 70,000.

In late 2006 ill health forced Gallery Director Gary Corbett to resign. Susi Muddiman was appointed as his replacement in April 2007. In 2008 the Gallery celebrated its 20th anniversary with a special exhibition, a Black-Tie dinner and a party.

The Gallery's reputation grew steadily until, following the death of artist Margaret Olley AC in 2011 and through the Trust she had established in her name, the Gallery received a gift of $1 million,

together with some of her personal art collection and household effects, for the establishment of a purpose-built extension to the Gallery.

The Margaret Olley Art Centre (MOAC) forms the third stage of the Gallery and celebrates the career, life and legacy of its namesake, Australia's most celebrated painter of still life and interiors.

To facilitate the installation of the MOAC, TSC also received:

- $1.0 million Federal Government Grant
- $200,000 from the NSW Government
- $620.000 from the Tweed Regional Gallery Foundation
- Ltd. (the renamed Tweed River Art Gallery Foundation Ltd.)
- $80,000 from the Friends of the Tweed River Art Gallery Inc.

With the addition of the final $1.112 million required, TSC authorised construction of the final stage of architect Bud Brannigan's original design, although in a completely re-imagined form.

The Friends contributed another $93,000 to the fit-out and furnishings of the new MOAC and a $480,000 donation by Tim Fairfax AC greatly aided the building programme, including the Nancy Fairfax Artist in Residence Studio.

The MOAC Inc., as Stage III of the Gallery, was officially opened by Her Excellency the Honourable Quentin Bryce AC CVO, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia on 15th March 2014.

The success of these developments is reflected in the numbers visiting the Gallery rising to over 110,000 in 2016, taking the total since the opening of the Gallery at its present site in Mistral Road in 2004 to over one million in 2017.

This is in addition to the many thousands who visited the original Regional Gallery in Tumbulgum Road where it all began, back in 1985, and was open to the public from March 1988 to November 2003.

The Lost Road to the Town that Never Was

Dr Greg Wightman has been researching a fascinating aspect of local history and shares this piece with us. The story is detailed and, due to space constraints, will be published in two parts without Greg's extensive references (available upon request).

Part 1 - The old Nightcap track from Lismore to Byangum

The Tweed has its mysteries, but few are as enigmatic as the old Nightcap track. At first feared

and loathed, then circumvented, later partly resuscitated, and by the 1950s almost forgotten, this "18-inch" bridle path — as torturous as it was tortuous — quickly became the stuff of legend. Eventually, its original course though the Tweed was lost to memory. But with the aid of online databases and programs not available until recently, it is now possible to reconstruct its entire length with high confidence, and indeed to walk along parts of its few surviving sections.

The Nightcap track was not the first track to connect the Richmond and Tweed districts; that distinction goes to the Old Casino track, established by Samuel Gray in the early 1860s to bring mail up from Casino. But it was the first to be surveyed and paid for by the NSW Government. During the late 1860s the search began for a more direct mail route from Lismore to Kynnumboon, the then location of the Tweed post office, operated by Joshua Bray. Any "direct" route had to deal with the Nightcap Range.

In 1871 a group of pioneering free selectors in the Tweed are said to have found a way across the Nightcap Range. Shortly afterwards, the Superintendent of Roads at Grafton, William Bennett, came to inspect the track, aided by Edmund Coleman, Lismore's first merchant, and Frank Girard, owner of Lismore Run. A description of this journey was widely published in 1873. In 1874, Bennett instructed George Earngey, road surveyor based at Tenterfield, to lead another party to produce an estimate of the cost of making the Nightcap track viable. Earngey recounted his journey much later, in a newspaper article of 1923. The track was made viable at that time, and in 1875 it replaced Gray's old Casino mail track. In 1878, Bishop Doyle journeyed over the Nightcap track to Murwillumbah to take up his new post, and wrote his own account of the trip. These travelogues are central to reconstructing the Nightcap track through the Tweed.

From the Nightcap itself, Bennett's party made their way down the razorback saddle of Curiosity Gap (a.k.a. "Big Trees Gap") to the headwaters of Doon Doon Ck, passing by the distinctive pyramidal knob of Mt Doughboy. Early maps of Toolon and Gooningar parishes show the Nightcap track as it descends the gap to join with the road along Doon Doon Ck:

> "Leaving the range at right angles and over flattish ground for two miles, Bottrill Range is reached, and its serpentine course followed till Cudgenbill Hole opens in full sight."

"Bottrill" is a corruption of "Burrell", so what is referred to here is the Burrell Ridge, a narrow spur thrown out to the north of the Nightcap range that ends near the confluence of Doon Doon Ck and the Tweed river at a low peak which, in the mid-

1860s, Bray had christened Mt Misery. Today this part of the Nightcap track is picturesque, open country, with gently rolling hills, but in the 1870s it was dense scrub where the creek was the only way through. The "serpentine course" mentioned in the 1873 description is not of "Bottrill Range" but of Doon Doon Ck as it winds its way down to the Tweed river.

By following Doon Doon Ck and the south bank of the Tweed river, Bennett's party eventually came to a landmark called "Cudgenbill Hole"; in the local indigenous language, this translates as "place of red trees". It is described as follows:

> "Cudgenbill Hole is on the South Arm of the Tweed; it is about 100 yards wide, and is said to be deep."

The narrator adds that the indigenous men who accompanied the Roads Commissioner believed the hole to be haunted and refused to go near it. But where was Cudgenbill Hole? In 1878, Bishop Doyle mentioned stopping there, having passed over Rowlands Ck. Now the latter joins the Tweed river downstream from Doon Doon Ck, at the spot where the village of Uki now stands. So Cudgenbill Hole is to be sought somewhere north of Rowlands Ck. An important clue is offered by a reference in the Tweed Daily News of 1917, which situates Cudgenbill Hole "just near McCollum's property, on the Tweed river". Early maps of Dunbible Parish show McCollum's property along the east side of the river, its northwest corner just where the present Mt Warning Rd crosses the river. The section of river fronting McCollum's property is unusually wide, its width matching the 30-odd metres (100 yards) of the 1873 description. At its north end, this "billabong" is effectively dammed by a forested scree that forms an effective natural crossing, and the banks on either side are low. Here the river forms a narrow creek that is diverted around the east flank of the natural causeway. Northwards from this point the river has much higher and steeper banks, and gradually deepens and widens as it proceeds. Thus, this point represents a natural and easy crossing-point, and that is probably why it was such a significant landmark along the Nightcap trail. The identification of this spot with Cudgenbill Hole is thus plausible and compelling.

The 1873 description continues:

> "Leaving Cudgenbill Hole, the road keeps on a cedar getters' track in a dense scrub following the windings of the river, and after passing through Perry and Hall's selection under Nullum Range, comes out at the village reserve Byangum. Here the road terminates..."

Doyle's 1878 description adds a little more information:

> "Coming to a place called... Cudgenbill, he

[Doyle] found a horseman sheltering under a spreading fig tree — Mr Denny Hartigan... From Cudgenbill onwards, Hartigan was pilot to his hospitable home on the Middle Arm *[Oxley River]*. Next morning we proceeded to Murwillumbah..." [italics supplied]

The old maps of Nullum Parish show that land belonging to the Hall family extended along the west bank of the Tweed river, beneath the peak known as Hatton's Bluff (after William Hatton, a pioneer of this district since the later 1860s). Also, the home paddock of Denis Hartigan, another pioneer of the Murwillumbah area, stood just to the north of Hall land, in a bend of the Oxley River (aka Middle Arm). The Tweed River through this area is overshadowed by the massif of Mt Nullum on the east, as described in the 1873 story. Also, Byangum village stood at the confluence of the Oxley and Tweed rivers, mostly on the west side of the latter, and next to Hall's and Hartigan's properties. All these indices demonstrate that, at Cudgenbill Hole, the Nightcap trail crossed over the Tweed River and followed the riverbank alongside Hatton's Bluff to end at Byangum village. During the 1870s there was no road along the east bank of the river north of Cudgenbill Hole; the present crossing at Byangum emerged only in the 1880s and 1890s.

Parts of this old cedargetters' track — reused for the Nightcap track — from Cudgenbill Hole to Byangum, are shown on old maps of Nullum Parish. Only a short section of the old trail is missing from these maps. Near its south end, Hatton's Bluff throws off a low spur to the east that goes down to the river; indeed, the river here bends in a semicircle around the foot of this spur. The section of track over the flat summit of the spur had disappeared by the 1890s, when most of the parish maps were first compiled. Today this land is in private hands and is inaccessible. To the south, the old track is preserved in today's Solomons Rd, named after a well-known pioneering family who lived nearby. To the north, the track is visible, and indeed still accessible, along the riverbank all the way to the Oxley river. Before it reaches that point, the track ascends a high ridge to the northwest before descending to a natural ford over the river. Since the mid-20th century, this section of dirt road has been called the Old Lismore Rd. This ford marked the original termination of the Nightcap trail. From there, those who wanted to go on to Kynnumboon on the Rous river, or (in the late 1870s and 1880s) to the new town of Murwillumbah, needed to be escorted by locals along a rough track along the ridge west of Murwillumbah, which was first brushed in the late 1870s but was not formalised until the 1880s and early 1890s when Murwillumbah began to emerge as the main hub of the district. This northernmost extension to the Nightcap trail, which ended at the upper end of Murwillumbah-street, has for decades been known as Byangum Rd.

Lines out of Time

Betty Hamill continues Part 3 of the story of the life of her father Hec Robertson, as transcribed from family tape recordings. What a window into the past!

Hec Robertson's story continues….

Dances, balls and Cudgera Hall

The hall was the hub of the community. Most festivities were held on or near a full moon as a practicality for seeing the way there and back.

When I was about nine years old Mrs . Salter and other ladies ran a Juvenile Ball in aid of the Catholic Church or Convent. After school they were recruiting kids to take part. The girls were no problem but the boys were, which was an indication of things to come. At the country dances the boys usually stood near the door until the dance was nearly over before getting courage to ask a girl to get up.

After school we boys were peeping in the rear door when Mrs. Salter came over and grabbed me and one or two others. The rest including Arthur Salter ran away. So I was in.

I was partnered with Olive Salter.The main feature was square dance sets which were competitive. We were the "Green Leeks" dressed in green. I think we won the competition.

My favourite dance was the Two Step. One of the teachers was Emma Brady who was about fifteen or sixteen years of age. So at the following dances I would go and get Emma up in the Two Step. She was kind enough to get up with me. Mum eventually wrecked my ego a bit. She said "Those big girls don't enjoy dancing with kids" "Don't overdo it."

In the early stages they used to periodically have different dances or balls. The Bachelors and Benedict (married people) Balls, Spinsters and Benedict Balls were popular. In those days spinsters didn't have much money as they were usually unpaid help so they needed the family with them to finance things.

The music was usually a piano, an accordion or a violin. That was the band.

Some bloke would ride into Burringbar in the daytime and get a few bottles of o.p. rum -- a little square bottle which would hold about a quart or a pint. These fellows would hide it under the hall and after each dance they'd race out and cluster round. Sometimes there'd be a blue because one fellow who didn't have any would watch where they planted their bottles and he'd go out and get

onto their bottles. If he was caught there'd be a fight.

On the floor sawdust was usual for dressing. The floors were made out of teak, which was a yellow oily sort of timber that made excellent dance floors. A chap called Arthur Ward was often M.C. at the dances. The day before a dance he would get someone to help him and they'd get a crosscut saw. They'd get onto a teak log and saw and saw and saw until they got a lot of sawdust. They'd cut up a candle and mix with the sawdust. When they sprinkled that on the floor it would make it really fast to dance on. If you couldn't throw people off their feet now and then it was a bit of a failure.

The hall had two rooms on each side. One was the Ladies room and the other the Gents Dressing room. The idea was one of these rooms was used by the men to play cards. They played Knapp. This Knapp was a gambling game. They'd whip out a quid (a pound), that it would taken them a month to save and they'd play all night.

I remember a funny story about Ras (Erasmus) Johansen. He was one of the local characters. These fellows had been playing cards all night and someone must have rung the Cudgen policeman. Cudgen was a long way away and the only way you could get there was on horseback.

Ras went outside for something and there was the policeman riding up the road about 9 or 10 o'clock in the morning. When Ras raced in they got rid of the cards smartly. They got a tub, filled it with water and by the time the policeman got there they were all busy washing up the dishes that were already clean.

The rum used to stir some of the fellows up and make them feel pretty brave. One of these was a pretty wild sort of bloke and who used to like a fight. He was considered a good fighter by his mates. Something happened with a local man who had grown up children at the dance. This fellow picked on him for some reason and his mates egged him on. He was determined to fight. As a last resort the local went outside and gave this fellow a terrible thrashing.

Next morning when this fellow woke up his mates said "You were robbed." "You were too drunk to fight." This dance was on a Saturday night, so next morning they got this fellow lined up and the local had a tennis court on his place where lots of us young ones used to collect on Sundays. He was a very keen tennis player so he was busy playing tennis and enjoying himself when along came this bloke and his mates wanting to fight. The local tried hard to get out of it but they persisted so he had to turn around and thrash him just to prove that it wasn't a fluke.

Quite a few families of Hardy bought land in the district These Hardys were all pretty good musicians. Clarrie played an accordion. He had two or three brothers who played the violin and his sister played the piano. In fact their sister Mrs King used to play on her own at dances for years. When all the Hardys came to the district they would play a violin or accordion with her, so we got a bit sophisticated with our music.

Hec with his parents Jim and Lizzie (née Rundle) Robertson (aka The Robbos)(Photo: Betty Hamill)

As time went on they started up bands in the district. Barney Burns was one of the bands who played for country halls and in the towns. They would be hired for balls or country dances or special occasions. Barney used to play the piano, a fellow on the drums, another on the saxophone and someone else on trumpet. There were also The Mackintosh Brothers from up Numinbah or

Chillingham way. Originally, Bill Rolls came to the district when the movies started. He eventually settled and formed a band.

They had a following of town people who would come out to the dances. This was now the day of the motor car. When cars became popular the roads became good enough to carry them. As these bands went to other centres the young people from round our way would travel to Burringbar, Stokers Siding etc. to wherever the good bands were. It was not every night of course.

I was very lucky as my people had a car and didn't mind me using it. I'd take other people and they'd give me two bob (2 shillings) for the petrol. So all in all we didn't have a bad time. The sad part was that you had to be home before 4.00a.m. to get up to milk the cows. We used to get up at 4.00a.m. every morning, have a cup of tea and milk the cows because we had to have the cream down at the road by 7.00a.m. for the carrier to pick it up. Sometimes you'd be half undressed when the alarm went off so it was a bit sad to have to start work so soon.

The magic lantern shows started coming round to the halls. It was the equivalent of the later slide shows. They were still pictures and then came the movies which were Penns touring movies. They'd go to the local hall, back a truck up to the doorway and show from there to a screen in the hall. Bill Rolls used to play piano while the silent movies were showing.

Among the young banana growers who came to dances and B.G.F. meetings were Eric Steele, Eric Lemon, Dud Leigh, Clive Dunstan, Fred Berry and Frank Benson. I always remember one fellow who worked for Eric Steele. He was a very helpful fellow. We were running a Bachelors Ball and no one ever wants to be on the executive for these things.

This Kevin was there and he said that he'd be the secretary. No trouble. He'd done it before.

So he organised it. It was well attended and should have been a good success, but during the night he spread the word that there wasn't enough money to cover expenses.

All involved put in 10 shillings each to cover it. That was a lot of money in those days. They ran another Chocolate Waltz to help cover the costs. Then we had to put in some more before the end of the night to balance the books. The next day he shot through. He'd paid no one and he got off with all the money. To make matters worse he took Eric Steele's cheque book and cashed a cheque at the local grocer's. He went into Murwillumbah to Raward and Jays Menswear, cashed another cheque and shot through. The butcher, baker and grocer didn't get paid either.

They decided it wasn't worth trying to get him back from Qld. It just proves being a villain isn't new.