

...WHERE HISTORY IS THE HERO



Image courtesy of IJED Electric and Data

South Coast Art Deco

Art Deco is one of the most distinctive, one of the most interesting styles of architecture, and there are abundant, excellent examples of it throughout the NSW South Coast.

The technological developments that followed the gloominess and hardship of World War I brought new ways of thinking amongst those who influenced society's culture and outlook. In the 1920s advanced forms of transport, entertainment and communication gave rise to an optimism about the future.

Improving affluence enabled privately-owned motor cars to become more prevalent. Increasingly consumers sought new appliances, and a new field of industrial

design became established. Manufacturing industry entered a boom period in coping with this demand.

On the home-front, the wireless, motion picture and the mass circulation of newspapers & magazines brought the world into the loungeroom. Emerging fashions and trends that were born overseas (Art Deco emerged from the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts (French: Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes – the description 'Art Deco' being lifted directly from this French title) in Paris from April to October 1925 [so how appropriate we carry this story in this issue of Recollections, exactly a century later!]) rapidly became well-known

Fantastic Reads

South Coast Art Deco— page 1

Joseph Check, Revisited— page 7

Pearl Gibbs— page 10

Bettie Fisher— page 12

Kezie Apps— page 12

When History is the Hero— page 14



Top: Image courtesy of IJED Electric and Data. Left: Detail of Art Deco doorway to Ritz Theatre, Nowra. (Image courtesy Les Harrison) Right: Art Deco doorway and Art Deco tiling on Carp Street shopfront; typical Art Deco patterned tiling on Bank Hotel building in Church Street, Bega.

to Australians and, in the case of Art Deco architecture, designers and builders were quick and eager to embrace its principles.

There are many styles in modernist architecture, the most commonly occurring in Australia were those known as Functionalist and those known as Art Deco. Some other styles included Stripped Classical, Spanish Mission, Inter-War Mediterranean, Chicagoesque, Georgian Revival, Skyscraper Gothic, and Art Moderne (Modernism) which superseded Art Deco. But the whole spectrum of this modernism is now generically referred to as 'Art Deco'.

Art Deco architecture is characterized by geometric shapes, bold colours and the use of materials such as glass, steel and concrete. In Australia, Art Deco style architecture became probably the most widely adopted style of design in the interwar period. It (or, at least, distinctive elements of it) was something that most builders could easily incorporate into their structures, providing their clients with buildings that were perceived to be both trendy and modern.

Art Deco is, of course, most noticeable on large, public buildings. The Roxy Theatre in Nowra, the Kings Theatre in Bega, the Eden Killer Whale Museum, the Kinema in Narooma, the Monarch Hotel in Moruya, the Illawarra Lighthouse Church building in Wollongong, the Breakwater Battery Military Museum in Port Kembla are superb examples.

There is also an interesting group of Art Deco buildings at the western end of Carp Street in Bega (and into Auckland Street, encompassing the Balmain Brothers building) that, together, could be a really impressive streetscape (and provide a 'statement' entrance to the CBD). The facades, however, desperately need repainting in the bright colours typical of the Art Deco period, and some interpretive signage would certainly not go astray. These buildings were designed by R.W. Thatcher, Bega's most prolific builder, who very clearly kept abreast of overseas architectural trends.

Roxy Theatre, Nowra

In February 1935 Ronald Sutton and Charles Owen purchased land in Nowra with the intention of constructing and opening a new cinema. It took just two months for the Roxy Cinema to be built.

Its architects were Guy Crick and Bruce Furse.

Crick and Furse had entered into a partnership the previous year. Over the next six years (so until World War II intervened), Australian theatre architecture was dominated by Crick and Furse. Their practice was to become spectacularly successful.

They designed or renovated hundreds of picture theatres across Australia during this period and had a huge impact on the architectural form and presentation of theatres. (Significantly, and obviously to the partnership's benefit, Crick was also joint managing director of the Kings' Theatre group.)

Collect Recollections

Whilst it's available from:

Eden: Eden Newsagent, Eden Antiques, Eden Library, Eden Sports & Recreation Club, Coachman Motel, **Pambula:** The Vintage Tea Shop, Oaklands Restaurant, **Merimbula:** Merimbula RSL, Merimbula Old School Museum, Merimbula Visitors Centre, Merimbula Office Choice, Audica, Picture Show Man, Tween Waters Caravan Park, **Tura Beach:** Tura Beach Bakery, Tura Marrang Library, **Millingandi:** Acacia Ponds, **Candelo:** Candelo Service Station, Candelo Café, **Bega:** Bega Library, Ryan Pauline Barber, Bega Cheese Heritage Centre, Bega Office Choice, Bega Indoor Marketplace, Bega Pioneer's Museum, UOW Bega, Bega & Cobargo Veterinary Practice, **Tathra:** Tathra Supermarket, **Quaama:** Quaama General Store, **Cobargo:** Well Thumbed Books, Cobargo Co-op, **Bermagui:** Bermagui Library, Lake Road Pantry, **Central Tilba:** Tilba Post Office, Tilba Dairy, **Narooma:** Narooma New & Used, Narooma Library, Montague Vets, Narooma Icecreamery, Narooma Visitor Centre/Southbound Escapes, **Dalmeny:** IGA Dalmeny, **Bodalla:** Tyrrells Store, Bodalla Bakery, **Tuross:** Tuross Head Country Club, Tuross Head Motel, Tuross Lakeside Caravan Park, East Dolphin Beach Caravan Park, Tuross Boatshed, **Moruya:** Moruya Library, Moruya Museum, Moruya French Hotbread, Moruya Icecreamery, **Broulee:** Banksia Village, **Batehaven:** Batehaven Barber, **Batemans Bay:** Batemans Bay Library, Batemans Bay Soldiers Club, Batemans Bay Heritage Museum, A.J.s Hotbake, Ambers Café, The Boatshed, Miller Street Hair & Beauty, **Nelligen:** Nelligen Café, **Surfside:** Surfside Store, **Ulladulla:** Ulladulla Library, **Sanctuary Point:** Sanctuary Point Library, **Nowra:** Nowra Library, **Gerringong:** Gerringong Library, **Kiama:** Kiama Library...

Or you can have copies emailed to you. Simply email 'Send Recollections' to southcoasthistory@yahoo.com...

And if you know of other outlets that are prepared to distribute Recollections – especially in the Ulladulla-Kiama area – please let us know (0448 160 852); stocking Recollections attracts regular visitors to your outlet! We're also looking for a volunteer (1/2 day every 2nd month) to deliver Recollections to outlets in the Nowra-Kiama area.

WHY DO PEOPLE COME TO NAROOMA JUST TO VISIT NAROOMA NEW & USED ?

They have discovered a veritable 'Aladdin's Cave' absolutely overflowing with valuable hidden treasures and bargains – pre-loved and brand new.

Choose from thousands of books, thousands of CDs and records, imaginative gifts, homewares, objets d'art, knick-knacks and odds & ends.

And Barrie is a JP, for those needing documents witnessed!



WE BUY ... SWAP ... AND SELL
122 Wagonga St, Narooma — ☎ 4476 1107

Crick and Furse introduced a new, modern concept to Australian theatre design. In a 1936 interview, Guy Crick observed that 'the architect's part goes considerably further than the mere design of the theatre. That aspect, of course, is important, but no more than the furnishing, lighting, decoration and the general treatment necessary to make an attractive show-house. All things must harmonise to obtain maximum effect, and, while once their choice was left to others, it is now a work for the architect.'

The theatre opened on the 14th August 1935 with a screening of the film 'Naughty Marietta'.

Four years later, the owners leased the business to a Mr Edwin Potts who became proprietor in 1944. Following his death, his wife, Monica Potts, assumed control of the business. In 1964, the theatre closed for ten months due to the popularity of television and the declining popularity of cinemas. However, it reopened in November 1964 and was to operate for another 12 years.

During this time, a Mr Robert Brainwood, leased the theatre and eventually bought it in 1976. He made significant changes internally and also ended the segregation of Blacks in the cinema.

Whilst proprietor, Brainwood purchased three Art Deco brass doors from the State Cinema in Market Street, Sydney and installed them at the front of the building. When the State Theatre decided that they wanted them back, Mr Brainwood refused and instead the State Theatre had to instal aluminium doors painted

in a brass colour.

In 2018 the Roxy Theatre was restored.

The Roxy Theatre is a superb example of Australian Art Deco theatre architecture with its distinctive vertical linear features.

Notably, and unusually, even the footpath in front of the Theatre is laid in art-deco patterns and is painted appropriately.

Grand Hotel, Bega



It's worth standing back and having a look – even admiring – the Art Deco streetscape at the western end of Carp Street in Bega. It is, most likely, the legacy of extensive building undertaken along this stretch of the street between 1935 and 1938 by one man, R.W. Thatcher, Bega's most prolific builder.

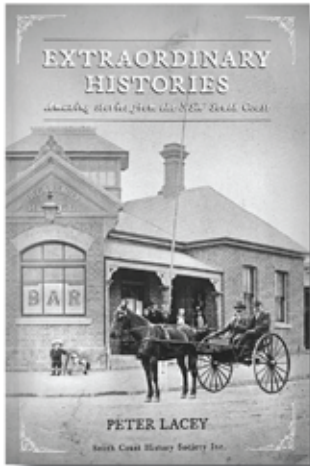
Thatcher obviously had a strong belief that his buildings should not just be utilitarian but should blend appropriately into the surrounding streetscape. This is reflected in, for example, his two major public monuments in Carp Street – the Bega Soldiers' Memorial and the Dr Evershed Clock Tower – being given 'matching' facades of local granite.

And it is very evident in the Balmain Brothers (Bega) building in Auckland Street (today occupied by Beta Electrical) which, because it was just to be a motor workshop, could easily have been 'just a building' - but, instead, was given a decorative Art Deco façade, albeit (compared to its neighbours) a relatively-modest one!

In 1935, R.W. Thatcher built this new vehicle workshop for Balmain Brothers (Bega) Limited. It is distinctively Art Deco – symmetrical, with the eye-catching central vertical finial (rendered and now painted white) with its 'steps' running both horizontally and vertically (intended to be reminiscent of a then-modern skyscraper, and included to create a sense of height and grandeur), recessed brickwork bandings in

**THE SOUTH COAST'S
BEST SELLER**

**The first ever history of The
entire South Coast
384 pages.**



SECOND
EDITION

**Includes many fabulous old
photographs.
Great value at just \$34.95
...and a fabulous read!**

long straight lines to give the otherwise-plain wall some character, and the then-popular curved corner leading into a turret from which a company pennant could be flown.

He then remodelled the façade of the building in Carp Street (now occupied by Carpet Court) that had originally been a Temperance Hall and was, in the 1930s, Balmain Brothers Motor Garage and showroom. He added simple Art Deco elements to this, such as the vertical piers.

The adjacent building (now housing four shops including the one occupied by Ryan Pauline, barber) was built by Thatcher in 1935-1936 to replace wooden buildings that had been destroyed by a fire in 1926. Here he incorporated many Art Deco elements – again, the prominent central vertical finial, on this occasion atop a ziggurat (stepped pyramid) feature, the vertical piers, geometric brickwork designs above the windows, distinctive tiling with bold geometric patterning, decorative doors that have a simple, symmetrical, geometric design.

The adjacent, single-storey corner building is interesting because it also uses (and adapts appropriately) many of the same design elements as its two-storey neighbour. It is a good example of how important it was to Thatcher that his buildings should have appropriate 'place' within the broader streetscape.

In 1938, Thatcher was retained to build a new hotel for Tooheys Limited. It replaced, on the same site, what had originally been the Occidental Hotel, which lost its licence in 1908, and then became a temperance hotel

and then a guest house.

Thatcher seems to have deliberately 'matched' this new hotel with his Balmain Brothers' workshop building down the road – it also has a round corner that becomes a turret from which the company pennant can be flown; it utilises unrendered brick into which the distinctive Art Deco elements such as the vertical piers and horizontal bandings have been incorporated (this being not only a decorative inclusion, but a nod to the skill of his bricklayers).

'Eyebrows' above the windows (the horizontal ledges, now painted white) were a popular Art Deco architectural form in the 1930s – so were added to this building. And the choice of font for the prominent wording 'Grand Hotel' is very Art Deco!



Now helping you hear, still helping you save Audiology now available at Bega

Visit your local Audiology Professional
Laurena Chai. They'll take the time to
understand your individual needs and tailor
solutions to fit your lifestyle and help you
save on latest technology hearing aids.

Specsavers Bega
Bega Village
(Near Woolworths)
6492 5000

[specsavers.com.au/hearing](https://www.specsavers.com.au/hearing)



Specsavers



Dental Surgery, Cooma

(59 Vale Street)

Located close to Cooma's commercial centre, this eye-catching building was the initiative of owner Leon Hewett, a dentist. Built on a vacant site, he engaged Canberra architect Ken Oliphant for the design in 1949. Local builder Cecil Barwick was contracted for the construction. The works were completed during 1951.

Recollections

**The only South Coast
history magazine that is
FREE and available to
everyone.**

**A new issue is released
every second month.**

**Simply email 'Send
Recollections' to
southcoasthistory@
yahoo.com
to regularly receive your
free copies on line.**

The two-storey Arte Moderne structure – often referred to as the P&O style – appears to have been done as a commercial development. There is capacity for three surgeries on the ground floor, via the hooded entrance at the end of the ramp. A small retail premises was also provided, on the uphill side, with direct access from the footpath.

The whole of the upstairs level is a generous 2-bedroom private residential unit, built for Hewett's family use. The residence is accessible through the recessed alcove leading from the driveway and has an outdoor balcony at the rear. That entrance has a small protruding lightwell for its internal staircase.

Thoughtful use of glass blocks for the large ground floor windows enables a flood of daylight into the surgeries whilst maintaining the necessary privacy. Glass blocks were also used for the stair light window.

Typical of this architectural style is the large curved wall junctions, rounded edge concrete hoods over entrances and a facade that extends to hide the roof line. The whole impression is reminiscent of the upper deck of an ocean liner. Some architects included porthole windows to enhance the effect. The brick structure has a stippled finish painted render.

The small shop was occupied by Stafford Jewellers until the mid-1970s but has been under long term tenancy by the current barber's business since. After Hewett's death, Messrs Hoyle, Willis & Doyle ran their dental practice there between 1955 and 1988.

Our thanks to Les Harrison for suggesting we include this article in *Recollections* and for providing much of the information used to compile it. Les contributed to 'Sydney Art Deco' by Peter Sheridan, and is currently documenting examples of inter-war architecture (commonly referred to as Art Deco and Art Moderne) in rural NSW for a forthcoming companion publication.

Joseph Check, Revisited

by Dr John Davies ARPS

In 2017, in Recollections 2 (available at southcoasthistory.org.au) there was an article about Joseph Check, a travelling photographer who visited the South Coast a number of times between 1901 and 1917. Communities then were small, isolated and mobile. The established ones supported the agricultural industries, mainly dairying, but gold also attracted larger communities. But when the gold ran out, so did they.

Gold was not the only fickle fortune maker. Our changing tastes in cheese and butter has also moved and reduced populations.

Add into these communities their needs for dentistry, wills, bricks, fences and a host of other features that go to make our lives. The populations were often too small to support a full-time solicitor, surveyor, dentist, priest or photographer. So, enter the travellers bringing their skills when needed, then moving onto the next settlement.

Now everybody, almost, has a camera/phone in their hip pocket and images can be instantly corrected for mistakes and then be transferred anywhere round the planet. So, why such a fuss about a travelling photographer? The simple answer is that life back then was different!

From the 1860s to the 1880s wet plate photography was the process that was mostly used. The plate referred to a standard-size window glass, 8½ x 6½ inches which was halved, and halved again, to give half and quarter plate sizes. The wet part referred to a solution of collodion in ether that held the light sensitive silver halide. The complete process of preparing the coating solution, exposure a cumbersome camera on a tripod, then processing the plate had to be carried out while the plate was wet – all in about 10 minutes. Thus, the photographer had to work next to a darkroom or have a modified cart if he was photographing outdoors. Images were limited to posed and often seated family groups. Restless young children were a problem.

From the early 1880s to the present day, gelatine was found to be a suitable substitute to collodion and it did not need to be in a solution. Photographers welcomed the dry plate which was coated in a factory. The Imperial Dry Plate was made in Adelaide, followed by Baker and Rouse in Sydney to be quickly absorbed by the Kodak empire. The photographer could operate anywhere and away from a darkroom. Heavy equipment and skill were still needed, as was the need to carry numerous glass plates.

Enter our travelling photographer, Joseph Check. Except for an R. Smith in 1865 who visited Eden and Pambula, he appears to have had the South Coast area to himself. (People who write about history will use words such as 'appears', 'seemed', 'could be' not because we are naturally vague - although we might be! - but because historical information is nearly always incomplete. So,

we leave the door open for new finds.)

The life of Joseph Check has already been well covered as mentioned in Recollections 2, but just in case you missed it

His life is poorly documented and so far no letters or diaries firmly attributed to him have been found. All information comes from either entries in newspapers or official documents such as marriage and death certificates. There are lots of question marks and these are noted below as ?.

Now at Bermagui !

Tilba Saturday 27th Inst.

J. CHECK.

Photographer, Limelight and Cinematograph and Polyphone

Entertainer.

PHOTOGRAPHY in all its highest branches. This is a genuine chance to secure a good Photo. Hundreds of pictures on view. Inspection invited.

J. CHECK'S Entertainments are famous south of Cobargo. Following are several press notices :--

Mr. J. Check's Cinematograph and Polyphone entertainment is said to be something wonderful. When given at Towamba some of the residents went to every performance, and afterwards proceeded to Burrigate to attend it again there. At Bombala some of the same people paid for admission six nights in succession, and then were not tired of it. —Pambula 'Voice', 12-4-02.

Mr. Check, who has opened a studio here for a short time, gave two unique entertainments in the School of Arts. The Cinematograph of the Passion Play must be seen to be appreciated ; it is the most realistic combination of scenes ever witnessed in the district. The show is the best of its kind ever seen here. —Bombala Herald', 19-8-02.

Mr. J. Check, the high-class cinematographic entertainer, concluded a successful run of three nights at Bega on Monday night. The show is by far the best of the kind we have seen anywhere, and so pleased the audience that some of them attended every night. —'Star', 3-9-02.

We let Mr Check speak for himself. This advertisement appeared in the Cobargo Chronicle Friday 26th September 1902, p.3, and describes his enterprise.

Joseph's naturalisation papers of 1896, filled out by him, state that he was born in Czegled, Austria, 1857 and arrived in the colony of New South Wales in 1873. He would have been 16 and lists his occupation as 'photographer'. He arrived on the clipper ship Ocean Express. According to the Maritime Museum, the Ocean Express did arrive in Sydney in December 1873 but carrying lumber from Peru. How he got from Europe to

Peru at his age and trained as a photographer **????** But according to his Death Certificate, he arrived in 1868 so he would have been 11**????** He gave his place of birth as Budapest, Hungary. A man of mystery.

He set himself up, primarily as a travelling photographer and oil painter at the start of the time of the dry plates. He had a four-wheel covered waggon which acted as both his photographic darkroom and his home. He quickly added 'entertainer' to his portfolio bringing a cinema, phonograph and singers with him. Combined, they were probably more profitable than photography. It seems that he centred in at least four locations or bases and radiated out from there. These appear to have been Ballina, Hillgrove/Armidale, Gunning and various ports on the South Coast from Eden and Bega to Moruya and townships to the west.

Joseph first visited the South Coast region in 1901. Unfortunately, the year before, his wife died from a heart attack on a tram in Sydney, leaving him with five daughters aged 13 (Eva), 10 (Jessie), 8 (Helen), 6 (Violet) and 3 (Ivy). He took them with him on his cart until he was able to find foster care. They earned their keep by putting up posters and selling tickets. No doubt their charm helped as well.

Between 1901 and 1915 (?) Joseph made over 22 visits to various sites on the South Coast.

There are 4 ways you can get copies of

Recollections

- Visit our fabulous new website www.southcoasthistory.org.au
- Email 'Send Recollections' to southcoasthistory@yahoo.com, and copies will automatically be emailed to you
- Pick up a copy from any of our distributors (see list on page 3)
- Ask for paper copies to be posted to you. It's \$24 per year (6 copies). If paying by Visa or MasterCard, ring 0448 160 852; if paying by cheque, post it to South Coast History Society, 90 Whitby Wilson Road, Quaama NSW 2550



Joseph, the photographer. Using dry plates, he could take not only portraits but also scenes. He nearly always signed his photos with his name on the negative along with the year, so it came up as white writing.

Unfortunately, this was often removed by subsequent users.

There is one other feature of his photography here that showed his quirky sense of humour. The above photo taken in Eden and now attached to the wall of a restored building could be one of his. It has his 'photographic signature' in having the two carts opposing each other and the 'senior gentleman' clearly visible between the horse and the cart.



Joseph was enterprising in publicising his services. Besides newspaper advertisements, he would photograph a business, complete with all employees in the frame. The print would be hung in the premises, word would spread and so people wanting a portrait would seek him out. This photo of A.M. Cansdell's Albion Stores in Church Street, Bega, is in Club Bega and again shows his distinctive style. He nearly always used left and right closure as with the lone figure and the dray. I suspect the little girl on the left could be one of his daughters.

A high class cinematographe was a hand cranked projector screening minute-long films. The light source was a carbide lamp that at one time caused a serious accident while Joseph was in Narrabri. One of the rubber hoses leaked acetylene causing an explosion and fire. The audience stampeded in panic. Joseph was not only burnt, but suffered widespread and unfavourable criticism in the press. He retired to Tasmania with his show for two years until the memories had died down.

Besides a 'moving image' Joseph also had a still projector that used hand painted slides on 5" x 7" glass plates. Having two projectors, he could dissolve one image into the other also giving a sense of movement. For music, he had a two horn cylinder phonograph, the two horns giving a slightly fuzzy but loud rendition of the popular songs of the day such as 'The Cat Came Back' and 'You Were a Good Old Wagon But You Done Broke Down Now'. Some we remember and some we thankfully have forgotten!

Occasionally, he was able to employ a baritone or a tenor as his assistant. All this brought a much-appreciated night of entertainment for a shilling to an audience that usually had little more than a yarn from a traveller.

Not only did Joseph bring entertainment and laughter to the isolated communities, he also brought a record of life as it was. BUT - and this is my input - too often the name of the photographer is removed from its display. We would never think of obliterating a signature on a painting or cut out the name of an author from a book, but too often the names of photographers have been erased.

The identity of a photographer is an important indicator of the age of the image - particularly up to WWII when photography was mainly the realm of the professional. Their skill was high and they often worked with dangerous chemicals, so let's keep them alive - please!

Looking for back copies of
RecollectionS?
 All are at www.southcoasthistory.org.au

MORE REMARKABLE SOUTH COAST WOMEN

Pearl Gibbs

Pearl Gibbs was an energetic and compelling advocate for Aboriginal rights.

In 1941, on 2WL in Wollongong, she became the first Aboriginal woman to speak on Australian radio. This was by no means her greatest achievement - but the very direct approach she adopted on that occasion is typical of her advocacy:

This is the first time in the history of Australia that an Aboriginal woman has broadcast an appeal for her people. I am more than happy to be that woman... My people have had 153 years of the white man's and white woman's cruelty and injustice and unchristian treatment imposed upon us... Our girls and boys are exploited ruthlessly. They are apprenticed out by the Aborigines Welfare Board at the shocking wage of a shilling to three and six per week pocket money and from two and six to six shillings per week is paid into a trust fund. This is done from 14 years to the age of 18. At the end of four years a girl would, with pocket money and money from the trust, have earned £60 and a boy £90.

Many girls have great difficulty in getting their trust money. Others say they have never been paid. Girls arrive home with white babies. I do not know of one case where the Aborigines Welfare Board has taken steps to compel the white father to support his child.

The child has to grow up as an unwanted member of an apparently unwanted race. Aboriginal girls are no less human than my white sisters... The bad housing, poor water supply, appalling sanitary conditions and the lack of right food, together with unsympathetic managers, make life not worth living for my unfortunate people...

Please remember, we don't want your pity, but practical help. This you can do by writing to the Hon. Chief Secretary, Mr Baddeley MLA, Parliament House, Sydney, and ask that our claims be granted as soon as



possible... Do not let it be said of you that we have asked in vain. Will my appeal for practical humanity be in vain? I leave the answer to each and every one of you.

Pearl Mary (Gambanyi) Gibbs was born in 1901 at La Perouse, Sydney. Her mother was a half-caste Aboriginal woman, her father was a white man.

Pearl and her older sister, Olga, were maids. In 1917, both of them took up positions as domestic servants in Sydney where Pearl was to meet Aboriginal girls who had been unwillingly removed from their country homes and been 'apprenticed' or indentured by the Aborigines

We're Different!

We are a history society...not a historical society. We don't collect objects...we don't run a museum. We don't have a library...we have very limited research facilities. Our interest is the fascinating history of the entire South Coast - so we don't focus on just one small, local area. Our aim is to reach absolutely anyone, anywhere, interested in South Coast history - not just a small number of paid-up members of our Society. And WE TELL TALES - yes, all the interesting stories about the NSW South Coast - exactly what our South Coast communities want to hear and read.

South Coast History Society Inc.

YOUR HISTORY SOCIETY

Memberships, enquiries, donations, etc.: southcoasthistory@yahoo.com or 0448 160 852

Protection Board as domestic servants.

In 1923, Pearl married and had two sons and a daughter. The marriage, however, did not last.

In the late 1920s, she became more acutely aware of the practices of the Aborigines Protection Board, so she, her mother and stepfather moved to Nowra to pick peas and to be able to live away from the Board's control. She then supported pea pickers who were seeking better conditions, and encouraged those at the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Reserve to defy the board manager's control over their income – as an example, by encouraging the Aboriginal women to shop for underwear after the manager decreed they could only go shopping when he was present!

In 1936 the Aborigines Protection Board's powers were widened to allow the confinement to one of its reserves of anyone 'apparently having an admixture of Aboriginal blood' – a decision that directly affected Pearl and her family. So, in 1937 she travelled to Sydney and began work for the fledgling Aborigines Progressive Association.

Pearl became secretary of the Aborigines Progressive Association and became one of the few women, white or black, who spoke in public political forums. Her focus (as was reflected in the later 2WL broadcast) was on issues of Aboriginal women's and children's rights, and the appalling nutritional and health conditions that were faced by mothers and children on government-managed reserves.

Pearl became a link between the white women's and Aboriginals' movements, serving, for example, on the management committee of the Union of Australian Women.

Conscious of the importance of media coverage, Pearl cultivated relationships with journalists. She was also an outstanding organiser, helping to plan the historic first Day of Mourning protest on Australia Day 1938 on the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet.

After World War II, Pearl Gibbs settled in Dubbo with her widowed mother, actively supporting attempts by Aboriginal people in the region to get better conditions from the Aborigines Welfare Board (as the Aborigines Protection Board had by then become known).

In 1954 Gibbs was elected to the seat on the Board that was assigned to mixed-race Aborigines. However, she soon found that there was no real power for an Aboriginal member of the Board; she could not inspect reserves unless on an official tour, and as both an Aboriginal and a woman, she believed she was excluded from key decision-making, some of which took place over drinks in hotel bars. So, she resigned from the position.

In 1956, Pearl Gibbs, together with activist Faith Bandler, was instrumental in forming the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship, an organisation that was to provide a fertile meeting place for black and white activists until the late 1960s. In 1957, the AAF initiated a petition to change the Australian Constitution 'to provide equal citizenship for Aborigines'.

Pearl also established a hostel for Aboriginal people who came to Dubbo for medical treatment, convincing the Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia to fund the hostel — a small weatherboard cottage — and the Aborigines Welfare Board to provide a modest allowance for a warden.

Pearl died in Dubbo in April 1983.

ezyprint

DISPLAY BANNERS COLOUR COPYING
BUSINESS CARDS A-FRAMES
POSTERS DESIGN SERVICE
INVOICE BOOKS POSTCARDS
FLYERS

JUST A FEW OF OUR SERVICES

AND SO MUCH MORE!

sales@printmadeezy.com.au (02) 4476 1824

Bettie Fisher

Bettie Fisher (1939? – 1976) was an Aboriginal singer, theatre administrator and activist.

She was described by Bob Maza, a theatre director with whom she worked closely (so, therefore, his description of her is likely to be accurate), *as a loudmouthed woman, rough, arrogant, independent of men and has this animosity for whites.*

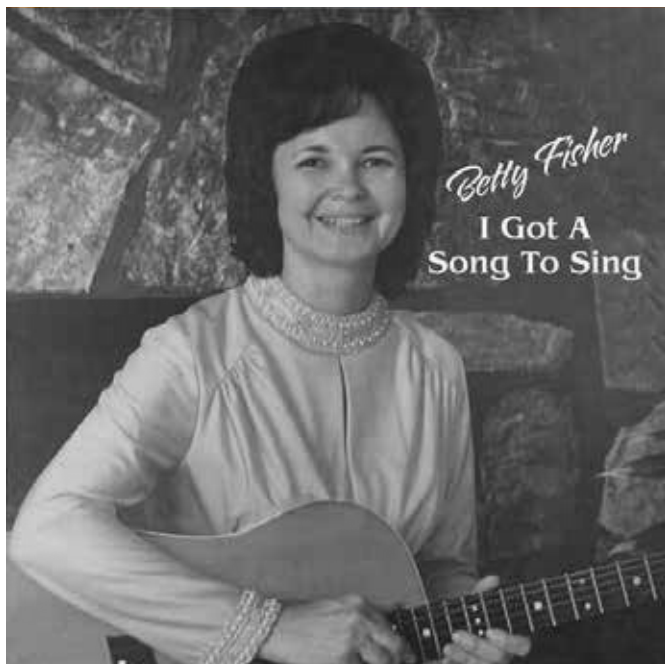
But she needs support rather than attack. She's got a raw sort of courage. You've got to give her her due: she's a real boots-and-all campaigner.

Bettie (sometimes spelt Betty) was born either in Berry or at the Roseby Park Aboriginal Mission at Greenwell Point around 1939. In the mid-1940s her family moved to Newcastle where she attended Cardiff Public School – until she was expelled at age 12.

She became a jazz and blues singer, joining Jimmy Little and his younger brother, Freddy Little, in the first all-Black show to do the club rounds in NSW and Queensland. In December 1962 she appeared on Brian Henderson's 'Bandstand' singing two jazz standards, 'Up a Lazy River' and 'Basin Street Blues'. She was also a guest on Graeme Bell's 'Trad Jazz' program at about the same time.

In 1974 Bettie became the administrator of a newly-established Black Theatre Arts and Cultural Centre in Redfern, Sydney. This centre ran drama classes and held workshops for inner-city Aboriginals in modern dancing, tribal dancing, writing for theatre, fashion design and modelling, karate and photography. It also became an informal meeting place for Redfern Aboriginals who previously had few places to gather apart from local hotels where they often encountered prejudice from Whites and aggression from police.

Roberta Flack and the British-Ghanian-Caribbean Afro rock band Osibisa were among a number of Black



Looking for information about remarkable
South Coast Women?
Find it at www.southcoasthistory.org.au

artists invited by Bettie to perform at the centre.

Bettie was passionately committed to Black rights.

In 1971 she became a member of the executive committee of the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs which had been established to provide assistance to Aboriginal people living in Sydney.

She also negotiated with the NSW Department of Education to introduce 'Aboriginality' to schools, hoping Aboriginal performers and painters would visit schools to demonstrate the richness of their culture.

In April 1976 she also took part in the opening of the 'Aboriginal Embassy' in Canberra.

Bettie Fisher died a month later in Sydney.

Kezie Apps

Kezie Apps (born in Bega in February 1991) is (in February 2025) the co-captain of the Jillaroos, the Australian women's national Rugby League team (the current world champions, having won the last three Women's Rugby League World Cup tournaments), and the NSW Sky Blues, the NSW Women's Rugby League team.

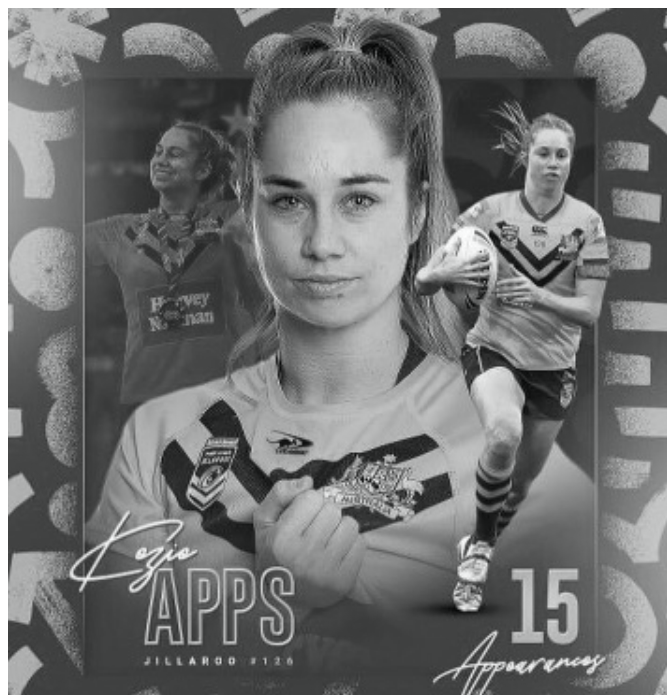
'I was born with League in my blood,' Apps suggests, 'because Rugby League has been a huge part of my family life.'

Her Father, Geoff, is 'a Rugby League-mad father', and her two older brothers, Deon (who played for the South Sydney Rabbitohs in 2011) and Ryan (who captained the Group 16 representative side in 2015) were both exceptionally talented players.

We used to play footy in the backyard all the time. They (her brothers) both played Junior Rugby League for the Bega Roosters, and my dad also played. I wanted to be like them, and they encouraged me to sign up at the age of 8, although Mum (Dawn) wasn't too impressed!, Kezie recalls.

Kezie was a teammate at the Bega Roosters to Dale Finucane who later played League from 2012 to 2024 for the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs, the Melbourne Storm and Cronulla-Sutherland Sharks. He remembers

Kezie, now a great mate, was then head and shoulders above anyone else on the field – boy or girl... She wasn't just better than me, she was better than all of us. She was one of the best players in the team... She was a really good tackler. She put a lot of force in them...(and) there was another girl in the comp as well. Actually, a lot of the guys were jealous because they were both usually better than us.



Kezie's Rugby League playing days, however, came to an abrupt halt when she turned 12, because the League had age restrictions on girls playing the sport with boys. So, Kezie then turned to playing hockey ('that was the sport my girlfriends were playing') and tag-league (a non-contact alternative to the traditional game, focusing on speed, agility, and tactical gameplay; she became captain of the Bega Chicks team).

A decade after having had to quit Rugby League, Kezie was watching the Jillaroos win the World Cup for the first time and suddenly realised that she COULD play full contact League again. So, she joined the Helensburgh Tigers - travelling from Bega to Helensburgh every week to play, necessitating a 5½ hour drive each way!

After just a few months of joining the Helensburgh Tigers, Kezie Apps was selected to play in a representative squad that competed for the State Cup. The Illawarra team won the competition and Apps was named Most Valuable Player at the tournament.

Then, in the space of one season, she was named the Illawarra Women's Player of the Year, NSW Women's Player of the Year and was selected to represent Australia in the Test against the Kiwi Ferns.

In 2016, Apps won the Women's Dally M Medal Player of the Year award and in 2017 was selected as a player in the Australian Women's Rugby League team. She has captained or co-captained the Sky Blues since 2020, and has co-captained the Jillaroos since 2022.

Kezie lives in Bega. She and her partner run a dairy farm. (At one time Kezie had a full-time job at Bega Cheese. Her grandfather, Ron, was once the 'dairy farmer face' of Bega Cheese and her brother, Ryan, once featured on a Bega Cheese label).



Aussie Precast Products

Manufacturers and suppliers of:

- Septic Tanks
- Collection Tanks
- Cattle Grids
- Stock Troughs
- Water Tanks
- Feed Lot Troughs
- Concrete Pipes, Pits & Headwalls
- BioSeptic Aerated Wastewater Systems

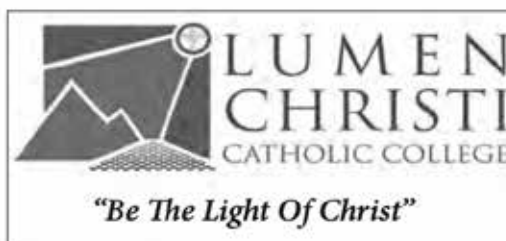
Phone: 0427 111 082

11227 Princes Highway

Cobargo NSW 2550

Email: info@aussieprecast.com.au

Web: www.aussieprecast.com.au



Part of local history since 2001

388 Pambula Beach Road, Pambula Beach

***Lumen Christi Catholic College caters for
Kindergarten to Year 12 students
across the entire Bega Valley!***



**For further information please contact
our Enrolment Officer on (02) 6495 8888
or email lccc@cg.catholic.edu.au**

When South Coast History is the Hero

Thankyou to the many, many people who provided feedback about our special 50th issue of Recollections and, more recently, have congratulated us for developing our new, comprehensive **southcoasthistory.org.au** website. That feedback is immensely gratifying to us and underlines, yet again, the extent of the support we are receiving from the community for what South Coast History Society is doing – and is achieving.

We were delighted that Kristy McBain, the Member for Eden-Monaro, and Councillor Helen O’Neil from the Bega Valley Shire Council were able to help us celebrate the release of Recollections 50 at a morning tea in late January at Tura Marrang Library. It was reiterated then just how (in many ways, uniquely) successful the South Coast History Society and Recollections have been, and how incredibly strong the ongoing support from South Coast communities has been.

Just one example of this: Recollections has become the most widely distributed history magazine in Australia (by a very long way; History Australia, published by the Australian Historical Society, is generally acknowledged to be one of the nation’s most widely distributed history magazines... but Recollections has an annual print run 13½ times greater than does History Australia!... and Recollections is free – thanks entirely to regular donations we receive from supportive individuals within the community; to subscribe to History Australia is \$150 per year!!)

southcoasthistory.org.au is designed to be equally impactful. It will eventually feature (and perhaps already does feature) more stories about the NSW South Coast than does any other local website. And it is freely available, 24/7, to anyone with an interest in South Coast history.

The stories we included in Recollections 50 also uncovered some additional ‘gems’:

The Wreck of the S.S. Merimbula

We were contacted by a reader from Malua Bay who has two interesting (and historically significant, because they are first-hand accounts from someone actually involved in the incidents) letters written by his Grandfather, Arthur Forrester Peak, who was Chief Engineer on the Merimbula when it ran aground in 1928 and who had previously been involved with attempts to refloat the Cumberland from Gabo Island in 1917.

This is his description of the wreck of the Merimbula:

I suppose you did not hear much about the nice little shipwreck we had. We bumped into the reef about (Tuesday) 1am, raining heavily and impossible to see where we were.

The engines were kept running to prevent her slipping

off again, her nose had lifted right out of water, so you can imagine the angle she was at 10ft higher forward than when afloat. Fortunately, she kept perfectly upright and when daylight came the passengers and crew were all boated ashore on the beach of a bay named Abraham’s Bosom.

Beyond being soaked with rain all were safely landed, and our luck continued for there were 4 huts, in which we took shelter. The passengers were sent away, also unwanted members of the crew, as soon as possible. The rest of us had quite an enjoyable camp set until Saturday when a large motor boat towed us into the Shoalhaven river 7 miles away and then 15 miles up river to Nowra, where we were met by cars which took us to a hotel where we dined, then we motored to Bomaderry station across the river. I got home about 7pm.

While our home was at Abraham’s Bosom we made several trips to the ship which was still afloat aft, and loaded up 4 large life boats with ships gear and a little Cargo which the launch towed away when we went home.

On the Thursday, I think it was, the after part of the ship filled up and she sank in deep water though with the bows still on the rocks, and there she will remain until the sea breaks her up.

The camp was in a delightful spot when the weather was good and only for the miserable feeling of having lost such a good ship and home, it might have been enjoyable.

The huts belonged to an old chap who came down to see us, and took it as a matter of course that we should occupy them. He prowled round fishing with some abo friends and goodness knows where he slept, and we had some wet nights too. I hope he was paid his rent. There was a permanent fresh water stream near, and we had every luxury from the ship including good mattresses to sleep on, so we had what a passenger called a movie shipwreck.

We struck the reef at full speed. The judge did not absolve the captain and officers from blame but stated that the evidence which was pressed upon the court that on this particular occasion a set of the sea landward caused the Merimbula to drift 3 miles landward of the ships course was unconvincing.

The same drift landward was asserted to exist when the Riverina was lost, and the tale is received with grave suspicion.

We have had numerous squeaks and risked greater disaster escaping by a very narrow margin before. There are hundreds of miles of safe water out eastward which should be made use of until the visibility allows the ship to near the coast again safely.

We were nearly wrecked at Culburra Hd in a fog. 10 seconds more and we would have hit the base of a cliff 150ft high.

The Cumberland

Much of Arthur Peak's letter about the Cumberland relates to technical details about the salvage attempt (such as details about pumps used to clear water from the ship) but it does include some interesting observations about the salvage effort itself.

First, he observes that the *Cumberland's* crew were young and inexperienced (probably unsurprising, as this was wartime):

The engineers, 7 in all, were all young; those from 3rds downwards were mere boys, the officers were young. Such men would not have got billets before the war. When the explosion occurred they all abandoned ship, but afterwards boarded her again and her skipper, a sickly old man of 70, did not know the coast otherwise they were afloat long enough to have reached Twofold Bay easily.

Then, the whole proceedings [efforts to patch the ship to enable it to be towed to Twofold Bay for repairs] seemed to be a series of experiments – trial and error... when over £1,000,000 worth of ship and cargo is at stake, it is surely far better to push the ship further up on the beach and either leave her there or make these patches a sure thing. I am sure the British salvage folk would have found her a soft job.

*The weather was also conducive to having unloaded some of the cargo before the ship was refloated: We put in five weeks alongside the *Cumberland*. She made a great breakwater, and the only times we left her through bad weather we went off to Eden about 40 miles distant. We*

*made 7 trips to Eden... the week we floated her it was like the harbour all the time. The old light house keeper at Gabo said he had seen nothing like it for many years... she had most of her 12 or 14 thousand ton of cargo aboard when she sank. For several days ships could have laid alongside her [to unload some of the cargo] and one on each side just as comfortable as at a wharf. The margin of flotation with which she left on her final trip was miserably small, she had a heavy list to the holed side, they were towing stern first as the NE swell she encountered just washed over her forward deck, some of the water getting below,,some of the *Cumberland's* engineers assured me that there was another leak which was not attended to at all.*

*I saw the *Cumberland's* 1st officer last week, he told me most emphatically that the salvage should have been accomplished. It riles me whenever I think of it, but it must be a continual sorrow to those connected with her.*

And, returning to the Merimbula

And then, several days later Ralph Cook from Nowra contacted us, indicating he was the grandson of Tom Cook, a Nowra mounted policeman, who was sent on horseback to oversee the wreck and prevent pilfering from it.

Tom set out early one morning riding via Terara where his shooting-mate lived.

Tom's friend was a market gardener in the village and



BATTERIES
for deep cycle,
car - truck - tractor
and motor cycle



Battery Testing and Fitting available
12/24v Alternators, Starter Motors, etc.

Sourcing items for the home auto electrician with access to quality
12/24-volt engine consumables, e.g. alternators / starter motors / batteries
and more at highly competitive prices

his son had the fishing shack at Currarong on land that he had obtained from the Crown.

It was around morning tea-time and Tom was invited to sit around the round newly obtained oak dining table. He remarked to the owner on its quality: 'English Oak, I believe, Tom', was the reply 'and we have chairs to match'.

An offering of 'imported Johnny Walker' whisky by the host was a surprise for Tom but, being a good friend, he graciously accepted the offer even though it was a bit early in the day for a whisky.

Tom explained that he was on his way down to the wreck, and drained his Johnny Walker from the shot glass etched 'SS Merimbula'.

He bid his host goodbye and said he would have to hurry as there were rumours of goods being unloaded from the wreck by local villagers!

Those glasses are now at Currarong in our original family home.'

Preparing for an Invasion, 1942

And then Tim the Yowie Man drew our attention to a piece he had written for the Canberra Times (19.4.2024) about surviving World War II tank traps in the forest near Cathcart that expands on our 'Preparing for an Invasion, 1942' piece in Recollections 50. We reproduce it with Tim's kind permission:

"I don't know what you're talking about," gasps the lady in the Cathcart General Store, giving me the once over as if I've got less grey matter stashed away in my noggin than the boar head mounted on the wall behind the counter.

For the uninitiated, Cathcart is a small blip on the

map, about 15km east of Bombala and about 80km south of Cooma. Due to its relative isolation, some call it deliverance country. Not me. I love it.

But this storekeeper isn't the only person to look sideways when I ask for directions to the World War II tank traps that are squirreled away in dense forest less than 10-15km south-east of town, just below Big Jack Mountain Road.

And I can't blame them, when I first heard about the war-time relics, I thought someone was having a lend of me too.

Sure, I've explored remnant tank traps elsewhere along our east coast, including concrete tetrahedra traps on Newcastle's Stockton Beach that occasionally surface depending on swells and the sand blow. And many years ago, while traipsing through scrub out the back of Tenterfield, I also stumbled across a purpose-built barrier of timber posts. Some claim they formed part of the Brisbane Line, a defence proposal formulated during the war to "concede" the northern portion of the Australian continent in the event of an invasion by the Japanese.

But Cathcart is a long way from the Brisbane line.

However, this is no wild goose chase. These Cathcart traps aren't a myth. In fact, prior to this investigation, an obliging parks ranger from Bombala despatched a missive to my inbox containing a 2009 NSW national parks historic heritage inventory of the traps.

The inventory is far from detailed but does reveal the traps were built in the early 1940s by the 15th Battalion of the Volunteer Defence Corps, based in Bombala.

Further, the document reveals the tank traps were part of a broader "military complex" that included a wooden



Tim leans on one of many timber posts, driven into the ground by the Voluntary Defence Corps during World War Two, on either side of a road near Cathcart, designed to stop (or at least slow down) any advancing enemy in their tracks. Picture by David Hanzl

fort and two fox holes for explosives on a hair pin corner on Big Jack Mountain Road, which in the 1940s was still a major route between the coast and inland.

The purpose of the fox holes was like those on Pooh's Corner on the Clyde Mountain where officers of the 14th Battalion of the Volunteer Defence Corps manned the corner between 1942 and 1944, guarding a tunnel that had been built beneath the road and was packed with explosives. The plan was that if Japanese forces landed on the south coast, the defence corps would detonate the explosives, thereby slowing any attempt by enemy forces to reach Canberra and beyond. After the war, the entrance to the tunnel was filled with concrete and, of course, is now decorated with a proliferation of soft toys.

Back to the hunt for the Cathcart traps. After leaving the store, accompanied by fellow history hounds David and Lisa Hanzl and armed with a mud map handed to us by the ranger, we head deep into the wilds of the South East Forest National Park. Well, as wild as 10km from town can be.

Less than an hour later we spot our first timber post. A rummage through the scrub reveals dozens of the waist-height posts, spaced out in four or five rows. The timber obstacles, numbered in their dozens, run perpendicular to an abandoned road that is now a fire trail of sorts. The posts on the road itself were removed following the war to allow vehicular access.

"They really are textbook examples of timber posts traps," explains David referring to the 1941 Volunteer



Fellow history hound, David Hanzl documents the extent of the tank traps near Cathcart.

Picture by Tim the Yowie Man

Can you help us with **Research &/or Writing** for *Recollections* and our website?

Are you interested in researching and/or writing stories for us for inclusion in *Recollections* or on our website. It's a rewarding and interesting challenge.

We need volunteers who can just work occasionally compiling, or helping to compile, stories from time to time (such as the lead stories in this issue of *Recollections*) and for volunteers who could take responsibility for regularly adding content to the 'History Categories' pages of our website (e.g. by adding details of South Coast Shipwrecks, or South Coast Pioneers, or histories of South Coast Towns).

If you might be interested, please let us know –

0448 160 852

Defence Corp Manual (long declassified and available National Library of Australia), where in the Pamphlet No. 6 titled "TANK HUNTING and DESTRUCTION", under the section about "obstacles" and subsection "stumps", it instructs the following:

"Tree stumps will stop tanks when they are sturdy enough to raise the tracks off the ground by fouling the belly of the tank between the tracks. For this purpose, stumps should be not less than 12 inches [about 30cm] in diameter and should be 2 ft 3 ins [about 70cm] in height. To prevent tanks manoeuvring between stumps the gaps must be reduced as in the case of trees. Belts of stumps must possess some depth; a single line will not stop tanks."

David explains, "They may not look like a serious defence, but they would have only been effective in stopping or slowing down the small, light tanks that the Japanese had at the start of the war."

Exploring the site requires caution, with several timber posts having succumbed to fire or rot or simply being removed, leaving the landscape pockmarked with partially hidden holes. Having a leg trapped in one of these needs to be avoided at all costs, especially in this snake-infested back country.

The official inventory poignantly states "the military operations were kept 'hush-hush' in the local area, so civilians didn't know much of what was actually going on," adding "this is consistent with the general censorship policy undertaken by the Commonwealth government in regard to the war efforts on the home front".

But surely, over 80 years on, knowledge of these war relics should be better-known - they tell an important story from war time Australia. Oh, and despite 15-year-old preliminary advice from a heritage consultant suggesting the site be considered for a heritage listing, it hasn't. Yet.



The hidden war relics that even locals don't know are on their doorstep

Louitt's Granite Quarry

And, from another reader: 'I regret to point out that item 9 of Recollections 50 perpetuates the myth that Moruya Granite was used for the façade of the Bank of New South Wales Head Office in George Street, Sydney.

The Bank of New South Wales purchased 64 acres of land at the mouth of a creek ("The Anchorage") on the Moruya River on 10 September 1914, through Robert

Tate Hilder acting as a nominee, with the intention of re-opening Louitt's Quarry to supply granite for the projected rebuilding of its Head Office at 341 George Street Sydney. This did not happen, the granite used for the building subsequently came from a quarry at Uralla [near Armidale]. The Bank, no longer needing the property, asked John Gorrell, as Manager of the nearest branch, to sell the land.'

Study Close to Home

UOW REGIONAL CAMPUSES

ON YOUR DOORSTEP

Gain access to all of the services and advantages for which the University of Wollongong is renowned, without leaving the South Coast. Our local connections will give you opportunities right here in Bega and Batemans Bay.

COURSES ON OFFER

- Bachelor degrees in Arts (History; English Literatures; Indigenous Studies; Sociology; Community, Culture & Environment)
- Bachelor of Business & Bachelor of Commerce
- Bachelor of Nursing
- Master of Teaching (Primary and Secondary)
- University Access Program

Find out more

bbay.uow.edu.au/study
bega.uow.edu.au/study

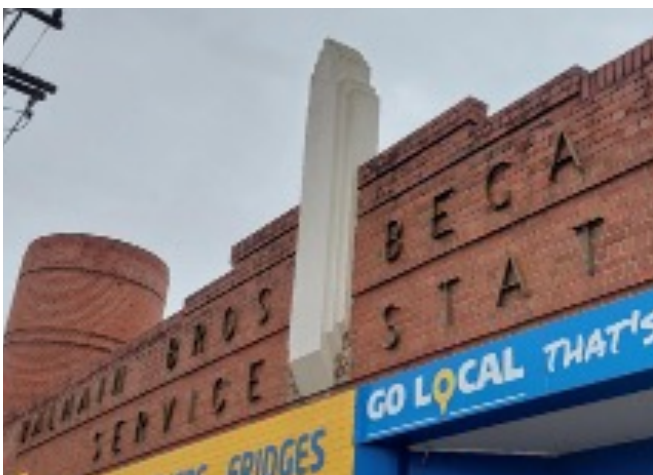


UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA





Kristy McBain, MP for Eden-Monaro (centre) and Cllr Helen O'Neil of Bega Valley Shire Council with Peter Lacey, President of the South Coast History Society, at the release of Recollections 50.



Top line: 'matching' vertical finials atop ziggurat features on adjacent Art Deco buildings in Carp Street Bega. Note the Art Deco decoration above the window. Lower line: vertical finial on Balmain Brothers building in Auckland Street; intricate Art Deco brickwork and 'eyebrow' on Grand Hotel building.

When Stairs Become a Challenge... **the practical solution is a Compact Lift from** **South Coast Lifts**



Our Compact Home Lifts are:

- ✓ Stylish with Quality Components
- ✓ Advanced Safety features
- ✓ Affordable
- ✓ A better alternative than a stairlift
- ✓ Much cheaper than the cost of moving house
- ✓ Compact
- ✓ Energy efficient
- ✓ Add value to your property
- ✓ Quick to install
- ✓ Whisper quiet
- ✓ Elegance – smaller lift 1-2 person, 170 kg
- ✓ Elegance Plus – Larger lift 1-2 person comfortably or 1 Person and wheelchair, 220 kg
- ✓ See Compact Home Lifts brochure on web site or South Coast Lifts can mail a brochure and standard costing to your home for your convenience

Call today for a Brochure or an obligation-free Assessment & Quote

(02) 4476 7977

<http://www.southcoastlifts.com.au>

(Member of Lift Engineering Society of Australia)

"We bought a Compact Home Lift because it has allowed us to stay in our home. It was a far cheaper solution when compared with the cost of moving house" — George, 66

"We looked at buying a stairlift but made the right decision choosing a Compact Home Lift. It has exceeded all our expectations" — Pippa, 56