

The Old School Report

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September 2020

Museum to Remain Closed

The Committee has decided that because of the ongoing Covid 19 crisis, the Museum will remain closed until further notice. The AGM will take place at 2 pm on Monday September 28th in the Museum grounds. Members are asked to bring their own refreshments.

Our new container.

Our storage situation has improved dramatically with the installation of shelving (thanks to Don Bretherton and Neil Burnham) in the container. Over the past few weeks, we have been moving artefacts and equipment from the annexe and the office to the container, in preparation for shelving to be installed in the annexe. When the shelves have been installed, we plan to rationalise the storage of all objects, using the two storage spaces. Our collection of oyster plates will be moved from its current location to the annexe and examples will be displayed on a rotational basis.

From 2 Mountains to a Red Kangaroo

As a result of the current re-organisation of the Museum, we've come across some forgotten documents, such as the collection of journals of the RAHS mentioned in the last Old School Report. One of these treasures is a delightful monograph written by Joan Weekes, 'Research Officer, Imlay District Historical Society'. I have been unable to discover the date of publication but the reference to the Imlay Historical Society is significant as our title changed in 1986 to the Merimbula-Imlay Historical Society so it seems that Joan's monograph was printed prior to that year. Joan moved to Sydney in 1980 so it's possible that the booklet was published some time before that.

Joan was a remarkable lady. She was born in 1916 and attended boarding school in England. She returned to Australia and attended Frensham college in Mittagong. She left Frensham in 1934-5 and enrolled in the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in England, graduating in 1938. She married soon after and seems to have moved to Merimbula in 1960. She was a keen member of the IDHS and was active in campaigns to save the Old Wharf and the Norfolk Island pine trees in Market Street. She died in 2013, aged 96.

Her pamphlet was typed (probably) on foolscap paper and was sub-titled *A Journey Down the Prince's Highway*. (In 1921 the highway was named after the then Prince of Wales who had visited Australia in 1920. The Prince later became King Edward the Eighth). Joan's intention was to explain the derivation of indigenous place names along the Highway:

So, to preserve and dignify what I believe to be an essential part of our history, I have made a short study of the meaning of the aboriginal names along the highway.

(The decision to use indigenous place names wherever possible was taken in the early 1830s by the Surveyor-General of NSW, Major Thomas Mitchell). Joan's narrative begins in *Bulli*,

originally Bulla (which) means 'beautiful' and 'two mountains' but we will take up the journey a bit further south:

On the coast, a little distance from Narooma, is Permageua, now Bermagui 'a haven for canoes with paddles'. In the mountain country following, the road comes through Tilba-Tilba, meaning 'many waters' and Cubargo (Cobargo) meaning 'grandfather'. Quaama next on the highway is 'a place of shallow water' and Buckajo nearby is 'running water'.

Bika (Bega) is next and means 'beautiful' and 'a large camping ground'. The open country around was probably a good hunting area and would explain the gathering of many aborigines (sic).

A little distance off the highway near the sea is Tathra which means 'a beautiful country' and 'the place of native cats'.

Further on, the highway comes to Wolumla 'a large waterhole' and a little south of the highway is Millingandi, another place of pipeclay providing warlike decoration for the nearby tribes.

The highway winds along a high ridge then comes gradually down into Merimboola or Murrumboola, which is 'a place of large snakes, a place of two waters or lakes'. Here in Merimbula is the retirement village of Bimbimbie, an Aboriginal word meaning 'a place of many birds'.

A short distance along the road is Pambula 'two waters' and on the sea, but still part of Pambula, is Jiguma 'where the jiggi reed grows'. Jiguma is at the mouth of the Pambula River. Here George Bass pulled into shelter for two days on his voyage of discovery in 1797.

The Prince's Highway now passes through the old whaling town of Eden out towards the Victorian border. The road crosses the creek at Nullica possibly meaning 'a place of war' after 'nulla nulla' a war club and then goes through Kiah 'a beautiful place'. Some distance away, before the Prince's Highway turns inland, is Wamboyne - 'a red kangaroo'.

Wamboyne is another sacred place of the Aboriginal people and is a refuge, close to the beach overhung with huge rocks and trees, dark and mysterious. Here in the sea and in the lake nearby, the fishing was good, and huge mussels were to be found on the rocks near the sea. They were excellent food, and their shells shone like dark mother-of-pearl.

The last place before the border is Narrabarba, meaning a dark place, twisted and forked. A short distance further on, the highway enters Victoria at the little town of Genoa.

So ends Joan's account of the indigenous place names of the Far South Coast. It is difficult to know how accurate her translations were as she did not cite any sources. However, her daughter Ms Christina Stephen has a collection of the sources Joan used to compile the pamphlet and as far as can be seen, her names correspond to what are generally accepted as accurate translations. Her monograph concludes with the following thoughtful comment:

Next time the traveller makes this journey down the Princes Highway to the Victorian border, he may travel back into the past, back to a time when Aborigines roamed the coast in their tribal grounds, hunting and fighting. The camp sites they made were practical and descriptive, indicating where food and water were to be found. Their sacred places were made mysterious by the magic of the medicine man. It is hoped that by understanding the names of these aboriginal places their true meaning will be given and remembered by all those who travel along the road 'from two mountains to a red kangaroo'.

The Wreck of the Mimosa

Mimosa Rocks National Park is named after the paddle-steamer *Mimosa* which was wrecked off Bunga Point in September 1863. The 153-tonne ship was on a voyage from Eden to Sydney. The following account is from the *Goulburn Herald* of September 26th, 1863:

"Intelligence arrived in Braidwood yesterday morning that the Mimosa steamer, a boat belonging to the Illawarra Steam Navigation Company was wrecked. The following particulars have reached us, and which have been passed on to Edye Manning, Esq; the manager, at the request of Mr Polack of Bega.

The Mimosa left Merimbula for Sydney about one o'clock on Friday last, September 18. At a quarter to three the same day she struck a rock or sunken wreck about a mile or a mile and a quarter from the land, about ten miles north of Tathra or the Bega River. She had on board about thirty-six passengers and crew; all saved with the exception of Mr and Mrs Ivell of Maneroo,--at least these are supposed to be the two that are lost; they were aged people. Everything is lost, the ship foundering immediately. All had to jump into the boat at once. The Captain (Keft) and the Engineer, Mr Livingstone, stuck to her to the last. The captain and the boat's crew arrived at Mr Polacks at Murrah, about two hours after the wreck: and the Mate, with his portion of the passengers and crew, arrived about six or seven o'clock the next morning, and landed about five miles from Murrah. Mr Polack rode over to Moruya on Sunday, a distance of seventy miles, to give information of the distressing event, starting at seven o'clock on Sunday morning, and accomplishing the distance between three and four o'clock in the afternoon. Captain Tranet, receiving the information, decided upon starting the same evening for the shipwrecked persons, who will be passed on to Sydney via Moruya. The place where she struck has been passed and re-passed over and over again trading on the coast, and no idea was entertained of there being any impediment to navigation on that spot.

The whole of the crew, without exception, have lost all they possessed. She had on board the mail, which is lost and is supposed to be a very valuable one.

The crew were unanimous in stating they have been repeatedly over the same ground and that the captain was on the bridge at the time."

Goulburn Herald, 26 September 1863, p3.

The Australasian Underwater Cultural Heritage (AUCH) Database comments:

"With fine weather and smooth seas, the vessel reputedly hit 'uncharted' rocks offshore from Bunga Head. The engines were stopped and the steamer put astern but it immediately began to settle by the bow. Captain Keft ordered boats out and everybody was called on deck.

Passengers and crew abandoned ship and the vessel soon sank under the last of them. Two of the steerage passengers were unaccounted for in the rush and it was presumed that they had gone down with the vessel. When news of the incident reached Moruya, the steamer Mynora was dispatched to help. Two days after the vessel sank, hard hat divers undertook one of the earliest salvage attempts in NSW. The vessel could not be recovered. Despite aerial and underwater surveys, no trace of the reported rocks has ever been found in the position given by Captain Keft. It is speculated that he may have been closer to shore than he cared to admit to the Marine Board. Intriguingly, the rocks still appear on modern charts, while the local National Park also bears their name (Mimosa Rocks National Park). The wreck site has been located in 21m and it retains the Mimosa's rare early diagonal marine trunk engine.”

Mimosa Wreck Inspection Report, Heritage Branch, Department of Planning, Sydney, 1992, <http://www.environment.gov.au/shipwreck/public/wreck/wreck.do?key=1256>

The steamer *Mynora* was a 117 ton wooden paddle steamer built at Pyrmont, Sydney in 1863. Ironically, the *Mynora* herself was wrecked in 1864 on St George's Head in the aptly-named Wreck Bay, near Sussex Inlet. In September-October 1863, she was used as the tender for dives carried out by a Mr McNab on the sunken *Mimosa*. The *Sydney Morning Herald* of October 8th 1863 reported that McNab found a hole in the ship's bottom. He located the mailbags in the chief officer's cabin and sent them to the surface. He then located the bodies of Mr and Mrs Ivell in their cabin in a *very much decomposed* condition (*SMH*, p2). The bodies were sent to the surface and were buried at sea. Mr McNab reported finding a rock which showed signs of recent damage and said that it was *a very considerable distance nearer the land than reported by Captain Keft*. (*Ibid*). The *SMH* of October 21st 1863 stated that *After an investigation, the government declined to prosecute Captain Keft*. (p9).