



The Shoalhaven Chronograph with Berry Newsletter

May - June 2020

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COVID 19 Update

As you would be aware we, like all museums and galleries in NSW, have had to close during the COVID 19 restrictions but we unlike the larger museums do not anticipate reopening before September, though should conditions change we will consider opening earlier. This is because most of our volunteers are over 65 and therefore in the high-risk group for contracting the illness. The spaces in our museum are also not easy to manage in terms of ensuring social distancing.

Nevertheless, we have not been wasting our time during the crisis.

During the past month or so a band of our volunteers has been meeting weekly to continue the task of refiling and boxing our family history documents. These documents are now almost all contained in special preservation boxes, labelled and arranged on shelves for easier access. These workers have of course been practicing social distancing.

Work on the back rooms and garage has also continued. One of our volunteers, Keith Houston has worked tirelessly with Shoalhaven Council officers to gain approval for repairs and reflooring of the shed so that it is now a more secure place for us to store items in our collection. The reflooring was funded by a grant from the Berry Garden Club.

Keith is installing more shelving in the garage and we can also now begin to use the compactus (a large metal storage unit) donated by Jen Saunders last year for storing the items within our collection awaiting use in future displays.

'Bum Tree' Project Report

Last year the Berry Museum received a spectacular object for inclusion in our collection and display. This is the dendrochronological sample taken from the famous 'bum tree' when it was tragically felled as part of road widening along the Gerroa Road in 2014.

At the time of the threat to the tree there was significant community concern about its destruction. The B&DHS was approached by Berry Landcare to participate in a project to provide a record for future research, and reference data to assist future decisions in managing old-growth trees. The Shoalhaven City Council agreed to fund this project.

The project involved taking a slice of the tree and submitting it to analysis by tree dating experts in Canberra.

After felling, close inspection of the stump revealed the tree originally had two trunks, and at some time in its early life one of these had fallen and the resulting scar overgrowth had formed the infamous burl.

Hundreds of volunteer hours then followed in preparing the sample and sanding the surface to a fine burnish to reveal its record of tree rings. An analysis of the rings, combined with radiocarbon dating, was then conducted by Dr Matthew Brookhouse at the Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University.

The analysis concluded that the Bum Tree probably germinated sometime between 1626 and 1680 CE (Common Era), that is, between 334 and 388 years before it was felled in 2014. This places the tree well before comprehensive European knowledge of the Australian continent and makes it a contemporary of the British monarch Charles II (who unlike the tree was not the Charles to have his head severed. Actually, on second thoughts the tree might actually have been around during the reign of the beheaded Charles I, 1625-1649.)

The polished trunk sample is on permanent display at the Berry Museum. The salvaged burl can be seen at the Shoalhaven Heads pool complex.

The Museum also holds a copy of the project Report in our library and we are currently preparing display notes for the tree sample and a brief layperson's guide on the importance of tree dating to our knowledge of environmental history.

The legacy of the Bum Tree is the knowledge that these large old-growth trees, in inconvenient places, are indeed ancient and more importantly, irreplaceable.



Figure 18 The Bum Tree with detailed graffiti highlights 19 February 2014. Note the blacked out 'Save Me' underlying the heart motif.

What happened last time? The 'Spanish Flu' in Berry.

The **Spanish flu**, also known as the **1918 flu pandemic**, was caused by the H1N1 influenza A virus. This unusually deadly virus lasted from the northern hemisphere spring of 1918 to early summer 1919. It arrived in Australia in early 1919 reaching its peak here in the middle of that year. In October of 1918 the Government declared a quarantine of all entrants to Australia which delayed the onset on the disease here and probably ameliorated its effects when it did arrive in 1919.

The flu pandemic infected 500 million people worldwide – about a third of the world's population at the time. The death toll is estimated to have been anywhere from 17 million to 50 million, though one of the world's preeminent epidemiological historians, Laura Spinney in her history of the Spanish Flu, *Pale Rider* thinks it was probably closer to 100 million, making it one of the deadliest pandemics in human history. It was probably only surpassed by the outbreaks of bubonic plague or black death during the 14th century.

Australia escaped relatively lightly with a national death toll of about 15,000. Comparatively, we avoided the horrifying rates of death experienced elsewhere last time and so far it now appears that we may have been lucky again with COVID 19.

What were the health effects of the pandemic?

Most influenza outbreaks disproportionately kill the very young and the very old, with a higher survival rate for those in between, but the Spanish flu pandemic resulted in a higher than expected mortality rate for young adults.

Scientists offer several possible explanations for the high mortality rate of the 1918 influenza pandemic. Some analyses have shown the virus to be particularly deadly because it triggers a cytokine storm, which ravages the stronger immune system of young adults. In contrast, a 2007 analysis of medical journals from the period of the pandemic found that the viral infection was no more aggressive than previous influenza strains. Instead, malnourishment, overcrowded medical camps and hospitals, and poor hygiene, all exacerbated by the recent war, promoted bacterial superinfection or bacterial pneumonia. This superinfection killed most of the victims. The 1918 Spanish flu was the first of two pandemics caused by H1N1 influenza A virus; the second was the 2009 swine flu pandemic.

The COVID 19 virus is of a different type from an influenza virus and of course unlike the pneumonic flu of 1918 it mostly kills older people, this is why some young humorists call it the “boomer remover”.

Of the 15,000 people who died in Australia, 6387 were from NSW. A recent article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH) reports that: *it infected up to 290,000 in Sydney, according to the NSW State Archives. It transformed the city. “So, for eight months, the people of Sydney lived in a nightmare city, with masked faces in quiet streets, the theatres and concert halls empty, the church bells calling more often to burials than to worship,” the Herald reported in 1954. SMH March 22 2020.*

So last time we had many more cases and many more deaths but the circumstances of people's lives and the civic management of the crisis was not dissimilar to what we have just experienced.



Closer to home

Berry had 3 deaths recorded, the Shoalhaven had 11. We know this because under the Public Health Act of 1896, local authorities were required to keep an Infectious Diseases Register. The Town Clerk at the time, George Gilliam, recorded all cases in this register which is now held by Nowra Library.

As early as April 25 1919 the *Nowra Leader* reported that local authorities were considering what arrangements should be put in place for the quarantining and care of those who had contracted 'pneumonic influenza'. There was discussion about setting up the Nowra Show pavilion or the local school as places to care for and isolate patients. Citing advice from one Dr Foy the newspaper states:

Panic should be avoided but the seriousness of the menace cannot be doubted - apathy in the matter is dangerous, for in the past eleven days fifty-six deaths have occurred from this mysterious epidemic at Lithgow. The suitability of either the school or pavilion we leave to the dictum of the medical practitioners but we do forcibly emphasise the urgency of converting the MOST SUITABLE building into a hospital, irrespective of whether isolated or casual cases only arise.

A report in the *Shoalhaven News and South Coast District Advertiser* on Saturday 28 June suggests that the advice of the *Nowra Leader* editor had not been acted upon. The *Shoalhaven News*, reporting on the proceedings of the municipal Health Committee meeting the previous Wednesday, suggests that the authorities had not fully appreciated the seriousness of the situation between April and July. In late June they were still debating what to do about care and quarantine five weeks later.

In defence of the local health authorities, it must be said that there was some confusion about the nature of the disease. Originally it was thought to be mild influenza but it later became

clear that in some cases it was a more virulent pneumonic influenza which could also develop into bacterial pneumonia. To add to the complexity there were those who contracted a mild form of 'Spanish flu'. To add to this, advice from State Government authorities was not always forthcoming, nor when it did come, was it clear.

The trigger for more action was the case of Mrs Parkes who visited Nowra from Sydney bringing with her the pneumonic plague. She stayed at the Prince of Wales Hotel where she died.

Dr Rodway, the District Government Medical officer proposed isolating the part of the hotel where Mrs Parkes had died but Government regulations regarding quarantine had been lifted and so the Nowra and Shoalhaven Health Committee had no authority to quarantine part of the hotel. One member of the Committee, a Mr Cecil Rauch, argued that the authorities in Sydney should be over ridden in the interests of the safety of the good people of Nowra, it was also noted that numerous people were passing through the pub. The Health Committee resolved to send an urgent wire to Sydney seeking approval to quarantine the pub and to meet the following day.

The authorities in Sydney did not respond to the urgent wire so the Mayor decided to close that part of the Hotel where the unfortunate Mrs Parkes had died.

A number of other decisions were taken to address the situation. Dr Rodway requested approval to ask the State Government to make a section of David Berry Hospital an isolation ward for 25 patients. This approval was subsequently given and Berry Hospital became the centre for the care of those in the district stricken by the plague.

The Mayor also decided it was time to give effect to the earlier proposal to set up a temporary hospital in Nowra Public School. It was also resolved to employ three nurses and three Voluntary Aids to undertake disinfecting duties under the supervision of the nurses.

The *Shoalhaven News* reports on the 5 July that the ladies of the Red Cross in Berry set up a depot and were providing broth to afflicted households because the flu was "rampant in Berry" and that the local GP Dr George had come down with it and had had to bring in a locum.

The women of the Red Cross in Nowra were similarly engaged and in some cases had been called upon to assist with the sick at home. By the 4 July there were ten cases in the temporary hospital in Nowra while the Sisters of Charity from the local convent were also nursing patients in their homes. The local ambulance which normally was scarcely ever used was brought into full time service.

So by this stage the situation had become a crisis with the report in the *Shoalhaven News and South Coast District Advertiser* on 12 July of six deaths in one day.

As often occurs in a crisis there were cases of the spreading of misinformation, some of it malicious. The Manager of the Roseby Park Aboriginal Station, J. R. Burns was forced to write an impassioned letter to the *Nowra Leader* as early as 12 June stating that, according to Dr Rodway there were no cases of Aboriginal people having contracted the Spanish flu and hence no cause for people to deny work to Aborigines from Roseby Park.

By the way - why was it called the “Spanish Flu”?

The origins of the 1918 influenza pandemic are not really known but it certainly did not begin in Spain. It was spreading rapidly in the troop transit and supply camp in Etaples in France on the Western Front well before cases occurred in Spain. What seems to have happened was that the war time censorship of news by the UK, France, Germany and the US meant that the lethal nature of the illness and its high mortality rates were understated in the press of those countries; whereas in Spain which was neutral in WWI the press was able to report more accurately on the illness and its effects. Indeed, the first reported celebrity casualty of the pandemic was King Alfonso XIII of Spain. So stories coming out of Spain gave the false impression that the disease had started there.

This article was prepared with help from June Robson (and Wikipedia)

Vale Warwick Leal

Warwick had a long association with the Museum. He and Judy joined as members in January 1995 and at the AGM in May of that year he was elected to be a Committee member and also the Secretary. He was Secretary from then until 1999, but continued as a committee member and Minute Secretary until 2004

He returned to serve for another year on the committee in 2008/9 when he was needed again.

He also took on the role of Public Officer from 2001 until 2006 and then again from 2012 until a few years ago.

Serving on the Committee of the Museum did not mean just attending meetings. It also meant being heavily involved in the work of the museum such as arranging displays, working

on tours, functions, festivals, stalls at the Berry Show and desk duty at the museum. He also helped with maintenance and making much needed equipment. Things such as organising security systems, display cabinets and perspex doors for cupboards used for display. For example, he made the bookcases used in the front room to display the books we sell.

Warwick was always there to do this work when it was needed. He loved to do things for the museum and was always a delight to work with.

June Robson says of her time working with Warwick:

“Warwick and I were both members of the Berry Garden Club and the Historical Society. When he stood down as secretary of the Historical society I took over and followed his instructions on the way the job should be done. The Warwick I knew was a kind and gentle man and very committed to voluntary work. He was a bit of a giggler too. He made a great contribution to the museum and I valued him greatly as a personal friend.”

Dallas Rogers adds:

“First met Warwick when he, together with Judy, were members of the Garden Club. In that time and later working with him on the Committee of the Berry and District Historical Society, I found him to be a gentleman, a great PR person and very easy to work with in all aspects where we found ourselves. My association with Warwick over many years has led to great memories of the fine person that he was.”

The President and Management Committee of the Berry and District Historical Society would like to convey their sincerest sympathy to Judy and members of Warwick’s family. Warwick was a valued and highly productive and respected member of the society and since his illness we have missed him and his valuable contributions.

This obituary was prepared by Jenny Clapham who had the great privilege and pleasure of working a great deal with Warwick over many years at the Berry Museum for the Berry and District Historical Society.

Articles for the Next Issue

If you have any interesting stories about the Berry region or its history that you would like to share, please forward them to the editor for inclusion in our next issue.

We are also collecting material on how community members are experiencing the conditions imposed by the pandemic, so if you have any stories or reflections on life as we are experiencing it now please send them to us.

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