

THE BLACKWALL BUGLE

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Issue # 38 October 2015

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The Path That Joins Us

In the grey early light of a recent winter's morning, this out of control white Holden Commodore came hurtling Eastbound down Wardell's Bridge Drive towards the highway underpass. It was on the right hand side of the road with its off-side wheels ploughing the grass bank, when it veered across the road and slammed into the earth wall supporting the Northern end of the bridge.

The car continued to surge upwards as though reaching for the sky, demolishing the treated pine fencing before losing its momentum and falling back with its front wheels hanging on to the pedestrian walkway. The footpath at that time of day is usually busy with joggers and dog-lovers exercising their pooches. It has been a crisis waiting to happen. Luckily everyone got home safely that day!



This is the only footpath joining the two halves of our town. It is a relic of the horse and buggy days. If you live in the West and wish to collect your mail, get a pie, have a beer with friends or just walk to school, you use this path. If you live in the East and want to play tennis or take the kids to the Council playground you use this

path. But you cannot get access from one side of town to the other without using the busy road if you are pushing a pram, using an invalid stroller or wheelchair - and Bridge Drive has no footpath.

The Wardell & District Progress Association has long pressed the issue with Ballina Shire Council and at the July Ballina Shire Council meeting, Pat Carney made a special case for the construction of a boardwalk or walkway to give all members of the community easy and safe access around our town.

Ballina Shire Council has already made an engineering study of the project which will cost an estimated \$540,000. They have applied for a grant of \$100,000 towards it and the balance will have to come from funds earmarked for the future development of Wardell. This project surely is an umbilical cord for the town. Lets hope our Councillors get behind it. Give them your support!



Sweet As

Wardell Public School was part of an exciting exhibition at the Ballina Art Gallery throughout September,” art teacher Mrs Yvonne Johnston said. “This project called “SWEET AS” has been designed to get students from neighbouring small schools involved with the production and display of real art to real audiences.”

‘SWEET AS’ was suggested as the theme by the Art Teacher at Empire Vale School, Karen Rantissi, in order to honour the farmers, workers and producers – both past and present – who are and have been involved with the sugar cane industry in and around the Wardell-Broadwater-Empire Vale areas.



The Mosaic



Ron Rosolen and the artists. A job very well done!

Photo WPS

K-6 students from Wardell began their artistic journey with an excursion to a working cane farm. Warren Wilson, father of one of the students at WPS, spoke about the process of growing and harvesting cane and sending the product to the mill. Staff from the school agree that this excursion was a fantastic springboard to get the students interested in cane and its by-products.

Working with local potter Ron Rosolen, Wardell students designed and created a 600 x 800 mosaic which beautifully captures sugar cane growing in fields around the local area. Over a 12 week period, students glued handmade tiles ranging from just 2-5mm in length onto ply board to create this spectacular image. Of special importance is the fact that the different coloured tiles highlight the cane stalks creating depth, texture and illusion. With the correct lighting and from the ‘right perspective’, the mosaic actually seems three dimensional. Ron completed the centre piece by framing it with beautiful red cedar.

Ron volunteered his time throughout the project and was instrumental in creating this centrepiece (mosaic) which all the students were involved in creating. “On the first day, they came up to me,” said Ron, “and they asked, “Where’s the glue? Where’s the paint brush?” I said, “To do this you are all little potters. You want it, you find it, you do it!” I

was very pleased by the way they learnt to work independently.

I don’t think most people realise how much discipline goes into creating something like this. The big kids (Years 3-6) were initially in a hurry to get it finished but it was the little kids (K-2) who ended up taking such care with each tile they placed to make it look ‘perfect’.

The students are very excited about their finished art works which also include framed individual pieces created with paint, charcoal and mixed media, totem poles made from cane stalks which narrate each student’s passion and woven fish created from sugar cane thrash. “The kids love doing art at school. Preparing for this exhibition has been tiring but rewarding for all involved,” said Mrs Johnston on behalf of all the people who helped, in various capacities, throughout the project.

All the students worked well together, learning important social skills as well as independence and perseverance. “When the public come to view and critique the art works our school has produced,” stated Mrs Johnston in summary, “I hope they know that their children’s art has not been altered in any way – our job was to guide them. It is completely their work and we are very proud of their efforts and achievements.”

Fashion Flashes @ Wardell



What a great night we had when the Wardell Red Cross put on a Fashion Parade at the Memorial Hall. Over 120 women attended to view spring fashions supplied by (Wardell's own) **Simply Fashion and Beauty** and modelled by ladies from the local community. It was such a fun night with lots of lucky door prizes, lots of laughter and a great supper provided by the ladies of Wardell Red Cross.

Sue McCowan, the proprietor of 'Simply Fashion and Beauty' said, "Cottons and rayons are very popular here because they breathe. Blues and whites are going to feature this year and I carry stock for all age groups from young to old."

There was a large burst of applause when President of the Wardell Red Cross, Ros Walsh, announced that all proceeds of the evening will go toward aid in the Syrian refugee crisis.

A big thank you ladies of the Red Cross for the valuable work you do.

Well done!

Red Cross. Ros Walsh, Telephone 6683 4111
Simply Fashion & Beauty, Mob. 0420 455 334



When the Publican Went A-Cutting by MJ Sly



Mick Sly (seen left) arrived in Wardell in 1981 when manuel harvesting for the mill had ceased. He says, however, that cutting seed cane by hand for planting was widely practiced because mechanical sett cutters at that time were a rarity. He worked with and for many cane farmers from Broadwater to Newrybar during planting time; cutting and loading a bit, but mostly hanging off the back of a trash planter with offsider Vic Bridges and wizard tractor operator Russell Clifford. When billet feed planting became the norm, most of the old trash planters were retired - machines and men !

Mick was in the Royal Hotel at Wardell one night when events began to unfold. He knew instinctively that poetry was in the air! He wrote the first verse of his poem on the only piece of paper available to him - the back of a cane-fire permit.

The story evolved from a conversation between the new Publican, Ian Hill who was an ex-policeman, David Robbie a well established cane farmer and Neville Convery, an old gun cutter who was one of the best cutters on the river. Neville was a big energetic man who used a cane knife he had fashioned from a high tensile saw blade.

Mick admits he may have used a bit of poetic licence to elaborate the story but the essentials were all there. The poem was first published by the *Northern Star* on 23 October 1987. Sue Felsch kept a copy to share with us. This photo of Mick was taken in July 2015. The poem is illustrated with a photo of Pat Martin who still wields a cane knife now and then.

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When the Publican Went A-Cutting

by MJ Sly

While drinking in the public bar,
Of the Royal at Wardell,
On a thirsty Friday evening,
I overheard them tell
Of the days of the great cane-cutters,
Of the men who 'plied their trade',
With trusty file and water-bag,
And razor sharpened blade.

Now the publican was standing there.
With interest in his eyes.
He said, "Do they cut cane today?"
"Of course", the men replied;
Although it's mostly with machines,
Loud, monstrous, clanking brutes,
There's still setts cut by cutters,
Sliced off cleanly at the roots.

Although the publican done his time,
Out in the dusty west,
He said, "I'm game to have a go,
Just put me to the test!"
A cane-man who was listening by,
With a smile upon his face,
Invited the hotelier
To cut down at his place.

And all that night around the bar
There was laughter everywhere,
A mood of great excitement
Anticipation in the air;
For arrangements were concluded,
That on the following day,
The licensee would venture forth,
And try to earn his pay.
Other plans were made that night,
The cane man and his mate
Were huddled in the corner
And didn't leave 'till late.

It was Mr Hill the publican,
Next morning did appear,
Directed to a patch of cane
And told, "Cut this down here."
The cane-man and his mate were there,
An old gun-cutter too.
They shared a little secret,
It was something they all knew:
That patch of cane to the untrained eye,
Might look just like the rest,
The publican never noticed,
He never even guessed.

Of three years old and hard as nails.
A rat infested mess,
A twisted tangled jungle,
A death-trap more or less;
With snakes and spiders it was rife,
And full of wild bean,
And goat weed and convolvulus,
The worst they had ever seen;
"I think this patch would suit him fine,"
The old gun-cutter said,
"The ground is hard and full of rocks,
And in there I'd not tread."

'Twas Mr Hill the publican,
Commenced to strike a blow,
With chop and slash and hit and miss,
He gave the boys a show.
What he couldn't cut down,
He tore out by the roots
And what he couldn't pull out,
He kicked down with his boots.

The admiring throng did cheer him on,
But at safe distance stood,
For the cane knife was a weapon
Of flashing steel and wood;
And deeper into the cane he fought,
No method to his blows,
He didn't seem to understand
That cane is sown in rows.
The old gun cutter stood and wept,
While watching our friend cruisin'.
They asked him why and he replied,
"It's my knife that he is using!"

Then suddenly all was quiet,
No more crashing crunching noise
And out he stepped and smiled
And said, "How's it going boys?"
Full bathed in sweat from head to toe,
With trash all in his hair
And black as soot from dusty grime,
The publican stood there.

"I knew it was a joke," he laughed
"And I'll admit I'm tired,
But thankful for the chance to take,
A little exercise."
Well they cheered him there with smiles all round.
They cheered him in the bar
And when talk turns to cutting,
They say: "Just ask that bloke thar."
For he can say with pride my friends,
He's been one of the men,
That cut for David Robbie,
On the Richmond River Bend.



Wardell Village Super Saturday 12 September 2015

Everything was happening in Wardell on Saturday 12 September on a specially ordered glorious spring day. The Wardell Public School held a fête in their well maintained grounds where there were stalls galore to cater for everyone. All over town there were bargains to be found at the coordinated garage sale. At the Wardell Fire Station open day there was a free sausage sizzle, lots of current information on fire prevention and an opportunity to see and use fire Brigade equipment. At the Wardell Sports and Recreation Club a display of current and vintage motor cycles captivated everyone.



Above, Judy at her garage sale with Sunny, her favourite cockatiel and constant companion on her shoulder. To the right, President of the Wardell Rural Fire Brigade, Rex Farrell, instructs potential recruits Mia and Payte on how to put out a fire. While below can be seen just a few of the many immaculate motor cycles that were on show at the Wardell Sporting Recreation Club.



Polly Esta - face painter and kids entertainer.



The Pacific Highway Upgrade



Bob Higgins

To keep us up to date on the planning and progress of the new highway that is to bypass Wardell, Bob Higgins, General Manager, Pacific Highway, Roads and Maritime Services, held an information meeting in the Wardell & District War Memorial Hall on Wednesday 5 August 2015. He updated those at the meeting on the plans and preparations for the Woodburn to Ballina section of the new highway and took any questions from concerned and interested members of the public.

The meeting was well attended by residents, farmers and business people. Cr David Wright, the Mayor of Ballina Shire and Deputy Mayor Cr Ben Smith were there. Bob Higgins outlined the progress being made and gave straight answers to the many questions. He said, "The major concerns for the protection of the koala are being addressed with underpasses and overpasses for the animals and protective fencing to keep animals from straying onto the highway. With these measures in place the RMS is hoping for the final tick from the Minister the Hon Greg Hunt MP later this year. Bob Higgins then introduced Christopher Wilkinson of the Pacific Complete consortium who will be Project Managers for the co-ordination and delivery of the finished highway. Christopher Wilkinson said his team was thrilled by the opportunity to work with Roads and Maritime on Australia's largest regional infrastructure project.

Brief history of the project

- 1 November 2004: Investigations commenced into the upgrade of the Pacific Highway including community consultation to identify a study area and route options.
- 2 May 2005: Route options announced and displayed for community comment
- 3 November 2005: Preferred route announced and displayed for community comment
- 4 October 2006: Ongoing consultation with the community regarding interchange locations and access arrangements
- 5 March 2008: Concept design announced and displayed for community comment.

For the latest on the Koala situation go to :-

Ballina Koala Plan update



Christopher Wilkinson



Telephone 6683 4437

We have just had a most successful Classic Motor Bike Show at the club as part of Wardell's 'Super Saturday' and there are many more things coming soon.

- Our Annual General Meeting at the Club on Sunday 25 October.

- The next seafood night on Sunday 31 October. The prices remain at \$30 for adults; \$18 for high school students; \$10 for primary school students and pre-schoolers are free. Bookings are required.
- There will be the Melbourne Cup Sweep raffle on Monday 2 November.
- The annual Kids' Christmas Party will be on Saturday 5 December.

Membership fees are now due. It is \$10 to be a member of the Club and an additional \$20 to be a member of the Wardell Golf Club.

Kerry Storton

Bill Partridge

who believes in: “family, friends, hard work and honesty.”

speaking with Mike Rushby

I come from an old English background. Most of my relatives settled around Wyrallah where they were dairy farmers. My paternal grandfather was named Edwin and my grandfather on my mother's side was William. I was named William Edwin. I was born in 1937 at Tregeagle where my dad was a share farmer in a valley between Marom Creek, Rouse Mill and Tregeagle. I went to school at Tregeagle. I only ever went to primary school because we were three miles from the nearest bus service up a very steep hill. So I knew I had to really work to make up for the lack of education.



When I finished school I worked on the farm with my dad and I would cut logs for firewood for people in Tregeagle and I worked a little six-horsepower rotary hoe doing a few jobs until I was eighteen. I then came down in 1956 to the cane fields to work.

I first lived in the cane-cutters' barracks at Carrs Lane. We had a South-Sea Islander cook living at the barracks and I was only a skinny kid trying to keep up with experienced cane cutters led by Milty Jiggins. All the sugarcane was pooled and went off to the mill in one bulk load and the pay was split evenly amongst all the gang. So if you couldn't keep up, with all those experienced men, they didn't want you. The cook would run a wooden spoon along the corrugated iron that divided the kitchen from the sleeping quarters before daylight of a morning and I wished I were dead. I was so stiff and sore and my hands were covered with blisters. We'd be climbing through the barbed wire fence to get into the cane to start cutting. There would be frost on the ground and icicles on the barbed wire.

When I left there, I came up to Boundary Creek and cut with Les Jiggins. There I met John Day who was a cane derrick man loading the whole stalk cane onto the barges on the river. He took me on for the next four years and taught me the trade of cane derricking. He is still a life-long friend.

After four years with John Day at Boundary Creek, I got a wharf out at

Back Channel at Law's Point and I stayed there derricking cane until the river transport of cane finished. I loaded the last punt to go up the river and the heaviest one to ever go into the sugar mill. That's a record I don't think will ever be beaten.

I was the second child in the family. I had an older sister, a younger sister and a brother. When my brother left school I took him as an off-sider on the cane wharf at Back Channel. In later years he left and derricked at Barnes Lane with Errol Leeson and Danny.

In those days I worked with blokes like Russell Clifford, Steve Flatley, Ray Walsh and Errol Leeson. I boarded with the Wotherspoon family in Wardell. They lived about where the BP Service Station is now before the highway went through Wardell. I used to ride a motorbike across the ferry with Errol Leeson although Errol was on a pushbike. I wondered why and I only discovered, at his funeral, that he was only fifteen or sixteen years old at the time. I watched the Wardell Bridge being built. I crossed the ferry in the days when Geoff Attewell had his bad accident on the ferry when he was crushed against the gate by a rotary hoe and he lost a leg.

Then I met Ruth. She worked in the telephone exchange at Marom Creek. We married in 1963 and our

first house was a little timber place beside George Leeson's bus sheds in Wardell – across from the hall. Apparently it was originally the site of 'Leeson's Cordial Factory'. We lived there for twelve years and that's where our three children Warren, Dianne and Linda were born. Most of that time I was derricking cane at Laws Point, Back Channel.

Because it was seasonal work I did almost anything in between cane seasons. I would chip cane and shovel drains for cane farmers who would give me work. I worked for 'Heavy Minerals' at a zircon rutile plant at Jerusalem Creek. I was with a drilling rig looking for zircon rutile right near the Esk River. I worked for Charlie Handly in between two cane seasons. He had a company called 'Trim Steel' where he built garages and sheds at Wollongbar. I did a bit of welding and we would be making frames and roof trusses in the shed and then go out and build the sheds. I had done a six-week crash course at Tech to learn to weld. I worked at the Tropical Fruit Research Station for a few months – picking and packing advocados and bananas.

For about four years I drove trucks for local Wardell carrier Jack Clark. There I did a lot of work with fellow truck driver Harry Law. I remember when they remodelled the Canberra Hotel in

Lismore. They wanted fine plastering sand. We got that from the Ford's property on the sand hills at Back Channel. Harry Law and I shovelled for two hours to get the dirty sand off the top to get to the clean white sand. Then while we were loading, the wall fell in with all the dirty stuff off the top, which we had to clean off again! I've done a lot of heavy work, which is why I think I have been built like a fried spider! It's through trying to keep up with bigger stronger men than me!

Because we were both reared on dairy farms, Ruth and I, once we were married, did a bit of relief work on dairy farms to enable the farmers to have a holiday. We did that for a couple of years. Dad, my brother and I bought the property at Meerschaum Vale near Bartletts Lane. We had two hundred and twenty acres with beef cattle. My father passed away and I bought my brother's share of the farm. We had Hereford breeders while Dad was alive but after he died, my brother and I were both working long hours and we couldn't spend enough time with the cattle so we sold the breeders and went into bullocks.

That is where we started ostrich farming. We had to build deer fences six feet high and sheds. Ostriches had to have special feed so they were expensive to keep. Ostriches had been very popular for their feathers but that fad faded out and in the late eighties they became popular because of their meat and leather. Leather was probably more value than meat. We bought two pairs. One pair we acquired locally and another pair came from Victoria. The eggs would be infertile. If the eggs hatched the chicks would only live five weeks and then stop eating and die. We had them DNA tested and they had eighty-six percent relativity. All the birds in Australia probably descended from ten or twelve pairs and they all inbred. That's why they started importing birds from Africa. They were very expensive! Fifty or sixty thousand dollars for a breeder-aged bird. Then the industry collapsed overnight. The only people that made any money out of it were those who got in early and sold chicks to other people.

Ruth and I were part of a very small group that had to make the sorry decision to close the Uniting Church

in Wardell. I was a warden at the church and had been part of the Wardell congregation from when Ruth and I married, until the church closed. It had reached a stage where only five or six people were coming to services at the church and we could not expect a Minister to come and do a service for that number. The upkeep of the old building was against us so we had to make the decision to close.

In October 1999 I had a serious accident out on the farm. I got thrown off a horse and broke my hip and leg which detached from my backbone and rolled along to the side. I spent three months in Brisbane, six months on crutches and eighteen months out of work. I had boxes screwed into my hips with rods on them like small scaffolding trying to manoeuvre my hip back into position and the joints didn't meet up so I had a big eight hour operation where they put plates and screws in my back. When they did that, they cut off my sciatic nerve down to my foot so I've got foot drop. I give it the name – 'kickmetoealong'! I was in good physical condition until then. But I found out I could still drive. I could press normally and move my foot to the side but I couldn't lift it. If I pulled back on my heel, it would come off the throttle.

After I got over it, Peter Lynch bought a second truck and gave me a call. He said, "I've bought a second tipper would you like to have a go at it?" I found out I could still drive and that made life for me because truck driving has always been my thing. So I drove for Peter hauling macadamia nuts – mostly from farms in the Alstonville – Rosebank – Dunoon area to local factories. Maybe once a week I would take a load to Gympie or Toowoomba. I would load up nuts at the Glasshouse Mountains and bring them back here to Friday Hut Road.

Harry Law became a partner in Teven Quarry. I used to go down there working in the quarry in between cane seasons. When they bought a semi tipper in later years, I stayed with them working permanently with Teven Quarry.

When Boral bought the quarry, I stayed with them for a few years. With driving for the quarry, driving for the cane trucks and driving for Peter Lynch and the macadamia nuts, I learnt all the Rosebank Dunoon area. There are not many back tracks I haven't been up!

In February 2009, bush fires burnt out a hugh area of Victoria resulting in the loss of over one hundred and seventy lives and over two thousand homes. Farms were devastated and livestock destroyed. Ruth and I joined a voluntary group called **Blazeaid** which was founded by Kevin and Rhonda Butler. We did very rewarding work replacing the destroyed farm fencing.

Being a truck driver I've always liked driving and I've always liked trucks. After I retired I met a wheat farmer from Trundle, near Condobolin. I talked to him for ten minutes at a café coming home from the Florae at Canberra. He picked up that I knew my trucks. We went out there and lived with him and I drove one of his trucks hauling wheat to the silos.

I am still very active and play sport five times a week – carpet bowls, lawn bowls and golf. I played a lot of sport for Wardell. I'm proud of the friends that I've made through sport and sporting achievements too. In the mid seventies I won the tennis championships in the Tregeagle Competition and the Ballina Butler-Fleming point score trophy for the Cricket Association in the Ballina Association when I was playing for Wardell. I'm the current club champion of the Goonellabah Workers Sports Bowling Club and I've had a hole in one on the first hole of the Wardell Golf Course. It's two hundred and twenty yards! That was such a miracle that God put it in the cup for me just to cap off a very enjoyable sporting career. Sports plays a big part of my life and through it I have made a lot of friends. I cherish the friends I have made more than the trophies. Sport has been good to me. Life has been good!

Bill Partridge

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