

Port Macquarie Historical Society Inc. Annual Report 2017-18

The year has passed by quickly and it is already time to present our Annual Report of activities for 2017-18. There have been many highlights over the year with a continuing focus on community engagement, sharing our collections through online initiatives and best practice collection management. Work has also continued towards improving our sustainability and to securing our future success through improvements to our facilities which are far from suitable for purpose.

I acknowledge the work and commitment of our Management Committee and their role in our achievements over the past year and present this report on their behalf.

Community and Partnerships

We started the year with the public launch of our Picture Port database in August. We continue to search for affordable and viable ways to make our photograph collection more accessible and in the meantime our weekly Facebook posts serve as public reminders of our rich photographic resources.

We have continued our work throughout the year on becoming Dementia Friendly and in October we piloted a 'Hands-On-Heritage' program at our museum in partnership with creative ageing facilitator, Lisa Hort. Objects from our collection were also used in a creative ageing outreach program which culminated in an exhibition 'Postcard Connections' for the NSW Seniors Festival in April. The exhibition also included artwork by Port Macquarie U3A textile artists and was viewed by over 2000 people. We are continuing to strengthen these community partnerships with a view to further cooperative exhibitions. Our free entry for seniors during the NSW Seniors Festival was well received with additional free entry tickets given out at our stall at the Sensational Seniors Expo.

Our collection was used as inspiration for many of the artworks created by Hastings Valley Fine Arts members for their exhibition 'Gaolhouse to Glasshouse' at Port Macquarie's Regional Gallery in June. We have assisted other community groups during the year by providing access to our collections to support community projects. Organisations supported include Port Macquarie Rotary Club, North Shore Progress Association and Bonny Hills Progress Association.

We continued our advocacy role with a submission to Port Macquarie Hastings Council's draft Cultural Plan and provided input during the Plan's development. We continue to lead the Hastings Museums and Heritage Group, and are participating in Council's Bicentenary Working Group.

In October we hosted two receptions for the National Trust Women's Committee in association with their Port Macquarie regional weekend. The events were attended by 118 National Trust members and created an opportunity to show our museum and

collections to a new audience. In April we again participated in Port Macquarie-Hastings Council's CBD activation and creative arts event 'ArtWalk'. With the permission of the Birpai Local Aboriginal Land Council, we projected photographs from the Thomas Dick collection in our garden in recognition of our First Nations People. Our museum and screening attracted 1857 visitors over the three-hour evening event. This was our main Heritage Festival event.

In May we launched our latest publication 'Birrpai – Beyond the Lens of Thomas Dick' by John Heath. The book explores the history of the people who appeared in Dick's photographs and adds another dimension to our local history. The publication was supported by an RAHS Cultural Grant and is selling well, as is Richard Grimmond's Bicentenary Comic Book, written to mark the 2018 bicentenary of John Oxley's arrival and the naming of Port Macquarie.

We hosted many school and other group visits across the year with special thanks to our team of museum guides led by Lil Andrews: David Allen, Carolyn Bittar, Lee Brown, Sue McQuaid, Anne Oud and Chris Rowe. Over the past year we have welcomed 613 school students on education visits. At the beginning of 2018 we began partnering with the Australian War Memorial as an agent for their education boxes. This is putting us in touch with more schools than ever before.

On International Museum Day we launched our izi.TRAVEL app- based Museum Audio Guide, which is already proving a boon to visitors and particularly school groups. Thanks to the Exhibitions Sub Committee for their work in developing the audio guide material and particularly to Tony Dawson for pulling it all together. Photography for the Audio Guide was supported with a RAHS Heritage Grant.

We held walks, talks and tours throughout the year including town history walks, guiding visiting bus tours, and speaking to numerous community groups. Thanks to our tour guides and speakers including Lil Andrews, Tony Dawson, Clive Smith and Debbie Sommers.

In May we introduced a new initiative 'First Sunday Free' aimed at attracting local visitors. This has created new audiences for us and we hope will lead to increased paying visitors during School Holidays when locals encourage their visiting friends and relatives to pay our museum a visit. Initial First Sunday Free attendances have been very strong.

We continue to contribute a weekly history feature article to the Port Macquarie News as a means of community engagement and have established a keen audience. A bi-monthly column in the Greater Port Macquarie Focus Magazine is also used to promote our activities and share local history. Weekly Facebook posts of photographs from our Picture Port database are engaging the community, attracting new audiences and providing opportunities and a platform for people to reminisce and share their stories.

We are also sharing more of our collection stories online as we catalogue the collection on eHive. Over the past year this has included not only objects but also our unique PMHS Annual Report 2017/18

archive holdings. Our collections are being accessed online by people from around the world and an increasing number of people are visiting us to specifically view in person items from our collection.

We installed several new exhibitions during the year including 'Passion for Fashion' for NSW History Week, 'Postcard Connections' and 'Celebrating Oxley' in May to mark the Oxley Bicentenary. We celebrated National Archaeology Week with a talk by Tony Dawson 'In Oxley's Footsteps'.

Management and Sustainability

Over the past year the Management Committee has continued to look to the future and to find ways to improve our facilities, processes and sustainability. Our Strategic Plan was reviewed and updated, and we continue to implement the many recommendations in our Cultural Tourism Plan to improve our visitor numbers and income streams. Many of these activities around community engagement are now ongoing and we have seen a 9% increase in visitor numbers over the past year and a 23% increase since 2013/14.

This year we have continued to explore digital engagement options and launched our new Audio Guide however providing better access for visitors with specific needs and improving facilities for both visitors and volunteers is still a major goal.

Our application to the newly created Regional Cultural Fund for funds to complete a Museum Upgrade Master Plan project was unsuccessful in the first round, but we have been encouraged to reapply.

The sustainability of our collections remains a high priority with ongoing work on the cataloguing, digitisation and storage of our collections (archives, objects and photographs) continuing as staffing and resources allow.

During the year we completed a review of our Conservation Management Plan (CMP) to ensure it meets NSW Heritage Office requirements and guidelines. This was a vital project to underpin planning of any future facility upgrade work. The CMP also highlighted some necessary work to our State Heritage Listed building. Like most of our projects, the CMP was supported by grants. In this case funds were received from the NSW Government's Office of Environment and Heritage Reports Program, The Copland Foundation and Port Macquarie Hastings Council Community Grants Program.

We carried out many behind the scenes jobs including removal of the fire proof safes to create more storage and replacing outdated fire extinguishers. Several small maintenance jobs were carried out during the year by Des Grissell. Thanks Des!

People

People, our members and volunteers are vital to our operations and our ongoing sustainability. At the end of June 2018 we had 136 members, including 4 life members. We said goodbye to several volunteers during the year such as Pat and Ted Martin who retired from volunteering. We also farewelled some long-time members who passed away, including Ila Brennan, Marse Coghlan and Colin Hine. Their collective

contributions to our organisation as members and volunteers well exceeded 100 years and it is because of them, and people like them, that we continue to be a strong and viable organisation. Recruiting new members and volunteers with the necessary skills and experience remains critical to our operations and we are working with the Port Macquarie Volunteer HQ on such recruitment.

We continue to recognise the work and achievements of our volunteers informally through the monthly newsletter and from time to time at general meetings and volunteer functions. Thanks to Anne Oud for compiling our monthly newsletter, it provides an informative and valuable record of our work and achievements and to Judith Hansen and Debbie Sommers for their regular contributions.

It was with great pleasure that we recognised the work and contributions of our Saturday Roster volunteers at our Volunteer Thank You lunch in May. Thank you all! Our front desk volunteers, our customer service face, do an outstanding job of welcoming our visitors and responding to the many and varied public enquiries that come their way. Our front desk volunteers remain a vital link for all our activities and customer feedback this year has been very positive. To each and every one of you – THANK YOU.

We have offered a varied members' social calendar over the year including a trip to the Sculpture in the Gaol exhibition at Trial Bay Gaol, Mid-Summer Picnic at the Museum, Dorrigo Day Out bus trip, and a visit to the 'Gaolhouse to Glasshouse' exhibition at the Regional Gallery. The Christmas lunch provided an opportunity to catch up with old and new friends, and to present twenty-year service certificates to Gwen and Richard Grimmond and a ten-year service certificate to Jenny Asher. Thanks to Gerald Billing and the Membership, Volunteers and Social Sub-committee for organising the year's social events.

We have also offered skills development opportunities to our volunteers including a Collections Care Workshop and through the Stitches, Threads and Yarns training project both offered by Museums Australia – Mid North Coast Chapter. In addition, are the many hours of 'on the job' training provided by and to our many volunteers.

Some of our members attended State and National conferences including the Museum of Arts and Applied Sciences Regional Stakeholders Day (Debbie Sommers), RAHS Annual Conference (Tony Dawson and Debbie Sommers) and Museums Galleries Australia National Conference (Debbie Sommers). Clive Smith attended the Digital Access to Collections workshop offered by Museums and Galleries Australia.

Over the past year we were recognised for our ongoing work and achievements reaching finalist status in the 2017 NSW Tourism Awards. We also received a Trip Advisor Certificate of Excellence for consistently receiving great reviews from visitors. Debbie Sommers received two awards during the past year in recognition of her service and commitment to our museum and the sector, a RAHS Certificate of Achievement and a Museums and Galleries NSW IMAGinE Award for Individual Achievement in the volunteer category.

To everyone who has welcomed, opened up, closed up, cooked, washed up, watered, mowed, weeded, pruned, sowed and sewed, answered, found, transcribed, researched, copied, processed, typed, catalogued, scanned, filed, enveloped, interpreted, painted, built, fixed, organised, written, dressed up, talked up, recorded, photographed, mentored, trained, supervised, set up, carried up, carried down, participated, attended, keyed, checked, telephoned, transacted, swept, dusted, vacuumed, put bins in, put bins out, nailed, hammered, painted, collected, guided, sorted, collated, shredded, edited, counted, delivered, cleaned, stored, conserved, packed, labelled, measured, helped each other and helped out generally – A BIG THANK YOU!

Looking Ahead

We know there will be many opportunities for us in the year ahead as we seek to implement our Strategic Plan and to pursue our vision of an upgraded museum to improve facilities for visitors, volunteers and our collections. The challenges for the year ahead will continue to be sourcing funding and support to achieve that vision without losing the momentum of our community engagement, collection management and access projects.

We look forward to the next year with much enthusiasm and to the ongoing commitment and support from our members and volunteers which has enabled us to achieve many successes over the past year.

Clive Smith
President
7 September 2018