

# FoPIA Flyer

March 2009

## In this edition

Book launch by Queensland's Governor	1
A gift given twice	2
Heritage grapes thriving	2
Vale - Jim Welsh	2
Getting stuck into the prickly pear	3
Events diary	3
Moreton Bay Marine Park zone changes	4
QPWS Rangers Report	4
Speech by Her Excellency, Ms Penelope Wensley AO	5
Last words	8

Editor/layout: Gabrielle van Willigen  
 Editorial assistance: Rhonda Bryce  
 Contributions are welcome:  
[gabvanw@optusnet.com.au](mailto:gabvanw@optusnet.com.au)

## Book launch by Queensland's Governor

24 February 2009

More than 130 people gathered at the Redcliffe Museum for the official launch of FoPIA's recently published book *going to the gums... the Lazaret on Peel Island* by Her Excellency Ms Penelope Wensley AO, Governor of Queensland.

Community history associations such as FoPIA are lucky that she has a 'keen interest in history' and is currently Patron of the Queensland Museum Foundation, and of the National Trust of Australia. Her Excellency was also kind enough to a "thank the Friends of Peel Island Association for that commitment over a long period, to preserving the physical and intangible heritage of Peel Island and their dedication to ensuring the broader community gains a better understanding of this difficult part of our shared history."

She also acknowledged group's efforts "to protect the island and their very specific efforts to produce this book and exhibition". A full copy of Her Excellency's speech is reproduced on pages 5-7.

The book is based on the very successful Centenary exhibition at Redland Museum in 2007. A scaled down version of the original exhibition was opened at the Redcliffe Museum at the same time

as the book launch. FoPIA's executive are grateful to Michelle Smith and her colleagues from the Museum for an excellent event, to which a number of FoPIA members, and Lazaret family members attended.

The book publication was made possible by a Q150 Community grant and assistance from the Queensland Heritage Council. Copies of the book are available to FoPIA members for a special price of \$16.00 each, plus postage. To purchase copies contact our Treasurer, Rosaleen Carroll ([Rosaleencarroll@bigpond.com](mailto:Rosaleencarroll@bigpond.com)).

Retail price will be approximately \$39.95 with details of distribution to major centres throughout Queensland still being negotiated by the FoPIA executive.



L-R Natalie Ambrosini, Rhonda Bryce, Gabrielle van Willigen, Her Excellency, Ms Penelope Wensley, Mayor of Moreton Bay Council, Uncle Peter Bird, Peter Hubbert.  
 Photo: Jenny Napier

## A gift given twice

Dr Ted Reye, younger brother of the late Dr Eric Reye (medical officer on Peel Island 1947 - 49) has astounded FoPIA with his generous donation of \$10,000.

Though he inherited from his close friend the late Rosemary Opala, Ted gave the money to FoPIA to benefit Peel Island and the community.

Rosemary would probably have been delighted at his generosity as she was not only a co-founder of FoPIA, but also a constant and inspiring supporter of efforts to protect and conserve the cultural and environmental values of Peel Island. As a nurse on the island in the late 1940s and early 1950s she had a strong connection with the staff, patients and their families. She also loved the island's natural beauty, capturing it in painting and poetry.

FoPIA is very grateful to Ted for his generous donation. How the money will be used yet to be finalised, but it is likely the principal will be invested, and the interest earned will be used from time-to-time for a worthwhile project.



Dr Ted Reye presented his donation to FoPIA President Peter Hubbert

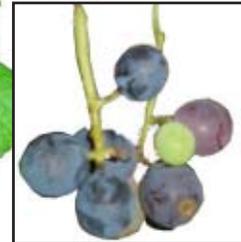
**Vale: James (Jim) Welsh** - FoPIA member and grand-nephew of former Lazaret patient Francis (Frances) Welsh.

Fopia was saddened to hear of Jim's sudden death in early December 2008.

Jim had participated in the Family Day trip to the Lazaret in September last year.

## Heritage grapes thriving

Though I have been a member of FOPI for some time my first visit to the lazaret was in November 2008. I was fascinated



to see that remnants of the grapes grown while the lazaret was in operation are still there, and some even had fruit. (Above is a picture of a healthy cutting, and some grapes, being grown by Colleen Hubbert.)

While speaking to Donna Bennett and Colleen I mentioned that I would be interested in a project to restore the grape vines to their original condition and method of growing.

Both agreed that it would be an interesting project. We thought it would be useful to have them identified and I suggested that Sirromet Winery might be a good place to start. Colleen offered to ring Sirromet and they suggested getting in touch with the University of Queensland, which Colleen did. They agreed and requested photographs, which Colleen supplied. I hope they are successful in their identification and have exciting news for us soon.

I have also been in touch with Ruth Gabriel as Rhonda thought Ruth's mother might have some memories about the grapes and who grew them, and whether they were for eating or making wine. Ruth will get back to me when she has spoken to her mother.

On that visit to the lazaret Wendy Boglary and I searched out as many of the vines as we could find and tied pink markers to them, and I photographed them (see picture, right).

I think it would be a most exciting and worthwhile project to work on.

Narelle Renn  
3.3.09



# Getting stuck into the prickly pear

A brief report on the 21/22 Feb working bee weekend for your information/FOPIA Flyer etc. Six FOPIA members attended, Colleen, Peter, Adrienne, Ian, Brian and myself.

Andrew Quirk from the QPWS, who is their weed control supervisor for the region, instructed and set us up on the Saturday, to look for and to pull up or spray any Lantana, Asparagus Ferns, Prickly Pear and Umbrella Trees we found.

On Saturday an area approx 2 ha, or 5 acres was covered, heading south from the junction of the beach and telegraph rd's. Then on Sunday, the group commenced a strip along from the beach to the inland road for approx 150m heading north east.

Lantana, prickly pear and some asparagus ferns were pulled up, lantana being left on the ground with the other two being removed from the area and placed in piles, later to be covered with black plastic to cook and rot down, see picture. The Umbrella Trees had 'V' notches cut into their trunks and this area sprayed.

As a trial however, some large asparagus ferns were pulled and rolled up for removal, others were pulled up and sprayed and some left in the ground and sprayed all over. These different methods are to be monitored to check on the most effective way of killing this weed.

And finally, many thanks to Colleen's eagle eyes, who spotted and pointed out to the group the native Thumbnail Orchid (see picture, right).

Regards  
Scott Fowle,  
Working bee Coordinator.



L-R: Adrien, Ian, Brian, Scott, Colleen, Peter with evidence that working bees aren't just about going for swims at Horseshoe Bay and drinking red wine on the veranda of the Nurse's quarters

## Events diary

**Now - 31 May** Exhibition *going to the gums*, Redcliffe Museum, open 10am - 4pm daily

**18 - 19 April | 16 - 17 May | 20 - 21 June** Weekend working Bees - contact Scott Fowle. Max 6 people

**16 May** Brisbane Heritage Expo - Brisbane City Hall Auditorium. The Expo will showcase Brisbane's many history and heritage interest groups, attractions and enterprises. FoPIA will have a booth.

**10 - 17 May** National Trust Heritage Festival. The theme this year is "The making of Queensland" to coincide the Q150 celebrations of Queensland's creation. Festival details will be available from mid-April from [www.nationaltrustqld.org/heritage-festival.htm](http://www.nationaltrustqld.org/heritage-festival.htm)

# Moreton Bay Marine Park zone changes

## A new zoning plan for a new era takes effect 1 March 2009

As many who have visited will attest, one of the main attractions to Peel Island is its natural beauty which relies in no small part on its location within Moreton Bay. What lies beneath the surface of the Bay - the sea life including corals, sea grass, the myriad fish, dugong and turtles etc - contribute so much to what makes the environment so special and deserving of the highest level of care and protection.



Following is an extract from the Australian Marine Conservation Society (www.amcs.org.au) on the changes which are now in effect, which includes an increase in the area under protection ('green zones').

*After a lengthy two year campaign by the Australian Marine Conservation Society, which FoPIA supported, the Queensland Government has released its new zoning plan for Moreton Bay Marine Park. The new plan comes into effect this Sunday, 1st of March.*

*As a result of our campaign, the new plan establishes 30 new 'no take' marine national park zones. The new zoning increases the protection from less than one per cent to 16 per cent of the marine park.*

*While this level of coverage represents only half the level of protection that Moreton Bay's wildlife needs, some very special places have been given*

*protection and we should celebrate these changes. The protection of these places represents real and tangible benefit for our sea turtles, grey nurse sharks, dugongs and other native marine wildlife.*

*Moreton Bay Marine Park is today a safer place for wildlife thanks to our efforts. Together we have given Moreton Bay a better chance of survival for future generations to enjoy. Without the generous support and commitment of our Sea Guardians and Ocean Activists, there is no doubt that the outcome would not have been this good.*

*Great work team. Hurrah to you!*

---

## QPWS Rangers Report

The last month has seen us continuing basic maintenance and general tidying up. Recreational use of Horseshoe Bay has been very high with resultant clean up required by the rangers.

The first weed project weekend has been seen to be very successful and we are hoping that it will continue to prove beneficial.

Works have continued on several of the buildings – the nurses quarters general refurbishment has continued (windows and doors removed, planed, sanded for clearances for future painting, replacing locks and general window hardware).

Painting has been completed of the male bath house and recent infestation of termites has been identified and treated.

QCA exhibition date opening has been put back a week to Friday the 27<sup>th</sup> March. Pat HOFFIE (QCA) is sending out invites to FOPIA.

Dacchi Dang – one of the students has just opened his own exhibit at the QCA gallery at Southbank.

Annual building inspections underway at present.

Regional fire referral group to meet to discuss 2009 fire management program for Peel Island.

QPWS staff update – We've been a bit short staffed lately. The current arrangements are:

- Roland Dowling (still around)
- Shayne Kimlin - seconded to Gatton management Unit; Brendon Yetman relieving in his position
- Trevor Mullen - off to Victoria to assist with wildfire emergency



Roland (Dowling)  
Ranger in Charge, Heritage Parks Unit

# Speech by Her Excellency, Ms Penelope Wensley AO to launch "going to the gums..."

His Worship the Mayor, Councillor Allan Sutherland, Moreton Bay Regional Council,  
Councillors of the Moreton Bay Regional Council and of Redland City Council,  
Mr Peter Hubbert, President, Friends of Peel Island Association,  
Uncle Peter Bird,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.



I thank Uncle Peter Bird for his Welcome to Country, and in the spirit of reconciliation and mutual respect we wish to see observed always and given full and genuine expression in our State and throughout our country, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Land on which we are meeting, the Turrbal people, and the Goenpul people - within whose homeland estate Peel Island lies and those who used to visit the Island for food and for shelter.

I wish to acknowledge particularly the Minjeribah Mulgulin Elders who, I understand, provided support for the Friends of Peel Island Association's dedicated work in researching and writing "going to the gums..."

I am aware that many of the Elders have stories of family members who provided service and help over many years to the people placed in quarantine and those who were isolated on Peel Island because of illness. It is fitting that on this occasion we recall that service and their commitment with gratitude; just as it fitting that we recall, with sorrow, the hardship and suffering of many of those who lived on the island, separated from their families on the mainland and the suffering also of those families, especially those whose loved ones lost their fight to live while on the Island.

Thank you for the invitation to me to join you today for the opening of this exhibition and launch of this very special book. It is a pleasure for me to be with you and to have the opportunity to visit the Redcliffe Museum which has played such a significant role in fostering interest and raising awareness of the fascinating history of Redcliffe and of Moreton Bay. I have a keen interest in history and now as Governor of the State and especially in my role as Patron of the Queensland Museum Foundation and of the National Trust of Queensland, I welcome warmly any and every opportunity to visit our many museums, large and small, to meet those who share my passion and to give my support to the organisations, institutions and groups which are working actively and with such dedication to explore and illuminate our history and to preserve our heritage. In this year of Queensland's sesquicentenary, this obviously assumes an even greater significance and importance for all of us.

I will confess that when the invitation arrived in the post from your Mayor, Allan Sutherland, in September last year, I was surprised to learn that there was a lazaret on Peel Island. I knew about the Moreton Bay settlement, the first European settlement at Redcliffe, and the role of the penal islands, like St Helena, but had no knowledge of the existence of the lazaret.

It was not my first experience with such a place. As Australia's consul-general to Hong Kong and Macau, in the mid-1980's, I visited a sheltered location in the South China Sea, off Macau where Hansen's disease sufferers were isolated. I remember it as a sad, but serene place ... one of segregation - yes, but also a centre that was curiously peaceful - where people evidently felt sheltered and could, in one sense, move about freely, in their own special, restricted community without fear of being stared at or reviled for their appearance - for their disabilities and disfigurement.

*(Cont'd over)*

\* Permission to reproduce this speech was granted to FoPIA by Her Excellency Ms Penelope Wensley, and was obtained from the official website: [www.govhouse.qld.gov.au/the\\_governor/speeches\\_articles.aspx](http://www.govhouse.qld.gov.au/the_governor/speeches_articles.aspx)

*(Cont'd from previous page)*

There was a camaraderie - a bond - among the afflicted - and a sense of respect accorded to them by visitors and their carers. There was a dignity about their situation and their separation.

Of course, the times were more enlightened and medical knowledge and treatment of Hansen's disease far more advanced than in colonial Australia a century earlier - as I discovered when I began to read.

Surprised and intrigued about this little known aspect of our history here on the Bay (at least to me), I determined to learn more about it. The Library helped me track down "Peel Island: Paradise or Prison" by Peter Ludlow, which I read in snatches on planes, in hotels and in the car, travelling to and from various official engagements, and of course I was able to read the book we are here to launch today. I also learned more about the redoubtable men and women of the Friends of Peel Island Association, and their commitment, over a long period, to preserving the physical and intangible heritage of Peel Island and their dedication to ensuring the broader community gains a better understanding of this difficult part of our shared history.

I thank the Friends of Peel Island Association for that commitment and dedication, both their broad efforts to protect the island and their very specific efforts to produce this book and exhibition.

When I accepted the position of Governor last year, one of my principal goals was to use the position - through my patronage and through speaking and meeting communities across the length and breadth of our State - to promote a deeper and richer engagement with our unique history and heritage. The work of the Friends of Peel Island in documenting the island's history, and in creatively using artwork, poetry and calligraphy to help us to interpret - and perhaps to help us to confront - the full history and significance of the Lazzaretto is to be welcomed by all of us. Its significance goes well beyond the story of this particular location. It tells us much about our past: about our values and attitudes, that were rooted in ignorance, prejudice and fear.

The movement to isolate patients afflicted with leprosy, which we now know as Hansen's disease, has a long and unlovely history in Western civilization.

The first lazaretto was established by Venice in 1403 on Santa Maria di Nazareth, an island in the Venetian lagoon, and the concept spread throughout the old and new worlds. Notwithstanding its relatively low contagion rate - at least compared to other scourges like tuberculosis, plague, syphilis and the like - a special horror of the symptoms of the disease marked out the sufferers for a different kind of life - isolated from the rest of the community. That we here in Queensland in Australia - the newest of the New World countries at the time - should adopt this ancient practice seems disappointing to us now - but these were colonial times, when attitudes, like people, were transported from the old world and thus the old fears prevailed: that is, to shun, stigmatise and - ultimately - segregate, the victims of diseases that people feared but did not understand.

Difficult as this history is to confront, it is compounded for the modern viewer by the differential treatment accorded to patients depending on their race. That this happened within living memory - and that it happened to family members of some of the people here today - is even more painful to contemplate.

With such a difficult subject matter, I think this exhibition and book, with its layers of text, photographs, drawings and poetry, is very well and most sensitively conceived: it offers multiple windows to a subject that might otherwise be too hard to view all of a piece, and reminds us that those who lived on Peel Island were much more than victims of a disease or their custodians: they were living, breathing human beings, with their own virtues and foibles - just like us, in fact, which I think is the most powerful conclusion to which this book and exhibition leads. There is also, shining through the text, a characteristic which I like to think finds particular expression in Queensland: of a certain kind of pragmatic optimism in the face of dire circumstances.

There is the story of Noel (Laddie) Agnew, diagnosed at only eight years of age, and transferred from Stradbroke Island to Peel, who identified and compiled a comprehensive list of 76 species of birds on the island, before his early death. Or the patient named Alex who recounted the tale of patients hoarding the weekly bottle of Pilsener until dance time, or the stories of gardens faithfully tended.

(Cont'd from previous page)

The stories of the lazaret speak eloquently about resilience in our national character - a characteristic and a quality that has been much remarked on and praised in recent days and weeks as Australians have dealt with the devastating bushfires in Victoria and floods in our own State and in NSW. So, too, do the stories illuminate the characters of those who, notwithstanding the cruel hand dealt them by fate, did their best to get on with life in the beautiful surrounds of their island prison.



Book production team L-R: Natalie Ambrosini (graphic designer), Gabrielle van Willigen, Tracy Ryan, Rhonda Bryce (co-editors)

I congratulate the Editors of the book - Rhonda Bryce, Tracy Ryan and Gabrielle van Willigen, and the illustrators, Ruth Venner and Rosemary Opala (now sadly deceased). Rosemary's quiet observation, "I sort of fell in love with the place" I found very revealing, both about her and about the location where she worked.

I congratulate and thank also all of those in the Friends of Peel Island Association who worked to create this book and to bring to vivid life the reality, the stories, and the people it presents, extending our knowledge of the development of our State - and also of ourselves, as we confront the truths of the past; and in the process, I would like to think, increasing our resolve to create a more compassionate and just society in the future, where discrimination and prejudice against those who are different or vulnerable finds no place.

This book deserves its place in the narrative of Queensland's history, and it is with great pleasure that I now launch officially "going to the gums .. the Lazaret on Peel Island."

~ End ~



Invitees to the book launch enjoy the exhibition *going to the gums*, which opened on the same day at the Redcliffe Museum

# Last words

**We've had some lovely feedback about our book *going to the gums*...**

I received my copy of 'Going to the Gums', arranged by my sister Geraldine. I found it a beautiful production of a very moving and sad part of our history. My family connection to Laddie Agnew made it all the more gruelling to face the painful revelations about treatment of ill people by those with authority to take care of health and wellbeing of human beings.

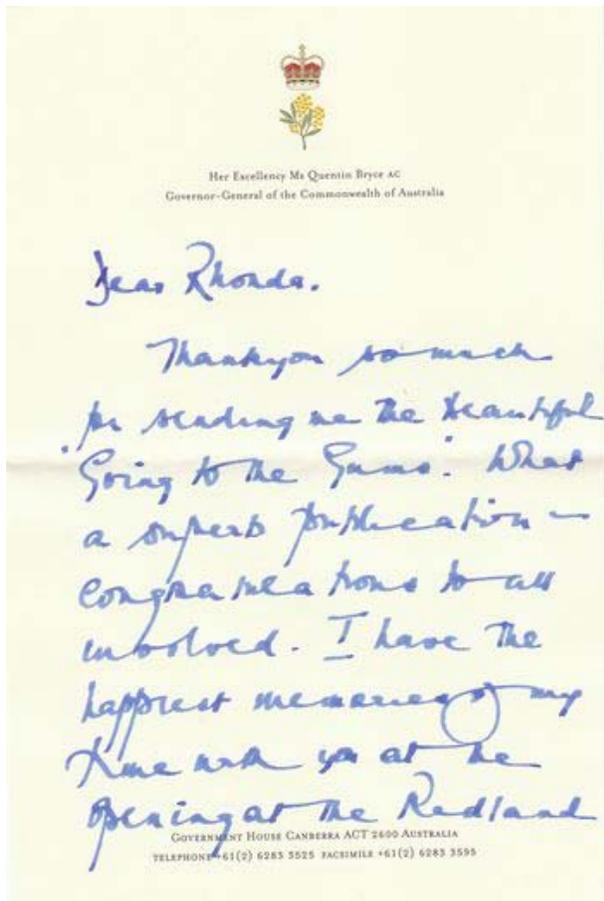
Thanks for a very professional and well illustrated collection of stories: all in all a fine publication.

Your sincerely,  
Pam Bleakley

Thank you so much for mailing a copy of "Going to the Gums". It is a valuable contribution to the history of tropical medicine, let alone medicine as a whole. What is more, it is about people, the patients, their families, nurses, doctors, boatmen, the lot who together make what we call - 'Lazaret'. It is wonderfully clear, and beautifully produced.

Maria and I hope that the public at large, and children in particular, will learn about and cherish an important token - a large one - of the history of early 20th and late 19th century Queensland and its people.

Our warmest wishes,  
Maria and Niall MacKenzie  
(Somerset, England)



Copy of the letter from the Governor-General, Ms Quentin Bryce AC