

FoPI Flyer

Special edition

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Good-bye, and thanks!

Rhonda Bryce was never one to make a fuss for her own sake, but with the blessing of her family, this edition of the FoPI Flyer is to mark her recent passing. Rhonda had remarkable qualities and abilities, and many friends, interests and pursuits. We celebrate her here.(Ed.)

Rhonda Mary Ayres (nee Bryce)

Rhonda was a great networker. She had a great variety of interests and had the ability to match people up with similar interests. I always found that no matter what question I put to Rhonda she would always be able to refer me to someone who might have the answer for me.

When Rhonda joined the Friends of Peel Island Association, the group gained a new driving force – a person, not only with ideas, but a person with the enthusiasm to have them implemented.

We all knew how sick Rhonda had been for such a long time, but she was never one to complain. Her answer to constant pain was to keep up her interests with people and to work even harder. She was an inspiration to us all.

In their yacht **Lady Lonsdale** Rhonda was the perfect First Mate to Skipper Chris. Two memories stand out for me:

The first was watching them wade out through 100 metres of mud one evening from Peel's lazaret to **Lady Lonsdale** moored in the Gutter. Only a dedicated crew member would have attempted that!

The other was when I accompanied them on a trip to Mud Island. My lingering image is of Rhonda waiting on the bow for the order to drop anchor. It will always be with me, and is the way I like to remember her.

My condolences to Chris and family.

Peter Ludlow
8.2.2012



Well connected

I first met Rhonda about 10 years ago when she was lobbying the Redland Shire Council for recognition of what is now called Fellmonger Park* in Ormiston. (and that of others as well, especially from FoPI) that the exhibition and publication *going to the gums* were the successes they were.

This issue had been kicking around for some time, but it was mainly due to Rhonda that there is a sign there to this day. As the local historian, I was the last in a long line of Council staffers she had talked to, and her frustration was showing.

To be fair, it was one of those tricky issues that wasn't any particular Council officer's clear responsibility, so each officer she talked to had tried to help but couldn't, and so she had been passed on to someone else.

A lesser mortal would have given up, but not Rhonda, and when she ended up with me, she made it quite clear that saying "I can't help you" was not on the agenda. I don't know that I was much use, but I did find out that Rhonda was one of those rare people whose quiet (and sometimes not so quiet) persistence is the reason our local communities have the facilities and services they currently do.

Later on, Rhonda and I worked on several projects together, most notably involving Peel Island and the lazaret. Again, it was due to Rhonda's persistence

I'm still very proud to have been involved in both the exhibition and the book, and don't hesitate to hold them both up as outstanding examples of what can be achieved if you have a great team with a Rhonda at the helm!

So to me, Rhonda was about community (she was one of the most connected people I've ever met; I only know one other person in Brisbane who knows absolutely everybody, and sure enough, she and Rhonda knew each other). She had the ability to pull disparate people together to achieve things, and I think the Redlands community is going to be the poorer without her.

I miss Rhonda, I miss her lobbying into my office to tell me about the latest idea she had (that may or may not involve me dropping everything to deliver!), I miss her telling me in no uncertain terms when she didn't agree with me, I miss her keeping me up to date with what was happening behind the scenes. I'm sure I'm not the only one.

Tracy Ryan

(Previously historian at Redland City Council Libraries and currently curator of social history at the Queensland Museum)



Launch of *going to the gums* at Redcliffe Museum, Feb 2009
L-R Natalie Ambrosini, Rhonda Bryce, Gabrielle van Willigen, Tracy Ryan, Her Excellency, Ms Penelope Wensley, Mayor of Moreton Bay Council, Uncle Peter Bird, Peter Hubbert. Photo: Jenny Napier

*Fellmongery or wool scour operated on or near the site from 1853, and ceased operations in early 1920s.

So much to do



Rhonda and Roo (above), 2009. This was one of a series Rhonda helped obtain a grant to engage local artist Troy Robbins to create to replicate the fragile wooden carvings from Peel.

Our member Rhonda Bryce passed away on the 16th January. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chris Ayres and his family for arranging the Memorial Tribute on the 23rd January which enabled Rhonda's friends and family to gather and reflect on her many interests and her involvement in various organisations.

When I joined FoPI in 2007 Rhonda was the Secretary, a position she had held for a number of years along with being editor of the *FoPI Flyer*. I soon realised she was a tireless worker and a very keen advocate for advancing the awareness of the history and for the need for the preservation of the lazaret on Peel Island.

In 2007 FoPIA held the centenary exhibition at the Redland Museum and produced our book *going to the gums*. Rhonda was heavily involved in both of these as a member of the Centenary Committee and co-editor of the book.

Also around this time Rhonda assisted the QPWS to contact the family members of former patients so that a family day could be organised. After a few false starts due to inclement weather and logistical issues, the celebration was eventually held in September 2008. It was a great success and received much appreciation from all those who attended.

Then the lazaret centenary exhibition 'going to the gums' was moved from the Redland Museum to the Redcliffe Museum for six months.

Subsequently, a permanent home was found at Fort Lytton. Once again Rhonda rose to the challenge, giving her time and putting in a lot of effort to ensure the new display arrangements and the public launch were a great success.

I appreciate the amount of time and effort required to plan and implement such activities and we are very fortunate to have had someone of Rhonda's fortitude and drive to deliver many projects over a long period of time. Rhonda will be missed. Her presence will continue to be felt through her work with the Friends of Peel Island.

Scott Fowle
FoPIA President

*tiger cowrie
pauses
with mantle relaxed
reveals its body
in a brazen glint*

*moray eel
lethargic and huge
snuggles up to
a clam with velvet blue lips
at home in pink acropora*

Extract from "Off the Coast" by Rhonda Bryce and Catherine James (2008)

Care for place and people

Rhonda Bryce left behind an impressive legacy for the present and future managers of Teerk Roo Ra (Peel Island). She was an enthusiastic defender of the island's conservation values. She cared about the place, its stories and particularly the people who continued to have connections with the site.

Rhonda was a tireless researcher, piecing together the jigsaw puzzle of the past. One of her most significant and impressive contributions was her completion of the digitising of the State Archive records. These are literally thousands of pages of information, all individually scanned and arranged now for the first time in a chronological order. This will be a huge benefit for future research and management.

I always got the impression that Rhonda had a strong understanding of the sensitivity of the stories and that these were real people, not just abstract names from the past.

This came through very clearly in her connection with the families of the past patients and Lazaret staff members. The great success of the Peel Island Centenary Family Day was largely due to the considerable work she put in behind the scenes.

Many of the guests were profoundly appreciative of having the opportunity to finally get to the Island and connect with their own families' stories and experiences.

Rhonda's enthusiasm, initiative and involvement were also displayed on a wide range of other projects. The publication and exhibition of *going to the gums* were very successful and professional achievements. Also the Queensland College of Art Post Graduate (artists' residencies) project has now been running very successfully for several years. The proposal is that it continues to run, allowing artists the opportunity to interpret and be inspired by both the place and the stories. This ongoing project was primarily due to Rhonda's vision and ability to follow through and make things happen. At the opening of the first exhibition at South Bank, I remember her speech starting with the words "This is the most wonderful evening". She could see the value in both the works and also in the future of having emerging artists continuing to be inspired by the site.

She was also very supportive and inspired others in their own personal projects.

Lauren Penny, author of *St Helena Island - An Historical Account* won a National Trust award last year for her book. Rhonda played a major role in nominating Lauren's book. On the night of the awards, I remember Rhonda didn't seem to stop smiling. She was obviously very chuffed at Lauren's achievement.

On a personal level, Rhonda Bryce was a great person to work with. She was always proactive, highly supportive, enthusiastic, intelligent, and gentle. She is sorely missed by us, but it has been very good to have known her and to reflect upon all that she has left behind.

One of her favourite places on Peel was part of the forest where there are abundant thumbnail orchids. The trees there are very old and the orchids cling to the bark waiting each year to flower and begin life anew. It is a very beautiful and quiet place - a good place to remember Rhonda.

Roland Dowling
Ranger-In-Charge
Fort Lytton National Park



Photo: Scott Forster, 2009

End notes

My darling Rhonda passed away on the 16th January. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004 and with secondary breast cancer in 2007. She still managed to go cruising and we did a trip to Townsville Far North Qld in 2005 and she also joined me at the Whitsundays and sailed back in 2009. We then just stuck to cruising around the bay – she loved a spot called Peel Island and we went there often.

Our last trip away was to Bribie Island another place she adored, up the northern end of Moreton Bay. In November her condition deteriorated dramatically. She went into hospital in early December, came out for a few days for Christmas and we had our last New Year's Eve at home before she went back in on 3rd Jan. Ten days later, she was moved to a Palliative Care hospital run by the St Vincent's and passed away on 16th.

I call her *our* Rhonda, because as with us all, she loved sailing, going to interesting places, exploring the reefs and beaches. It was Rhon who introduced me to the islands of the Great Barrier Reef in the boat before the boat before in 1985 when we cruised with the girls (daughters Meg and Mif) for 2 years. Before we met in 1974 (she was a student of mine when I was a college lecturer—but then it was the 70's!) she had cruised the Aegean, sailed across the Atlantic as cook on a 70 foot schooner, worked on a Charter Boat on the Barrier and worked on Heron Island Resort as tourist guide. So it comes as no surprise to say that quickly we became a team, she would motor forward as I lowered the anchor, then back up gently before the final 'dig-in' burst, she who would notice "that sails flapping - better do something!" or gently chastise me "You've run aground. WHY DID YOU RUN AGROUND!"

Her final moments we were together. I had spent the night at hospital on a folding bed and been there all weekend. I must have looked a mite seedy because

two nurses had said I looked worse than the patient and should be on one of the terminal patient beds. I replied "That's fine but I don't like the hospital's exit strategy!" The girls, Rhon's sister and Dean, our eldest daughter Mif's partner, were at the hospital with us. Then I went back alone to see her.

Now I'm not one for miracles, but on the way to Rhon's room, a grog trolley appeared, laden with rum, Bombay Sapphire Gin, brandy and a fine malt whisky. As I caressed the whisky a soft voice behind me said "Would you like a drink? You can have one. You're a patient aren't you?" "The third time!" I said. I explained the situation and he promised to put a glass for me in Rhon's room. "Wait 5 minutes," he said. He was a volunteer and apparently the old Bish donates drinks to the terminally ill.

When I went back into Rhon's room there was a large glass of single malt. I drank our last sundowner with her, just like we used to after a day's sail or passage when we had anchored snugly and would talk about the day and plan tomorrow watching spectacular sunsets. As I drank and we reminisced, I sang the Welsh hymn "Calon Lan and Sosban Vach" and then "Fiddlers' Green" – a favourite of hers. Shortly after she passed away.

Her spirit will always be with the girls and me in all we do and wherever we go.

Chris Ayres

So sad to think we'll all be missing out on Rhonda's dry wit and observation and extraordinary enthusiasm for life, new and sometimes seemingly crazy ideas she had for Peel Island. These would then come to fruition with a bit of team work and cajoling by Rhonda, and we'd all get a great boost in morale and courage to try even bigger and possibly crazier ideas.

Many know that Rhonda had a long time passion for improving access to Peel Island. Her research into pontoon and jetty options won't go to waste though. There will be others, led by Chris Ayres and Gordon Wilson, to take up that particular baton.

Farewell to you Rhonda, I hope you knew how much I treasured the adventures we had together.

Gabrielle (Editor, FoPI Flyer)

P.S. Rhonda, I'll get onto that story you asked me in August last year to follow up about the bodhi tree on Peel. Maybe one last adventure with you....Intriguing to think it may have come from a tree planted on Thursday Island in the 1890s from Japanese or Sinhalese Buddhist migrants. And then there's an interesting angle of conscientious objectors in WWII being sent to Peel to work as orderlies...

