



FoPI Flyer

Volume 2, July 2007

Exhibition opening a great success!

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May 31 2007 - the opening of the exhibition, **“going to the gums... the Lazaret on Peel Island”** brought warm autumnal weather for the Governor’s arrival and the 200 and more guests who were welcomed by President of the Redland Museum, Kath McNeilly and FoPIA President, Harry Beiers.

Her Excellency, Ms Quentin Bryce AC, was piped into the Museum by John McLellan, from The Scottish & Celtic Society. Ms Bryce appeared relaxed and was happy to talk with guests after the formalities. She expressed her desire to return to the museum to spend more time viewing the display and she commented that the exhibition was “very well curated”.

Aunty Irene Egert, representing the Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders, opened the proceedings with a warm and sincere Welcome to Country address. Dr Hugo Ree delivered the Guest Speakers opening address (transcript available page5).

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of the FOPIA Life Membership Awards to Ranger Shayne O’Sullivan and the founding members of the Friends of Peel Island Assoc. Shayne O’Sullivan and Donna Bennett (see photo below) initiated the formation of the Friends of Peel Island Assoc in 1999. Donna seconded Simon Baltais, Peter Ludlow, Rosemary Opala and Cr Debra Henry to join with her as founding members. Shayne O’Sullivan, who is currently based at Blackdown Tableland National Park in Central Qld, made a fleeting trip to Brisbane to attend the opening.



Several families of former patients were present. Nola Carver and her daughter Cheryl, Ruth Hinds, Charles and Kathleen Sullivan and family and Les McFadzen.

Rick Thomason’s visionary concept from the outset; the excellent work by artist/calligrapher Ruth Venner; Rosemary Opala’s poems; and the thoughtful assembly of the photographic and text material by Tracy Ryan from the RSC Local History Unit; all came together with the presentation of a powerful display.

The President, staff and volunteers of the Redland Museum contributed greatly to the success of the exhibition. The Catering Committee, led by Barbara Matthews and her team, worked ‘flat out’ in the kitchen from early in the day to produce the excellent supper.

FOPI Treasurer Rosaleen Carroll was busy all evening on the bookshop table while Gabrielle, Brian, Peter and Colleen did a sterling job weaving through the crowds with trays of delicious nibbles.

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Reminder

Membership renewals due 1 July.
 Details on back page.

Governor's opening address

Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, AC Governor of Queensland's graciously agreed to open the exhibition going to the gums. Below is a transcript of her address and which FoPI is permitted to reproduce here.

Mayor Don Seccombe

President, Redland Museum **Mrs Kath McNeilly**

President, Friends of Peel Island Association **Mr**

Harry Beiers

Dr Hugo Ree

Peel Island's many and loyal friends

I acknowledge:

- the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet;
- and their successors, the keepers of our heritage, whose knowledge, insights, and respectful and dedicated care are so evident here tonight,
- in this marvellous space, reserved for that which we hold and value in common, to be enjoyed by us as if collectively owned, and guarded as if in trust for those who come after.

Friends, I feel great privilege to be in a civic role at a time of growing awareness of the things:

- that represent our shared experience, gathered over generations of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians;
- and that together make up the fabric of who we are.

And I am honoured and delighted this evening to celebrate:

- the power of those things to teach and enlighten us;
- to reunite us;
- their accessibility;
- and their role in honestly and faithfully recording our past.

A past that, in the hundred years since the establishment of the Lazaret on Peel Island, has been revealed to us, often uncomfortably and shamefully, as a poignant reflection of the attitudes to race, disease, and criminality that prevailed in Queensland society, and beyond:

- the grim repute of islands as places of exile, much like how Australia once found itself;
- the banishment to such places, of those regarded as society's outcasts;
- the racism and discrimination that was expressed in our laws and our nation's White Australia Policy;•the misguided passage of fear of contagion from ignorance to misdiagnosis, ostracism to culpability;
- and the liberation that comes with new understanding, other than of course for those already too damaged to be freed;
- and the decaying structures that still speak of the disfigured bodies and fragmented lives that suffered in their clutches.¹



Author David Malouf has said:

We can easily, in choosing only what is significant, miss what is most humanly valuable, but also necessary to the wholeness of things...making a choice in favour of beauty, of wilderness, or historical importance, and thereby depriving ourselves of a real past that is dense with ordinary life and living like our own.²

It's certainly true that the site of the former Moreton Bay Hospital is now:

- long and far remote from wretched affliction;
- its environs, exquisite;
- and its topography and shores, a welcome shelter for sea travellers in roaring south-easterlies.

But, in its ordinary life, in its real past, there were few signs of beauty.

Friends of Peel Island, I sincerely thank you for helping us to see what is most humanly valuable, and for working to sustain that vision.

This exhibition belongs to a continuum, a broader and many-layered process:

- of evolving and unfolding;
- of separating and weaving the threads of our heritage;
- of hunting and gathering the values³ that seep through its ageing cracks,
- and coming to understand its meaning and consequence, and our place within it.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to declare open *Going to the Gums — The Lazaret of Peel Island*, and to welcome you to its story.

Footnotes - see page 3

Family contacts

The descendents of Alexandra "Allie" Burns and William Sullivan (who met on Peel Island in the 1920s) recently made contact with FoPI via the website. They were subsequently invited to the opening of the opening of going to the gums exhibition and emailed their thanks:

"... thanks again for involving us in the Peel Island Display and it's opening night. It was a wonderful evening, we really enjoyed it. Dad was especially touched by being presented to the Governor and by having his mother acknowledged in the display in such a significant way.

Could you also please pass on our congratulations and gratitude to all those involved in the display. They have put together a truly beautiful, respectful, informative and meaningful tribute to all those people whose lives were touched by their experiences at the Peel Island Lazaret.

The design of the display does a great job in creating the right atmosphere and the art work is truly beautiful. The floating panels was an inspired idea and the artists involved have created wonderful pieces to represent life at the Lazaret.

We feel honoured to be part of such a project and are truly grateful to you for giving us this opportunity.

Thank you so much.

Charles, Kath, Karen, Lenore, Michael and Scott Sullivan"

Cruising St Helena Island

The cruise to St Helena Island left Raby Bay Harbour in blustery winter westerlies on 16 June 2007. The number of guests exceeded our limit of 70 but good humour and fellowship prevailed. On the way up Harry and Karilyn supplied another bay cruise gourmet morning tea—then the raffle tickets were on the go.

The jetty on St Helena is well protected in all winds except from the West! Although our Captain, John Groom, tied the "Queenslander" to the lee side—it was high tide and there was plenty of swell and slosh. Walking the Plank took a bit of courage but all passengers (one with baby) had their sea legs and did well. Our tour guides Lauren and Laurelle led 2 groups through the historical site.

Back on board for lunch—Sharon and the crew served a magnificent feast—and the trays of sweets just kept coming...

On the return trip, the raffle prizes were endless and, by now low tide, John took us for a cruise into the Lazaret's Gutter, in through the narrow coral passage.

This was a joint venture between FoPIA and the Qld Penal and Prisons Historical Assoc. The question was asked more than a few times—when—and to where—is the next Bay Cruise?

Footnotes - Governor's Opening Speech (from page 2)

¹ Based on a reading of Helen Gregory, "The Heritage of the Ultimate Outcast", *Heritage, History and Health*, 1996, proceedings of the 4th Biennial Conference of the Australian Society of the History of Medicine, pp 129-134

² David Malouf, National Trust Heritage Lecture 2000, www.nsw.nationaltrust.org.au

³ Reference to the words of Seamus Heaney in his Nobel Prize for Literature acceptance address to the Stockholm Concert Hall, 1995: "poetry has the power to remind us that we are hunters and gatherers of values..."

A potted history of leprosy

Well done Hugo!

On 28 June, FoPI member, Dr Hugo Ree (retired physician who has worked with Hansen's Disease patients in London, West Africa, Papua New Guinea and Qld), gave a talk at the Redland Museum as part of the Museum's 2007 Lecture Series of monthly historical talks.

Hugo had the attention of the more than 80 people (of all ages) who attended.

Although it was a cold, bleak afternoon, the audience was riveted by the "potted history of leprosy from antiquity" (as the title had been described to Ed!)

We had a tour through the ages, (medicine, society, religion, politics) from BC, the early Christian era, the crusades, middle ages to the present.

Kath McNeilly, President of the Redland Museum in thanking Dr Ree, commented that it was the largest attendance the Museum has had for its Lecture Series.

More accolades

Jo Robertson has made contact and congratulates FoPIA and the Redland Museum on an impressive exhibition. She mentioned a web site see: www.leprosyhistory.org.

Jo will be in touch again in the near future with details on new museums in the Philippines (which was set up by Americans in 1906); Carville in the USA; and one in India.

Centenary update

From the Committee Chair

The Peel Island Lazaret Centenary Committee (PILCC) are all really pleased at how the exhibition *going to the gums* came together. And what a successful opening for FoPI!

Thank you again to everyone for your time and hard work in making this happening, in particular Tracy Ryan for her wonderful evocative text panels, Rick Thomasen from the Redland Museum for his efforts beyond anything we had hoped, and Rhonda Bryce for her creative and project management skills. Lastly, thank you to Ruth Venner for her artistic vision, skills and generosity in time.

The Exhibition is on display until the end of August. However, there is a possibility it may continue into September for the Redland Spring Festival.

Artists in Residence Program – Griffith University

Professor Pat HOFFIE has been away overseas. Arrangements are in train to have her visit Peel Island in the near future.

Replication of the ‘Totems’ from the lazaret

We were not successful in obtaining an RADF grant for Troy Robbins, professional sculptor and environmentalist, from Cleveland to make replicas of the wood carvings. However, a submission has recently been sent to the CRL Benefit Fund. (CRL is the mining company on Stradbroke Island.).

Touring exhibition

Planning, which includes approaching sources for funding, is underway for this exhibition to tour regional Queensland centres in 2008/09.

The Townsville Library has expressed a strong interest in having our display and Ruth Venner, currently in the Whitsundays, has had discussions with the Proserpine Museum and gave a presentation of the exhibition which she set up in a folder.

(Ruth’s detailed art work, 575mm x 750mm, produced for the Proserpine Sugar Industry Centenary about 10 years ago has recently been donated to the Proserpine Museum)

Committee members

- Gabrielle van Willigen (Chair)
- Rhonda Bryce
- Tracy Ryan
- Roland Dowling

Suggested reading

Fiction:

Rowena Ivers – *The Spotted Skin* (set at the Channel Island Leprosarium – where Cressida is incarcerated). Author Rowena Ivers worked as a Flying Doctor in Arnhemland and remote Islands in the Top End.

History (or perhaps ‘Travel’ better describes these books?)

Fergus Fleming – *Barrow’s Boys* (however the intrepid Lady Franklin is included with the boys). Fergus has a way with words, plenty of hilarity in these tales of “Daring, Fortitude and Outright Lunacy”! And it is said “the search for the North West Passage in the 18th C can be compared to our search into space in our time” i.e. in terms of expense and futility.

Jennifer Niven – *The Ice Master* (A true story of adventure, betrayal and survival in the Arctic). For those who like a bit of “who done it” and “psycho suspense” in their reading, this story will have you on the edge (as the seamen, the inuits - including 4 yr old Mugpi, and the scientists face survival - or death).

Breaking news

Wildflowers tour on Stradbroke Island

Planning is underway for a bus trip to North Straddie in September this year. Permission has been sought for entry into the CRL Mining site. It will be a full day trip - seating is limited and price per person around \$45 including return transport from Cleveland and lunch.

More details will be sent to members soon.

Hugos opening address—*full transcript*

Dr Hugo Ree delivered the Guest Speaker's Opening Address at the launch of the *going to the gums* exhibition marking the centenary of the opening of the lazaret on Peel Island—31 May 1907.

Hugo, a member of the Friends of Peel Island, is now retired after twenty years working in Third World medicine and twenty years in Queensland working in leprosy and HIV/AIDS. He is currently doing a PhD in the history of leprosy, and has just written a book of fiction, partially set on Peel Island.

Your Excellency, The Governor of Queensland, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

On May 9, 1889, the Queensland Colonial Secretary ordered the removal of seven Chinese men, all suffering from leprosy, to Dayman Island in the Torres Straits. The island was, and is still, totally uninhabited and devoid of any amenities, but it is said to have a good natural water supply. The men were provided with food, seeds, fishing tackle and some tools; two military tents were put up for their accommodation. The steamer that had brought them then sailed away.

This was the opening chapter in a long history of the incarceration and segregation of patients with leprosy in Queensland, a story that would not end until the closure of Fantome Island in 1973. Sir Horace Tozer, the Colonial Secretary of the time, had doubts about the legality of the incarceration, and so, in 1892, he introduced a Leprosy Bill into the Legislative Assembly. After some spirited debate, this bill quickly became law; it validated the previous detention of leprosy patients, and gave the Colonial Secretary, later the Home Secretary, broad powers to order the segregation of people with the disease.

Up till then, all the patients had been either Chinese or South Sea Islander men, but also in 1892, the first of a number of white men was notified with the disease. Tozer was in no doubt that white patients could not be sent to the Torres Straits, that would be quite unacceptable, so he ordered the setting up of a small institution, next to the Benevolent Asylum on Stradbroke Island, for male white patients. The numbers of these patients increased, albeit slowly; in 1895, the first white female was ordered into segregation. But where to put her?

The authorities asked the government of New South Wales if they would help out, but were tartly told that Queensland should expect more women, and therefore should make its own arrangements. The government was certain that it was responsible for this girl's moral welfare, so she was initially housed on Peel Island, in the care and control of an elderly couple. This was not a



success, and she was eventually moved to Stradbroke Island.

A report of 1904 described the lazaret on Stradbroke as an inhospitable place, lying next to a swamp, dark and miserable. The government decided that a new purpose built lazaret should be constructed, this time on Peel Island. This was opened in 1907, and all patients, white and what were then called coloured, transferred there. Each hut for the white patients cost 58 pounds, for the coloured, 3 pounds.

In the year 1892, when the Leprosy Act was introduced, there were twelve notifications of leprosy. In the same year 601 patients died of tuberculosis, yet nothing was being done for this disease by the public health authorities, and I specifically mention tuberculosis, because the organisms that cause these two diseases are very closely related. How did this curious state of affairs come about?

One answer can be found in dictionaries that are twenty or more years old, many of which give two meanings for the word leprosy. The first, correctly, is: a chronic infectious bacterial disease affecting skin and nerves. The second is 'moral corruption.' Not even the venereal disease, syphilis gets this sort of treatment. It is this second meaning that patients with leprosy, or Hansen's Disease, have had to contend with over the years, as the two definitions have become gradually conflated into a single one

(Continued over page)

giving rise to the sense that somehow they have developed a chronic bacterial infection through some moral faults of their own. That burden continues to this day.

A second answer can be found in the very fact of the small number of patients with Hansen's Disease. It is easy enough to lock up twenty or fifty, or even a hundred people, especially if they are deemed undesirable, such as the Chinese and South Sea Islanders, and later Aborigines, were at the time, but it is politically inexpedient to lock up hundreds or thousands of white patients. A third answer lies in the sad fact that, in contrast to tuberculosis, Hansen's Disease may lead to quite severe disfigurement and deformity. It may surprise you to know that the most common adjective used to describe Hansen's Disease in the 19th century was the word 'loathsome.' This gave governments the opportunity to say that they were being considerate of the sensibilities of the patients. Last but not least, similar arrangements were being made in other parts of the world, though relatively few jurisdictions chose a deserted island as a suitable place for a lazaret.

Before the advent of new treatments after the Second World War, very few patients ever left the island cured, a small number tried to escape, usually unsuccessfully, and most died, to be buried, in quicklime, because that was what the regulations said had to be done, on Peel Island. Some committed suicide. The cemetery there is a sad, dark place.

In January 1940 all the coloured patients were removed, by train and boat and under police escort, from Peel to Fantome Island, part of the Palm Island Group, off the coast from Townsville.

The Peel Island lazaret closed in 1959, more than a dozen years after the first successful trials of a new drug for Hansen's Disease were completed. For reasons that are far from clear, Fantome Island continued in use for another fourteen years. During the fifty-two years of the Peel Island lazaret, about five hundred patients were incarcerated there. In the opinion of many, they were dealt with harshly, especially as there was little scientific evidence to justify incarceration. But ordinary people were terrified of this exotic, strange moral corruption, and readily accepted the need to interfere in people's liberty; some doctors supported incarceration, a few objected. In 1892, Dr. Lyons, a well-known Brisbane surgeon talked of a return to mediaeval barbarism, but his views were ignored.

We are here today to acknowledge the existence of the Peel Island lazaret, opened a hundred years ago this month, to remember those who were incarcerated there, and to hope that those who died and are buried in the cemetery in unmarked graves, have found peace. Peel Island is a fundamental and integral part of Queensland's historical heritage. This exhibition is about that heritage, and I hope that as people come to understand what happened during those fifty-two years they will come to see the need to spend money for the preservation of that heritage, and also to take a few moments to ponder on the question of power and how it is used.

Thank you.

And thank you Hugo, from everyone in FoPI, for the historical insights you provided (ed).

2007—2008 Subscriptions now due

Many thanks to all those members renewing subs this year. FOPIA is aiming for a membership of over 50 in order to apply to the ATO for DGR status. (This will mean that donations to FOPIA will be tax deductible.) Your support for Peel Island is appreciated.

Cheques payable to: **The Treasurer, PO Box 1015, Slacks Creek, Qld 4127.**

FULL MEMBERSHIP: \$26 (\$10 joining fee and \$16 annual subs) available to people aged 18 years and over and entitles the member to full voting rights.

PENSIONER, STUDENT & JUNIOR: \$17 (\$5 joining fee and \$12 annual subs) entitles the member to full voting right in FoPIA. Junior Membership is a non-voting membership available to people under the age of 18 years.

ORGANISATION MEMBERSHIP: \$50 (\$10 joining fee and \$40 annual subs.) available to organizations (incorporated or otherwise) and entitles the organisation to one voting right in FoPIA.