



# FoPI Flyer

April, 2008

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## Celebrating a life

### Rosemary Opala (1923 - 2008)



**A founding member of Friends of Peel Island, ex-nurse at the lazaret, painter, writer, environmentalist and much more is remembered.**

Rosemary Opala (nee Fielding) was born in Bundaberg, Queensland in 1923. She began to study a commercial art course at the George Street Technical College (now QUT) but took up nursing at the onset of World War II because as she said: "I wanted to do something more meaningful than playing with paints, seeing as though everybody was rushing off to the war."

After finishing her nursing training at Brisbane General Hospital, she stayed on the staff at Wattlebrae, the city's infectious disease section. It was here that she met a small and engaging group of Peel Island (Hansen's Disease) patients, temporarily housed in one of the pavilion-type wards while waiting specialist consultation about eye problems. They convinced her to go to Peel as a nurse and she spent two stints there in the late 1940s and early 50s. While there and ever since, Rosemary worked tirelessly to "de-mythify" Peel Island folklore.

"It was a particularly interesting time, a time when a cure was on its way," she said.

After leaving Peel Island Lazaret, Rosemary eventually became a nursing supervisor at Prince Charles Hospital in Brisbane.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, she wrote popular magazine fiction - gaining some notoriety with the publication of various short stories in women's magazines. The University of Queensland Fryer Library recently accepted these and a collection of what she describes as "disrespectful cartoons".

A stint at St Anne's Hospital at Cleveland revealed another love - that of Coochiemudlo, which she visited by rowboat, returning that same day. She was later to live there, exchanging nursing for "a stress free life as farm hand cum beachcomber". Later she and her husband Marian built their own home on the island, at a time when the ferry only ran on weekends and public holidays.

*Continued page 2*

Celebrating a life *cont'd*

“Building was an experience considering my husband’s previous carpentry experience was to build a bookcase,” she said.

Rosemary had a way with words.

Rosemary and Marian moved to Caloundra, in the late 1960s and despite every intention, Rosemary’s husband was never to return to Coochiemudlo. While at Caloundra, she was very involved with the Sunshine Coast Environment Council and used to send articles and drawings for the quarterly magazine *Eco Echo* - her pages were a regular feature. After Marian’s death, Rosemary moved down to Victoria Point where she was to continue contributing sketches and articles to local environmental groups.

“These days I leave such work to the more accomplished but still like to do a bit of illustrating if the subject appeals. Hopefully the time is coming

***“..a provider of much humour and strength through words and art, a much admired person, a truly living treasure.”***

when I can vege out without feeling guilty and do nothing but re-read old favourite books and new best sellers,” she said. “There is more to life than just existing - more than being upright and breathing.”

As well as sketching, Rosemary also wrote non-fiction articles, with an emphasis on Queensland’s environment, botany and its history. She contributed to many groups.

From her time in Caloundra, Rosie and Kathleen MacArthur were members of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (WPSQ). Later, when she moved back to Victoria Point about 1995, Rosie continued writing articles for the WPSQ Bayside Branch newsletter. She was also involved with the Botanical Artists Society of Queensland with her friend Louise Saunders.

From her time as an early resident of Coochiemudlo Island, she had many reminiscences of her family’s early struggles to get established there. As such, she was a member of the Coochiemudlo Historical Society. However her art was always close to her heart and she was an active member of the Coochiemudlo Art Group.



Even after her admission to the Redland Hospital just prior to her death, Rosemary’s one concern was that she would not be well enough to attend an upcoming exhibition at the Redland Council’s Art Gallery, in which she is to exhibit.

Rosemary was involved in the Friends of Peel Island Association as a foundation member, was a member of U3A, a Friend of Eprapah and was an ecological writer with *Eco Echo*, a tri-annual Sunshine Coast publication.

Regarding her foundation membership of the Friends of Peel Island Association (FOPI), Rosemary once said ‘It’s just an excuse to get into the place (Peel). I don’t really contribute. I’m sort of the elder statesman.’

Fellow FOPI committee member Debra Henry said her involvement was far more than this. “She is a very active member. She just plays it down.”

But this was Rosie all over.

FOPI President Simon Baltais once said, “Rosemary Opala is a kind and generous soul, a willing listener, a provider of much humour and strength through words and art, a much admired person, a truly living treasure.” Rosemary Opala, we thank you for sharing your life with so many of us.

*Peter Ludlow, Cleveland, 31.1.2008*

## World Wetland day cleanup at Horseshoe Bay, 2 February.

The Friends of Peel Island, Hilliards Creek Bushcare members and QPWS, combined efforts to clear litter on the beach and foredunes, as well as camping areas, of Horseshoe Bay. Around 20 garbage bags of rubbish were removed to the mainland.

Everyone was pleased to see that there wasn't more rubbish there. Apart from a few odd thongs, balls, and mooring bottles, the majority of rubbish was rope and fishing lines and campsite rubbish. Broken bottles were a particular concern in the camp areas.

Thanks to the clean-up team: *Peter Ludlow, Colleen Taylor, Gabrielle van Willigen, Rita and Peter Durham, and Shirley Angus.*

Thanks also to FopI members *Troy Robbins* and *Caroline Santaguiliana* who visited the island on a previous day and gathered several bags of rubbish.



## Cemetery and gardens received some TLC from FoPI members who had their first successful working bee of 2008 with an overnight stay on Peel Island.

Unlike our attempts in 2007, the weather was fine and the winds favourable for a trip to the island. We were able to clear weeds from the numerous grave sites, as well as clear fallen branches and bark to reduce fire hazards in the cemetery. We all felt a great sense of satisfaction caring for the last resting place of so many.



Some of the grave sites cleared of weeds and branches.

We also put a lot of effort into the 'gardens' around the nurses and matrons buildings, though weeds were the main plants growing. For a number of years the weeds have been a recurring problem. However with prompting from Colleen Hubbert, Rolland Dowling (Ranger in Charge of Peel Island) purchased a large roll of matting which we laid on the garden beds to smother future weed growth.

Here are some before and after photos of the nurses quarters, where we weeded, laid weed mat, and spread mulch. Much to our delight some plants - mostly *Hippeastrums* - were rescued from the weeds. We believe they've been there for a long time, and therefore are of heritage significance.

Colleen H. also contributed *Lomandras* and *Leptospermum* for the garden. These are native to the island, and will require little ongoing maintenance.



The team looking happy with the results of their efforts.

Back row: Colleen Taylor, Peter Hubbert, Mette Juel  
 Standing: Alex (Ranger)  
 Front row: Colleen Hubbert, Gabrielle van Willigen

## New park, old name

On 18 December 2007, the Friends of Peel Island welcomed the announcement by the Hon Andrew McNamara, Minister for Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation, of the Teerk Roo Ra (Peel Island) National Park and Conservation Park.

Andrew McNamara was joined at Polka Point, Dunwich, by the traditional owners, former lazaret staff and patients, conservationists and history buffs.



Darren Burns, gave the Welcome to Country at the ceremony. Midden sites and a bora ring on the Island indicate that Moreton Bay's Indigenous people had long used it as a feasting and ceremonial site.

"The park name Teerk Roo Ra, (pronounced took-a-ra) reflects the Quandamooka name for the island.

The Nunukaul Jaggera Dance Group welcome guests.

"With the addition of Teerk Roo Ra the area of national park in Moreton Bay has increased to more than 19,500 hectares" Mr McNamara said.

"Seventy-four bird species have been recorded on the island as well as eight reptiles, two frogs, three mammals and a sub-species of Agile Wallaby.

The Island has sedgeland, melaleuca swamps, low-open and tall-open forests. It is fringed by ancient mangroves, coral reefs and significant beds of seagrass.

Teerk Roo Ra will be jointly managed by QP&WS and the Island's Traditional Owners, the Quandamooka People. The Friends of Peel Island welcome this initiative and look forward to the development of this Joint Management Plan for the Island.

Guests included FOPIA representatives including President Harry Beiers, Cr Debra Henry and Simon Baltais, Aunt Margaret (also a FOPIA member) together with Uncle Pat and other members of the Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Aboriginal Corporation; Ian Delaney and other members of the Quandamooka Land Council; Local Historian and FOPIA foundation member Peter Ludlow.

### Welcome to new members

Welcome to new members: *Bill Bennett, Cr Wendy Boglary, Gregory Fox, Gary Hargrave, Anne Hely, Catherine Jacquier, Mette Juel, Gary Millar, Denise and Dr David Nicholson, Bradley Scott, Ken Seeto, Darren Timms, Geraldine Trivett, Ray Wassenberg and Gordon Wilson.*

### Tax deductability status

Thanks to all those who continue to be members of FoPI, and the success of the recent membership drive. Our membership numbers have grown sufficiently that we can now go ahead with an application to the ATO for 'Deductible Gift Recipient' status this year.

This will enable any donations or gifts to FOPIA to be tax deductible.

## Visit planned to lazaret by ex-patients and staff, and their families as part of Centenary of National Parks in Queensland celebrations.

Organised by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service for many, the visit to the lazaret will be the first time in a long time, and is likely to bring back deep memories. To commemorate this historic visit, QPWS are inviting those with a connection to the lazaret to contribute a memento, photo, or written piece, to be placed in a time capsule to be buried on the island. It is hoped this time capsule will lie undisturbed, to be opened in 100 years.

Originally scheduled for Saturday 5 April, due to expected strong south-easterly winds, the trip has been postponed to Saturday 19 April. Around 100 people are expected to participate including family members Charles Sullivan and his wife Kathleen (pictured right) who celebrated their 50th Wedding anniversary in 2007.



## Diary

### History Queensland : Family and Local History Fair

The 6<sup>th</sup> Biennial Family and Local History Fair : *One Hundred and fifty year On – Celebrating Queensland.*

1 June 2008 - Mt Gravatt Showgrounds  
Admission is \$10.00 pp for adults.

### Wynnum Library History Fair

South Moreton Bay Bicentennial Historical Collection : *Living Local : Lytton to Lota*

Saturday, 17 May 2008 - Wynnum Library, Wynnum Civic Centre, Bay Terrace, Wynnum

### Exciting New Murri Cultural Festival - Yuggera Corroboree Festival

The festival will involve at least 15 different dance groups; Spear-throwing contest (Grand Prize of \$1000); Boomerang-throwing contest (Grand Prize of \$1000); Fireworks; and VIP Luncheon.

**Contact:** Shannon Ruska 3299 4470 / 0413 830 756  
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Saturday, 13th September 2008 - White's Hill, Mount Gravatt

### FoPIA MEETINGS:

Monthly - Second Monday at 7.00 pm  
**Indigiscapes, 17 Runnymede Rd, Capalaba**

### The Black Swans

Susie Imer "Southern Bay News", 20 April 2007 wrote that it was the "Dutch explorers in the 1600s who were the first to note the presence of the Black Swan (Cygnus atratus) – the word's only (mostly) black swan". Most Australians think of them only being present in W.A. However, they are long term residents of Moreton Bay.

Rhonda Bryce says "I often sees them at Prices anchorage, eastern side of Lamb Island and around Russell Is. It is a joy to watch them so gracefully moving by"



photo by Susie Imer

## Last words

### Replicas of sculptures from lazarret

Troy Robbins recently sent us an update on the project to make replicas of the wooden sculptures from the lazarret. The pace of work slowed at the beginning of the year due to conflicting demands on his time. However things should start to move ahead.

Here's a photo of the roo along with the completed steel support frame covered with wire which will be rendered in cement fondue to replicate the original.



photo courtesy of Troy Robbins 2008

### “Wild: An Elemental Journey” by Jay Griffiths

This book was reviewed by Mark Cocker in “The Guardian Weekly” 22 June 2007.. Mark says in summing up his review that “Wild” is the “most rewarding travel book that I have read in the past decade...wilderness has found an eloquent champion”. Jay Griffiths writes about the relationship between wilderness and culture through listening to indigenous people from four continents (including Australia).

In a recent ABC interview Jay mentioned how ‘westerners’ would be incensed by the wanton destruction of major cultural centres such as a library etc. and yet destruction of a major rainforest is not considered a ‘cultural’ calamity.

### The ravages of time

The "Platypus" has been located at Peel Island since 1926. Her role has been to protect the stone jetty which was originally built by ships passengers quarantined on Peel Island in the 1890s. During the operation of the Lazaret, the jetty was used for unloading supplies.

As you can see from these photographs taken over the last 60 years, the Platypus is crumbling away. So too is the old stone jetty, less protected now that the Platypus is disappearing with the ravages of time, tide and weather.



1940s



Stone Jetty & "Platypus" 1976

photo courtesy Kris Price



2004



2008