Murray Clan Society of NSW

Newsletter – April 2025

Welcome

Greetings everyone. This Newsletter is much later than I hoped it would be, for which I apologise. In my last report to you I mentioned that I had a rather disastrous computer crash just before Christmas in which I lost a considerable amount of material. My back-up system apparently wasn't working properly and one of the documents I lost was the material I had collected for my next Newsletter so I've had to start from scratch. Anyway, I hope that you all find here some interesting reading.

If you have sent me information and it doesn't appear in this issue, please feel free to send it again and it will go in next time.

Bonnie Wingham Scottish Festival 2025

As previously advised, the Festival this year will be held on **Saturday 31 May** starting at 9.00am. It will be held this year at the Wingham Showground (note change of venue).
On **Sunday 1 June** there will be a **Scottish Concert** at the **Wingham Services Club**, starting at 1.00pm. Entry Fee is $5 per person over 12 years. The Murray Clan will have a tent at the Festival and we would be delighted to see as many of you as can get there.

Camping Information

The showground has powered camping sites available for $22 per night, per site. There are powered and unpowered sites, however all sites are the same price. There will be an area roped off for parking for the festival, but people are free to camp wherever they wish outside the roped off area.

Payment details for camping are as follows-

Account name: Manning Valley Historical Society Inc - Bonnie Wingham Scottish Festival
BSB: 932 000
Acct Number: 5001 93220
Reference: Camp Fee + name

There is more information on accommodation generally here:
https://www.bonniewingham.com/accommodation

Marie Bartlett

One of our longstanding members, Marie Bartlett, passed away recently. Marie was a niece of committee member Joyce Murray and a cousin of Vice President Ian Murray and committee member Lorraine Murray.
Marie was an enthusiastic seller of fund-raising raffle tickets for the Clan on many occasions and was a regular attender at our formal dinners. Her funeral was held at Gloucester on 26 March.
We express our condolences to her family.

Update on Vice President Ian Murray

In my letter to members late last year I advised of a dreadful car accident on 14 November involving our Vice President Ian and his friend Annette Johanssen (my apologies for misspelling her name in the previous letter). Ian suffered fractures to his upper and lower spine, ribs, left wrist, pelvis, left femur and both knees, and Annette suffered very serious injuries as well.
Ian has provided me with the following update. It was difficult for him to write and I appreciate his efforts.

ABOUT MY ACCIDENT (Written 17 March 2025)

It has been 131 days since my Motor Vehicle Accident. I have been in three hospitals and one nursing home. I have endured six operations: one on each of my arms, one on each of my legs, one on my sacrum for bed sores and one on my bladder.

I was totally bedridden for more than half of those days because my pelvis had to repair so it could support my weight. During these 60+days I lost most of my muscle tone and a lot of weight. The loss of weight was not an issue, I was a little overweight anyhow.

Not only did I have to learn to walk again and rebuild my upper body strength, my muscles had to be woken up not only in my legs and arms but also in my shoulders, back and torso as well as the inner core. It all had to be done slowly.

I started physiotherapy as soon as I was given the go ahead from my doctors. It was difficult at first. I was taken to physiotherapy in a wheelchair. My legs just could not carry me. I slowly became strong enough to leave the wheelchair and use a walker. Initially they came to collect me and walk with me to therapy. Eventually I went to therapy on my own, I even worked out my own routines that suited me best, but always under the watchful eye of the therapists. I do not go anywhere without my new best friend, MR WALKER.

Every day it gets a little easier. I feel stronger and I can take a few steps without my friend. I do not think it be long before MR WALKER will be put in the cupboard. I am not there yet though.

Probably the hardest decision I had to make was to resign as CARETAKER of the WINGHAM SHOWGROUND, a position I really enjoyed. I was part of the management team for about five years, eventually being given the role of Secretary. In total I spent about eight years there. The Showground had become my life.

However, I would not have achieved this much if it was not for the skill and dedication of all the doctors and nurses at the Port Macquarie Base Hospital, Manning River Referral Hospital, Estia Health and Aged Care, and the Mayo Private Hospital.

I probably should not single out any Doctor, but the first I saw at PORT MACQUARIE HOSPITAL was DR ROBERT OAKESHOTT. He remembered me and he simply said, “You have got this and I’m onto it.” That was the only time I saw him but he talked about the Clan and said, “You have to keep it going.”

Photo from Wingham Showground Facebook page

There were times when I got depressed, mainly because everything was happening slowly and I was not in control. I had lost all modesty. I had to wear a nappy because I could not take myself to the toilet. A nurse said to me one day, she could see something was wrong. I told her that I had had enough. Her reply was something I did not expect a nurse to say:

“You are alive. Most victims of accidents like the one you had end up at the undertakers, not a hospital. Get over yourself and be thankful you are here and we can fix you.”

Those words still have an impact, every time I feel down, I think of them, and don’t stay depressed for long.

Doctors, nurses, physiotherapists aside, a lot of the progress I have made is simply due to the fact that I had my family near me. My two girls Kylie and Markeeta spent nearly every waking moment with me. They made sure I was given the treatment I needed. They made sure I had everything I needed. They certainly kept the hospital staff on their toes. My son Shaun was there when he could be. It was not so much what they did. It was just knowing they were there and there for only me. I love them all deeply. They are the reason I am still here.

My sisters Lorraine and Cherie made sure Mum was kept informed of my progress. They even bought Mum to see me a few times and that was great.

I have no idea what the next 12 months will bring but whatever it is I will confront it with the same determination that I am facing this one with. The challenge will only make me stronger.

Ian

[**Editor’s Note:** *Dr Rob Oakeshott is a Murray descendant and spoke at one of our dinners when he was the Member for Lyne in the Federal Parliament. After leaving politics, he enrolled in Medicine as a mature age student, graduating in 2022. He now works as a GP in Port Macquarie.*

Our next Newsletter will have an update on Ian’s friend Annette. At this stage it appears that she will require a wheelchair permanently and her left arm is paralysed.]

Bruce Hunter Murray

Brigette Murray, daughter of Bruce Hunter Murray, has recently informed us of the death of her father in May 2024, five months after being knocked over by a trolley collector.
Brigette tells us that her father spoke highly of the Hunters and Murrays in the Wingham area and that he proudly carried the Murray banner in quite a few processions. She writes:

“Bruce was born in August 1934 in the Wyong area and passed away on 12 May 2024. He lived every day to the fullest and just loved his Scottish heritage and everything it represented, He was a Mason most of his life, belonging to multiple lodges. At the funeral we had a Scottish piper and a guard of honour of Masons with swords as we walked in. He fought to stay with us for five months after the accident, but it wasn't meant to be. My Mum Dorothy survives him as does my sister Janine and myself.”

I personally cannot remember Bruce, but I did miss quite a few gatherings during my years living in the Upper Hunter and North-West.

We extend our condolences to Bruce’s family. As far as I know he was not related to the Manning River Murrays, but was one of many Murrays who have joined over the years from other branches.

Brigette is planning on coming to the Bonnie Wingham Scottish Festival to meet us.

Wauchope Games

The Inaugural Wauchope Highland Gathering was held on 23 November 2024. Clan Commissioner Warwick Murray was there representing the Clan with his tent.

The First “Big” Thing

Australians are familiar with the many supersized objects to be found around the country, such as the Big Pineapple, the Big Oyster, the Big Merino, the Big Prawn etc. Many people, particularly in NSW, think that the first of these was the Big Banana at Coffs Harbour, which opened with considerable publicity in 1964.

There was an earlier one, however. In 1963, the five metre tall **Big Scotsman** was built above a motel known as “Scotty’s” in central Adelaide, SA. It is regarded as the first of the “Big” objects.

The Big Scotsman above Scotty’s Motel, Adelaide. Photo Scotty’s Motel website

The Story of Ada Bridge

The subject of this story was not a Murray descendant, but her father's brother was married to a Murray so her aunt and cousins were Murrays. The wider family was deeply affected by her tragic death in World War 2 and she is still held in great honour by the family.

First, some background. As a History teacher, I used to teach the story of Vivian Bullwinkel to every class I taught that was studying World War 2. Most Australians know something of the story. Australian Army nurses were serving in Singapore, attending to the hundreds of casualties from the rapid Japanese southwards through Malaya in 1942. As the bombs came closer and the situation became perilous, the nurses were asked to volunteer to return home. None did.
It soon, however, became obvious that withdrawal was the only option. The *Vyner Brooke*, a steamship that usually carried 12 passengers, left Singapore with over 200 people on board, including 65 Australian nurses and many children.

Grantlee Kieza, in his excellent biography of Bullwinkel, *Sister Viv*, describes the Japanese air attack on the ship about 20 kilometres from Bangka Island near Sumatra, then part of the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia. With aircraft bombing and strafing the ship and its passengers there was mayhem, but the courage and commitment of the nurses were nothing less than heroic. A bomb that fell directly down the funnel into the engine room, and another that hit the keel below water level ended any hope of remaining on the ship. Several lifeboats were destroyed in the attack and the water was thick with oil, blood and bodies.

In 2017 the Royal Australian Mint issued a 20 cent coin to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the sinking of the Vyner Brooke.

Many of the survivors managed to reach scattered parts of Bangka Island, including 53 of the nurses; 12 had died in the water. After a lot of walking to try to link up with other survivors, including those from another ship sinking, searching for food and water and treating the wounded, the nurses were exhausted. Much of their clothing had been torn up for bandages, and it was agreed that they should surrender to the occupying Japanese. They expected that they would be imprisoned and at least be fed.

The Japanese separated the men from the women and brutally shot or bayonetted the unarmed men. The men included servicemen from Britain, civilians and children. The massacre took place out of sight of the nurses, but they realised what was happening.

After the massacre of the men, the Japanese soldiers proceeded to torture the women. Then they ordered the nurses to walk into the sea. They did so, some assisting their sick or wounded fellow nurses to stand in the water. When they were waist deep in the sea, the soldiers shot them in the back with machine guns. Bullwinkel herself was shot. She was the only one to survive, and the story of her survival and years of imprisonment as a POW make graphic reading, as does the story of her long and distinguished post-war life as a witness to the Japanese atrocities, as an advocate for her dead friends, as a nurse, hospital administrator and much more. These are only the barest details. There are many sources on the internet and of course the Kieza book I mentioned earlier, that provide more details.

There is very credible evidence that the nurses were violated before being murdered. There is evidence that Bullwinkel agreed to pressure from the Australian Government not to mention in her post war testimonies that the women were violated, a fact she apparently regretted all her life.

The Connection with the Murrays

Robert Murray was just 15 when he migrated to Australia from Scotland in 1851 with his widowed mother and five brothers. Four other brothers and a sister had migrated in 1848. He married his cousin, Isabel Weatherley, as was common at the time, and settled at Darawank just outside Tuncurry on the NSW mid-north coast. They had a large family, and one daughter, Margaret, married Andrew Bridge. Andrew had been born in Scone, but the family lived in the Manning district. He was the police chief in Taree.

Andrew's siblings included a brother, William Thomas Bridge (1869-1938). William married Ada Matilda Thurlow (1878-1957). They lived at Stony Creek near Belltrees, about 30 km east of Scone in a stunningly beautiful area of the Hunter Valley area of NSW.

William and Ada had two children, Leslie Thurlow Bridge (1905-68) and Ada Joyce Bridge (1907-1942). These children were therefore nephew and niece to Andrew and Margaret. Although they were the children of Margaret's in-laws ,William and Ada, it seems that the families were very close and the tragedy that befell Ada, one of the nurses massacred on Bangka Island in 1942, is still an important memory for John and Margaret's descendants. Robyn Garrett, grand-daughter of Andrew and Margaret, who now lives in Norway, is profoundly aware of Ada's death in 1942 and the effects it had on the wider family, especially Ada's Murray cousins. As Robyn wrote to me, "It's all one family to me – all intertwined."

Robyn's home in Norway has a treasured photo of Ada, with the words "His Grace is Sufficient" (from 2 Corinthians 12:9) in Norwegian underneath. I must point out that Robyn has been very helpful in working with me on this article from the other side of the world.

Ada was born on 6 July 1907 in Scone and trained as a nurse at St Luke's Hospital in Sydney. She enlisted in the Australian Army Nursing Service on 8 April 1941.

Known as 'Joyce' to her colleagues, she was posted to hospitals in Malaya and Singapore. With the rapid southern advance of the Japanese, she was ordered with the other Australian nurses to be evacuated on the *Vyner Brooke*.
It is worth mentioning that Ada's father died in 1938, so Ada would have had every reason to have stayed in Australia to support her widowed mother.

According to biographical notes by Faithe Jones on the Australia War Memorial website:

Ada's Enlistment Photo, Australian War Memorial

"As a young girl, Joyce loved the country life at Stony Creek. She and her brother rode their horses about 5km to the Public School at Belltrees until they reached 6th class. The outdoor life tanned her skin and emphasised her brown eyes and short brown hair. Those who knew Joyce at this time described her as a happy girl, who enjoyed her life to the full.

"She had a ready smile which often turned into an infectious chuckle…She was not very tall, but her figure was slim; her arms were strong and her hands were gentle…Joyce was socially very popular, and being an excellent dancer, she enjoyed the local dances.

“A friend who graduated with Joyce remembered her as ‘a very pleasant companion, very bright with a great sense of humour. She was a genuine friend, a typical country girl who took pride in her work and was very good nurse.’
“Joyce came from a very patriotic family and enlisted in the Australian Army Nursing Service on 8 April 1941.

A small book was written in 1989 by Joan Crouch entitled “*One Life is Ours: the story of Ada Joyce Bridge*”. Vivian Bullwinkel wrote in her Foreword:

> *“When approached to write a Foreword… I felt very privileged. I met Joyce, as we knew her, for the first time when our Unit… formed in 1941 and posted overseas to Malaya. The Unit had a short but intensive life during which the weaknesses and strengths of individuals were quickly recognised.*
> *It was during this time that our respect, esteem and affection grew daily for Joyce’s commitment, skills and dedication. Joyce faced every crisis with cheerfulness and fortitude. One cannot but feel resentment and so very sorry that such a young, lovely and defenceless Australian Nurse, wearing a Red Cross Armband, was murdered in such a cruel and calculated way. A young woman who had so much to give the community and humanity”.*

The Scone Advocate newspaper in 1954 described her as “… a popular and brave district servicewoman” and “To those who knew her in private life there remains the memory of a lovely girl with laughing brown eyes, unafraid to face the horrors of war in her eagerness to help nurse the wounded and suffering.”

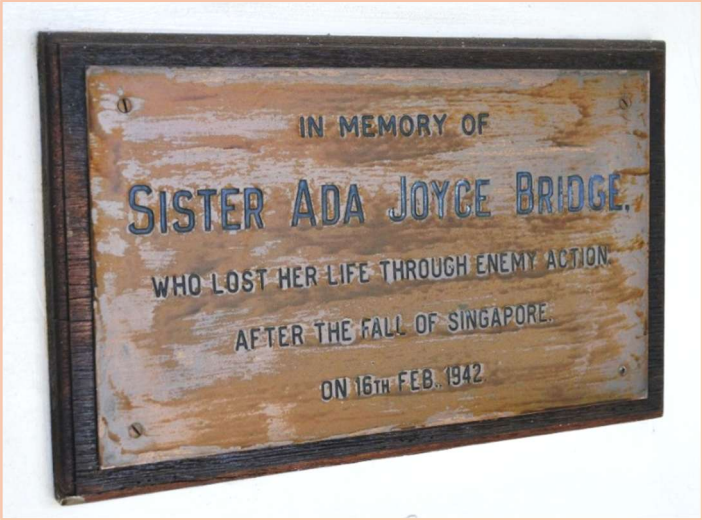
I worked at Scone High School for seven years (1970-76) and taught many students from the rural areas around the town, including the Belltrees region. I found the students to be delightful young people – deferential, life-enjoying, courteous, sporty, self-effacing – just nice kids, not that the town students were any less obliging. As I read the stories about Ada, I felt as though my experience at Scone probably gave me some insight into the kind of person she was. I also knew the area around Belltrees quite well, a peaceful, bucolic setting that couldn’t have been more different from the horrific scene at that Bangka Island beach and the brutality of the massacre. I have no doubt that if the nurses had been taken prisoner instead of being murdered, they would willingly have attended to the medical needs of their captors.

There are many memorials to the heroic Australian nurses: St Andrews Cathedral Singapore (which had been converted into a medical clearing station during the war), the Singapore Memorial which lists the details of every nurse, and the Nurses’ Memorial on Bangka Island itself.

The Bangka Memorial

During my 19 years living in Scone I was familiar with the Country Women’s Association building in the main street. Inside is a portrait of Ada Joyce Bridge. Her posthumously

awarded medals were displayed as well, but were stolen many years ago and have been replaced with miniatures. On the outside wall was fixed this plaque: “In Memory of Sister Ada Joyce Bridge who lost her life through enemy action after the Fall of Singapore on 16th Feb 1942,



From the Scone Advocate 27 August 1954

“It is now the wish of the [CWA] members to perpetuate the memory of Lieutenant Ada Joyce Bridge, of 'Stony Creek' Belltrees, who paid the supreme sacrifice after the fall of Singapore in February, 1941, during World War II.

"Ada Joyce Bridge completed her training at St. Luke's Hospital, Sydney, and was highly regarded by doctors, patients and the nursing staff, of which she was a member for a number of years. To those who knew her in private life there remains the memory of a lovely girl, with laughing brown eyes, unafraid to face the horrors of war in her eagerness to help nurse the wounded and suffering. So we, the members of the Scone and District Branch of the Country Women's Association, feel quite sure that every person in this district will appreciate our action in building our Baby Health Centre and Assembly Rooms as a memorial to NX76284 Lieutenant Ada Joyce Bridge."

After Ada’s mother’s death in 1957, a memorial was erected in the Scone Lawn Cemetery to both parents and Ada.

Her name is also inscribed on the Scone War Memorial.

The best-known picture of Ada Bridge is this official military portrait. It was painted posthumously in 1947. Presumably based on photographs, the portrait has a few inaccuracies.

A war memorial entry notes that the style of uniform portrayed by the artist post-dates that worn by Sister Bridge in her life-time and there are several other inaccuracies in the way the artist has portrayed the subject. For our purposes that is not important. The purpose of this article is to tell the story a wonderful young woman whose brutal murder at a Bangka Island beach greatly affected the lives of the Bridge and Murray families, and who is not forgotten.

Those readers watching the election results come in on 3 May will notice a new electorate, the WA electorate of **Bullwinkel**.

From the official explanation:

> *Named in honour of Vivian Statham (née Bullwinkel) AO MBE ARRC ED FNM FRCNA, 1915–2000. Lieutenant Colonel Bullwinkel was a civilian and military nurse who was the sole survivor of the 1942 Bangka Island massacre and a prisoner of war. In recognition of Lieutenant Colonel Bullwinkel's dedication to honouring victims of war crimes, service to nursing, and the community, in both her civilian and military service. This electoral division name also honours the contribution of military nurses, and other military medical personnel, and recognises those who were prisoners of war.*

Warmest regards to all our members and friends. Please feel free to send me any items, historical or current, that you think may be of interest for the next Newsletter.

Ross Murray
President