

# Murray Clan Society of NSW



## *Newsletter - October 2019*



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## **Welcome**

Welcome to another issue of the Murray Clan Newsletter. I realise that recently our Newsletters have been somewhat irregular, but I hope you can all find something of interest in this issue. There is quite a lot to report.

## **40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gathering June 2019**

Our gathering this year was one of the best ever. It was held, as usual, to coincide with the Bonnie Wingham Scottish Festival. We had a strong roll-up for the morning procession and were busy throughout the day at the Clan Tent. At one point we had the local mayor and our State and Federal members together in our tent and had a regular stream of Murray visitors throughout the day.

For the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Clan Society, we reverted to an evening function. The dinner, held at the Wingham Showground, was very well attended and everyone who spoke to me afterwards said that it had been a great night.

We were entertained with first class music throughout the night, provided by a trio of Judy and Tony Stuart from Goulburn and James Palethorpe from Sydney. Judy is a descendant of George Murray through his daughter Margaret, who married John Northam.

Warwick Murray addressed the Haggis with his usual flair, and Kylie Murray and her team of volunteers did an exceptional job providing us with a sumptuous three-course meal.

There were three toasts: To our Ancestors and our Scottish Heritage (Warwick Murray); To the Clan and its Members (Alan Martin, response by Ian Murray); and To our Distant Travellers (Ross Murray, response by John Huggart).

I was privileged to be asked to give my impressions of 40 years of the Clan Society. Reducing 40 years to a few minutes was rather challenging, but for those interested I have included my observations towards the end of this Newsletter.

The proceedings were presided over by our very capable MC, Julie Evans.

My thanks to all those who made the effort to join us, especially a number of first-time members including Stephanie and Meredith, grand-daughters of our late and highly esteemed Secretary Joyce Kidd. A great many members happily contributed their time and talents, and we were all grateful for the manner in which everything came together.



Our musical trio takes a break – Judy Stuart, James Palethorpe, Tony Stuart (obscured)

Reflecting on 40 years of the Clan



The pipe bands are always a delight at the Festival. This band is from Tamworth.





Two pictures of the Murray Clan contingent in the Festival procession.



## Annual General Meeting 2019

The AGM was held just prior to the evening function. Reports were presented and triennial elections held. All current committee members were re-elected, with the addition of Lynne Mehaffey (as Assistant Secretary) and Lorraine Murray to the Committee.

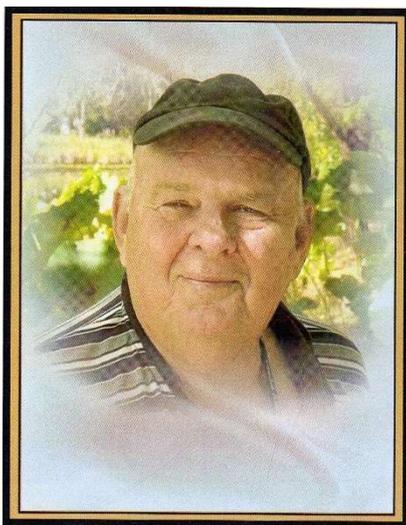
## Annual Gathering 2020

The 2020 annual gathering will be held on 30<sup>th</sup> May, again coinciding with the Highland Fair and Games day of the Bonnie Wingham Scottish Festival.

We are planning something a little different next year. There will be more details in the next Newsletter. At this stage all we ask is that you note the date.

## Tributes

### Les Murray



Since our last Newsletter we have lost one of our founding members, Les Murray 17/10/1938 – 29/05/2019). The news media have covered Les' life and achievements in great detail, including his early life on the Bunyah farm, his education at Taree High School where he faced severe bullying, as well as his great success as a poet – 30 volumes of internationally renowned poetry, some of it officially translated into 10 languages. It would be impossible to do justice to such a life in a few short paragraphs.

Several members of the Clan were able to attend his funeral service at St Bernadette's Catholic Church in Krambach. Its focus was not so much on his great literary success, but on Les as a person – a family man, and one who loved his home district.

Les was interested in his family history and I was very pleased when he allowed me to republish two of his poems, *Spital Tower* and *My Ancestress and the Secret Ballot*, in my biography of our common ancestor, Isabella Murray.

Les spoke many languages and had a deep understanding of the world's cultures and history. His poetry also strongly reflected his Scottish roots but, as his biographer Peter Alexander noted, he saw "his writing as helping to define, in cultural and spiritual terms, what it means to be an Australian" and describes how the beauty of the Bunyah area "forms a backdrop to many of Murray's best poems".

Alexander also remarked on the fact that Les identified "with the underprivileged, especially the rural poor" and had a "strong sense of unity with Aborigines and with 'common folk'".

For more information on Les Murray, see *Of Greater Worth than Gold*, page 71.

## Marie Saxby



The Murray Clan Society lost a faithful and long-time supporter with the passing of Marie Saxby on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2019. Marie was born on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1941 to Elmo and Madge Murray. She grew up in the Burrell Creek / Krumbach area but spent time as a governess at Tottenham before enlisting in the army.

In 1964 she married Archie Saxby and they spent their lives dairying at Kundibakh until retiring to Taree almost 16 years ago. Marie loved country music and won many prizes at local shows with her knitting and crocheting.

Marie was laid to rest in Bo Bo Creek Cemetery at Burrell Creek.

Marie is survived by her three sons Nigel, Faron and Niall and their families.

(My thanks to Marie's sister Libby Mather for assistance with this notice.)

## “Auld Acquaintance”



Our Clan Commissioner Warwick Murray represented the Murray Clan at *Clans on the Coast* at Nelson Bay on 21<sup>st</sup> September.

A fit-looking 92 year-old gentleman saw his name tag, and said, “I taught a Warwick Murray once.”

The gentleman was Jim Murdoch, who did indeed teach Warwick at Taree High School back in 1959. The conversation took off from there...

Pictured: Jim's wife Jean, Jim, Warwick.

## Vandalism at The Bight Cemetery

Many Murrays originating from the Manning district have relatives in the picturesque, heritage-listed cemetery at The Bight, just outside Wingham. In March 2015 we reported on the restoration of the grave of Alexander Lobban, one of the founders of Wingham and ancestor of a large family of Murrays through the marriage of his daughter Margaret to George Murray. The restoration was carried out by Warwick Murray and his son Cameron, a stonemason.

In early August this year, workers from Midcoast Council were sent to the cemetery to check on whether there were any graves that might be in danger of falling over. It was Work Health and Safety issue.

However, the Council employees, apparently unsupervised, went on a vandalism spree, smashing and destroying graves that were in no possible danger to anyone, including many low-set, sloping headstones. Brass plaques were jemmied off and thrown aside. The restored Lobban stone was uprooted, its obviously fresh concrete foundation gleaming in the sun.

Members of the Murray Clan Committee visited the cemetery a few days after the destruction, on 10<sup>th</sup> August, and the place resembled a bomb site. The modest, sloper (or “desk tablet”) memorial to my great uncle, “Saddler Jack” Murray and his wife Margaret Clara (nee Somerville), that was as solid as the day it was laid in 1917, had been forcibly detached from its concrete base.

About 70 graves were vandalised by the council workers. The Council has admitted responsibility, but a letter of apology from the Mayor, David West, has angered many of the recipients because it refers to “head stones at risk” being “laid down”, the purpose of the program being to “address public safety concerns”, and admitting only that some stones were “incorrectly laid down”. There has been a disconcerting reluctance to acknowledge the extent of the destruction.

If any readers of this item have relatives in The Bight Cemetery, the Council has a website that you can visit: <https://www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/Part-of-your-everyday/Council-Projects/The-Bight-Cemetery-Wingham-repair-program>. The Council has undertaken to repair the damaged graves, and has announced that \$60,000 of the cost will be covered by the Council’s insurance.

At a meeting of about 200 people, held at the Wingham Bowling Club, which I attended, the Council undertook to hold an independent inquiry into the incident. However, we now find that the identity of the independent investigator is to be kept secret and the terms of reference will be also kept secret. Originally, the report was to be presented to a closed meeting of Council (to keep it secret) but some Councillors are opposing even that concession, so it is likely that we will never know what management failures led to the fiasco, what disciplinary action has been taken, or what the Council will have learned from the inquiry. We may never know any more than we do now.

Here is how the ABC reported the incident:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-07-31/gravestones-knocked-down-in-name-of-safety-upsets-relatives/11367020>

Many residents have expressed concern at the lack of accountability of Midcoast Council for the conduct of its employees and the policy of extreme secrecy that has been adopted. We hope that the Council will at least fulfil its commitment to restoring the vandalised graves where possible.



The vandalised grave of John 'Saddler Jack' Murray and his wife Margaret Clara, nee Somerville.



Damage to the graves of early members of the Lobban family

Some examples of the destruction:



A brass plaque was ripped from this monument

Not even new graves were spared:



## Internet Clips

Some interesting short clips:

1. Andre Rieu's performance of Amazing Grace in Amsterdam (with a Scottish flavour)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DI7RVNEKP08>

2. A remarkable lifting effort

<https://videosift.com/sports/video/The-Ardblair-Stones-with-Andrew-Cairney-Lifting-all-9-Stones>

3. Scottish scenes set to music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXK-pRivCbl>

## Year of Scotland in Australia 2020

Next year people of Scottish heritage will be celebrating the **Year of Scotland Australia 2020 (YOSA)**. It is being announced as the largest ever presentation of Scottish music, food and drink that our nation has seen.

There will be over 200 events taking place in Australia featuring bands from Scotland. Participating venues and festivals include Sydney Opera House, Woodford Folk Festival, The National Festival, the National Celtic Festival, Port Fairy and many others. Hundreds of Scottish musicians, including some well-known names, will travel to Australia to perform over 12 months.

A more detailed announcement is being made on the 28th of November and we will include this information in our next Newsletter.

In Scotland, the initiative is being managed by Showcase Scotland Expo and is supported by the Scottish Government, Visit Scotland (the tourist board) and Creative Scotland. In Australia there are several partners involved, and the events are being coordinated by Una McAlinden, Director of the National Celtic Festival.

Lisa Whytock, Producer of Showcase Scotland Expo, has written from Scotland:

*"Hi everyone, we are extremely excited that this year is taking place and are very keen to link up with all Scottish based organisations to make sure you are aware of the year, informed about its activities and that we include all of your activities in our marketing of the year. There may also be some opportunities for the Scottish artists who are coming over to perform in your communities. It is certainly likely that with the number of musicians that are coming to Australia there will be something going on close to you. The Scottish diaspora and community groups and organisations are extremely important to us and we very much hope to connect with you throughout the year."*

The Murray Clan Committee will be discussing our possible involvement at our next Committee Meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> November.

You can sign up for YOSA email newsletter on their website at

<http://yearofscotlandaustralia2020.com/>.

## 40 Years of the Murray Clan Society

*Reflections on 40 years of the Murray Clan Society on the occasion of the annual gathering on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019.*

Tonight we reflect on 40 years of the Murray Clan Society. It doesn't seem 40 years since 600 of us gathered on the riverbank at Wingham for the family reunion. I was there, and met for the first time many of the people who had worked hard to organise and advertise the reunion. Those I didn't meet on the day I met at those early meetings that formalised the establishment of the Clan Society. I'm talking about people like Kath Murray, Eunice Capple, Evie and Alan Martin, Lily Sambell, Joyce Kidd, Alec Murray, Alice Gleeson, Bob Murray, Angus Murray, Les Murray, Malcolm Murray, Harry Murray.

Of the other leading figures, I'd known Fred Murray, of course, since I was born, and had known Joan Murray since my days at Newcastle University.

When I gave the eulogy at Alec Murray's funeral nearly three years ago, I made reference to the fact that I would not have had the immense privilege of knowing Alec Murray, Heather and Pam had it not been for the Murray Clan Society. I'm sure you could all echo the thought that we have all enjoyed wonderful friendships as a result of the formation and existence of the Clan Society. I looked back over the signatures in the Visitors' Book the other day and reflected on the many outstanding people who have been a part of the organisation over the years, very few of whom I would have otherwise known.

The Society has helped countless people find where they fit in the Murray family tree – more like a forest really – a task which is now much harder with the passing of people like Lily Sambell and Alec Murray who seemed to know everyone and where they fitted in.

One of the great early achievements was the publication of the book "The History of the Australian Murrays from Roxburghshire, Scotland" in 1981. Written in the days before computers and the internet, it was an excellent family history and had involved a prodigious amount of work. Many family histories of the time were little more than family trees, but this book set the early history of the family in the historical context of pioneering life in Australia. My father Fred did much of the research and Joan did most of the actual writing. They donated the profits from the sale of the book to the Clan Society, which did a lot to help establish the organisation on a secure financial basis. Supplies of the book are now exhausted, but I hope that by the next time we meet, we will have scanned the book and uploaded it to the Clan website where it will be available for everyone to read.

Some time after the publication of that book, Alec came across a letter that had somehow fallen into the back of a cupboard, I think behind some drawers. It was a letter that Isabella Murray had received from Scotland in 1852, and I immediately recognised its importance. It revealed a great deal about Isabella's background in Scotland, her religious beliefs and other information that we didn't know about her. I felt that this information needed to be expanded and permanently preserved for her descendants, so off I went to Scotland to find out everything I could about the letter, the man who wrote it, and the Scottish heritage of Isabella and her husband, John. The result was the little book that I know many of you have read. The point I'm making is that if it were not for the Clan Society, I would never have known of that letter and few people would ever have known of the lovely story behind it. The letter has enabled us to see into the kind of person Isabella was.

Another important piece of family history has been Darryl Murray's excellent history of the family of Hugh Murray and Margaret Beattie. It serves as a model of what can be done.

Having been asked to reflect on the 40 years of the Clan, I thought of talking about the wonderful gatherings at Camphouse at Killawarra, the early Murray church services, the picnics, our growing association with Bonnie Wingham, the speakers we have enjoyed, our friendship with the Earl and late Countess of Dunmore, visits to old Murray homesteads like *Gowan Brae*. Who could forget the hospitality of Bob and Bert at their wonderful old home and shed? There is a lot of nostalgia in all this.

But what I decided to emphasise, and what has been most important to me, is the people who make up the Clan. No amount of organisation or planning or publishing will achieve anything without people on board. So I would like to thank every one of you for being here. You are the Clan Society. Thank you for your support. Thank you for reading our somewhat irregular newsletters. Thanks to the Committee for keeping everything going. Obviously the next 40 years will be very different, especially considering the average age of the Committee. Nevertheless, I believe that the Clan Society can continue to serve a productive purpose, and I hope it continues to do so.

*Ross Murray*

### Just for fun



(Reproduced with kind permission of Marty Mouse House)



Old Lang Sign (Timeline photos)



## Clever Scot

The rain was pouring down outside McGregor's Glasgow Pub.

There standing in front of a big puddle outside the pub was an old Scotsman, drenched, holding a stick, with a piece of string dangling in the water.

A passerby stopped and asked him, "What are you doing?"

"Fishing" replied the old man.

Feeling sorry for the old man, the gentleman said, "Come in out of the rain and have a drink with me".

In the warmth of the pub, as they sipped their whiskies, the curious gentleman thought he could have a bit of fun at the old man's expense and asked, "So how many have you caught today?"

"You're the 8<sup>th</sup>," he replied.

## Finally

Thanks to all who came to the gathering this year. We really enjoy your company and interest in our family and heritage.

There will not be another Newsletter until the new year, so I will wish you all the best for Christmas and express the hope that we will see you again next year.

Remember that we always welcome articles about family history and other interesting stories.

We also still have copies of the book *Of Greater Worth than Gold: The History and Legacy of Isabella Murray*. Contact me at [murrayr46@gmail.com](mailto:murrayr46@gmail.com) if you would like a copy.

Ross Murray

President