

Soundings

EDEN KILLER WHALE MUSEUM

Established 1931

Special Newsletter April, 2024

SNIPPETS OF THE LIFE AND TIMES OF OLD TOM (POST MORTEM)

The old saying 'everything stops for tea', is now long gone from everyday speak. But not at 184 Imlay Everything **will** stop for "T", as in Old Tom. The Museum will close between 15th and 21st, April for the long planned movement of the skeleton within the building. This move also creates an opportunity to undertake a variety of other desirous conservation tasks. Exclusion of the public is necessary for their safety and no less importantly, the security of the greatest treasure in our trove.

The programme has been in the planning stage, back to the concept of the building extension. Visitor figures were showing a trending increase and with that, on group visits particularly, open space was presenting as a problem. With the advent and with increase of cruise vessels, so were our corresponding numbers. Upwards to 500 became the norm. Visitor comfort was taxed by crowding. Particularly in Davidson Gallery where all must pass for access to other sections. The problem became acute.

To accommodate this, an extension on the ocean side was agreed upon and the task of bringing it about began. The work began. Looking for supplementary grant money, necessary permissions, engaging a planner letting tenders for various works, at the most suitable passenger lift, power loads and the list goes. While it seemed tough at times, it all went reasonably smoothly. As it turned out, good fortune was on our side and our timing was textbook.

We had not long let the contract to build, when the onset of bushfires, pandemic, staff difficulties all seemingly reared their ugly heads, together increasing the load on the Board. In a discussion with the ultimate successful tenderer, "to not leave it too long to decide who should do the job, that materials and tradies etc. could be booked to present a smooth operation. It turned out to be sage advice. Had we delayed, we would have been involved shortage of both and the steep 'rocketing costs of both.

We chose well in the builder, Leserbuild. The job went smoothly, with site manager and tradies great examples of their calling and the within agreed terms.



Some few ago, before covid and fires we sought advice from an experienced display designer/exhibition builder firm as to where and how we might go forward. It was a costly, slowly delivered result. We were disappointed.

With the completion of the build, came the excitement of that part programme. We had added display space and importantly, for the first time, a lift, making ease of access to all floors comfortable for the elderly and disabled. Thoughts turned to maximising the advantages we had created.

EKWM Soundings 2023

Tom's Travels

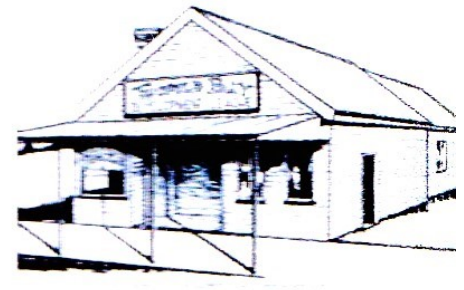
(Post Mortem)

When you want to do many things today, by the time all the permissions etc. are sought, twelve months are easily spent, notwithstanding the instant communications, the rapid transport and the rapid transport.

Think of the isolation in 1931, of Eden and in the country in the depth of financial depression, a number of blokes got together to follow up the four months after the carcass was identified, put OLD TOM on display and found a way of doing it. got to vision of John Ronaldson Logan.

Those Founders of '30/ '31, never cease to hold my admiration. The first Committee was formed, several also having been active members of the Twofold Bay Development League. Ha

They agreed that people would pay to see the skeleton. They took up JRL's invitation to show Old Tom in the TFB Dev League rooms, situated in (now) 197 Imlay St, opposite the Hotel Australasia. The site was re-developed c1977, by Al Armstrong, taking experienced furniture/ furnishing friend, "Paddy" Marriott into the business with him



Tom was to spend the next eight years on this display site. During this time the Committee was active in looking for a suitable site for a stand alone building to serve as a museum, might be built.

With support from the Imlay Shire Council a Crown Land site was obtained and designated as being for "museum purposes". And so it remains, today. The committee of management became a Committee of Council and remained that way until the late eighties when it incorporated as a separate entity.

1939 arrives and the Museum building on the current site is ready for occupation with Tom to transition to the new site. George Davidson was paid thirty bob (\$3), to undertake this task. Thus began a forty year occupation in that small 36ft (11.2m) x 24ft (7.3m) as the prime exhibit, a cap that it still wears. The number of people who have come to see Old Tom as their prime reason, would be countless. S

So too, came the second world war. Being a coastal town, particularly, residents had bigger worries on their minds. Later Charlie Corry and Jim Davidson opened the Museum for a time and there were periods when there was nobody available. One former President told me he would, on request, throw the keys to a visitor, invite them to "go and have a look, then drop the keys back to me when you are finished". Such were the days of yesterday.



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Bert Egan district born, and twice wounded WW1 veteran. He retired from driving trams on Sydney streets. to come home to the peace of the town from which he left as a youth to volunteer for war service. He would recall travelling with his bullock teamster father, to keep the supply lines open to places like the Yambulla gold mines and Nangutta Station.

Berti Lawrence Melbourne Egan J.P. dedicated the rest of his life to EKWM. His stories captured the imagination of the visitors. Woe betide if you tried to sneak out before he finished his spiel. He chose items to accompany Tom for exhibition.

Bert became alarmed at a suggestion that Tom be let go to an out of the town body.

Tom's post mortem longevity(??) was assisted by the provision of an enclosure, crude though it might be looking from 21st century eyes, but quite effective in keeping the transfer of any foreign human substances. It was made of chain wire, water pipe and Downee fittings.



Circa 1980, we engaged a chap from a Sydney university to dismantle the skeleton to clean and undertake any conservation work. He carried out that as requested and "treated" the bones with (from memory), powdered PVA and alcohol, assuring us that the work could be reversed if need be in the light of future methods. I need to remember volunteer, the late Louis Simpson who stayed with this job throughout'.

It came to the knowledge of Cocks Bros that we would dearly like to have a new cabinet for Tom, to highlight the unique place that Tom hold in the very soul of Eden. Without hesitation, the cheque book was on the table to cover the cost for us. We engaged Whiter Bros to design and make to unit for us. It has stood us in good stead for forty years..... It was with fear and trepidation that we put the extra four metre piece of glass on top of the main frame to again, keep bare hands of the head. We envisaged all sorts of calamities if the glass was broken. I can stop worrying now. After forty years, we have not had to replace it once!

There were lingering feelings of a grant promised for a new building. But not fulfilled. So we did, what Eden has continued to do. That is hop in and do it the hard way. Thus operation Newhot (new home for old Tom) was launched to raise funds for just that ambition.

We raised a fair amount of money, I can't really remember the total figure. We ran the usual score card of country fund chasers with raffles, lucky envelopes, Queen competition , Jenny Whiter, (now Drenkhahn) won this being the highest fundraiser among the girls who entered. We organised two walkathons to the top of Mt Imlay, which was a lot of fun. Wow! High tech! We borrowed portable communication units to maintain connection along the track. One of the Helmore boys conquered the mountain in a time that I have forgotten. Believe me. It would take some beating. The figure I do remember is that of \$14,000 from the Back to Eden efforts

So with six members happy to put their name to a loan document with the Bank of NSW, we were off into unchartered waters but keen to embrace any ill wind that we might encounter on the way. They had no need. The debt was settled well before the agreed date.

The job was set to tender, the successful builders were Whiter Bros. The headline that was to follow in the Magnet was, \$140,000 extension opened was the sweetest enjoyed by those involved. Te

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The vertebrae in the photo is a "Tom's eye view" of the old Museum. A closer view by the old hands reminds of the giant step forward when we had the bare floor boards sanded and "polished", which was certainly aesthetically, a major improvement but importantly to us, easier to keep the dust under better control. The welfare of the skeleton even then was carried out to the best of our knowledge and ability. Visitor numbers were increasing and with little paved pathways outside, dust was a major problem



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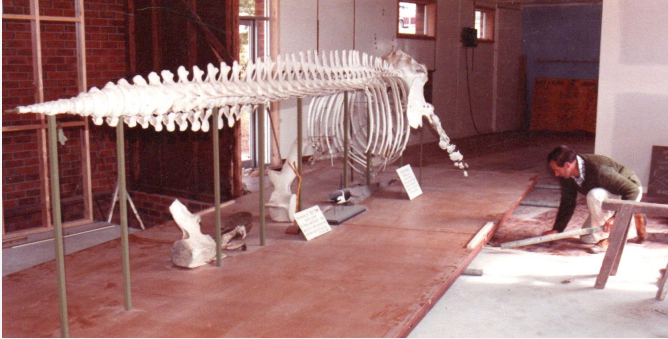
So with six members happy to put their name to a loan document with the Bank of NSW, we were off into uncharted waters, but keen to embrace any ill wind that we might encounter on the way. The people had no need to worry about their cash security, the debt was settled well before the agreed date.

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Bert didn't live long after officially opening the new wing. Loyal to the last, he worked at the Museum until the last person of the day exited, walked home, sat down for tea, collapsed and passed away.



So Tom was on a journey to his second position on this site of honour in the new wing. So the wonderful "new" Tom cabinet had to be pulled apart for removal. Of course we had no lifting gear and were conscious that the base would have to be moved with its contents attached. With caution not to have things off level we gathered up lengths of waterpipe. We rolled and coaxed Tom to his new position. He looked quite approving of our efforts. The picture shows Rob Whiter with bar,

probably changing direction slightly to land on the appropriate situation. The ability to undertake regular inspection and maintenance was enhanced considerably.

A Twofold Bay killer whale needs a whaler's boat alongside. Though fifty years after the last whale was harvested in TFB, Bert thought that there could be, somewhere in the area, a whale boat mouldering into decay. Hope springs eternal. So I drove him about on a couple of fruitless searches, until we were told of a former Pambula Surf Club boat laying in the front yard of a house between Pambula and Merimbula. This could be second prize. It could give the idea of that which the shore based whalers used. So it was that it was. That it was given to us and duly took its place alongside Tom

It was suggested to second generation shipwright, Charles Peel retired from the slipway business after some decades, servicing fishing vessels, might consider building a replica Twofold Bay whaler's boat for display at the Museum. Reluctant at first, Charlie took to the idea with a passion, his backyard became his work place.

Meanwhile Rob Whiter searched for plans and was able to procure a set from Boston USA (as I remember) that was as near to our boats as were likely to get. Rob became Charlie's companion for the duration of the programme, taking in all the master of his trade offered. The boat was finished in the colour preferred for the Davidson vessels. Thus the "Beryl" was conceived and built



The surfboat went on to a third, interesting career, but that's a story of its own.

Reluctant as we were to agree, we let one tooth of Tom's go to Canada on the request of a well known institution, to endeavour to age the specimen. emphasising that we wanted it back in short time. It was over two years before it came home and not before expensive and time wasting calls to Canada were made. The result was not as emphatic in its findings as we expected. Quite recently a sample of Tom's DNA was sent to the northern hemisphere for comparison with his resident cousins.

J. Alex. S, McKenzie. was another who came to retire and fell under the spell of Old Tom. An artist of natural talent, his work for exhibitions, tile murals and promotions, were of untold advantage to EKWM, and the town, generally.



Much of Alex's work is still part of our exhibition. The photo shows that which was suspended above Tom. It was popular because it could be easily read by those with poor vision. A bus group could read it as a whole, without the need to move closer.

For thirty odd years, his work has entertained and educated thousands of people who have passed through our doors. His imagination was limitless.



I can remember one Saturday afternoon we were putting together an exhibition highlighted the beatification of Mother Mary McKillop. Casually I said "it's a pity we don't have an image of the port in South Aust, where Mary had landed. About two hours later, after going home, he had painted the image that I wanted, returning saying.

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“be careful, it is still wet”!

The years rolled by during which Tom has photographed, videoed studied and written about. It remains the primary destination of travellers who come to the area.

But Tom was looking forward to the next forty years. There is an old saying in business that here is no such thing as standing still. If you are not going forward you're going backwards.

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And now we're at 15-22 April with the Museum closed to the public for the week. It's Tom's week. In my memory, this is only the third time we have done so for operational purposes. that I can my time..

With contemporary display methods, ease at which poster type units can be created a well as the limitless choice of limitless electronic support units, and with the extensive period envisaged for this “permanent” and most prominent exhibit and its immediate supporting items, the Board agreed to seek professional advice.

With the lifeboat gone, the scene is set for Tom.

It was pleasing to the Board that we able to engage Greg Lissaman's company to undertake the tasks of advising on and and planning the re-siting of Tom and the surrounding galleries.

Greg has had a wide experience in the profession including places like Old Parliament House in the A.C.T. and the often controversial Barangaroo, on Sydney Harbour. His designer is also a local resident He now lives in the Shire and has taken a keen interest in SEHGI. Among which group he is advising (gratis), members, in ways they are able to lift standard. The standardising of collection management computer programmes is largely due to Greg's advice.

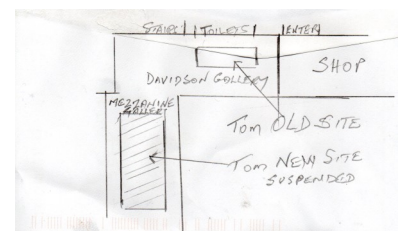
Without doubt it is a huge project. Planning for a smooth exercise has been constantly front and centre Collections Manager, Angela George's desk. With only a week to complete the work, at least to the stage where we can meet the notified re-opening date will be attribute to the organisers

As always, the in house crew has risen to the occasion. The two experienced palaeontologists were also ready and eager to start. By lunch time on the first day, the familiar view of the Davidson Gallery was now unrecognisable. In the dismantling of the Cocks' Bros cabinet, largely dismantled and the area cleared.

My greatest hope is that the warmth that EKWM has shown its visitors over the years, will continue indefinitely.



Greg Lissaman



Back of an envelope location map



Long gone are the wild, rough whaling days
When we led the boats to the whaling frays,
My old bleached bones are preserved and wired;
My dreams—phantasms of which I've tired,
For I have had my day.

J. Alex S. McKenzie

Cheers.....

Jack

