

HISTORY IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOUNTAINS

A journey through the history of the Sapphire Coast

Part 8 – The Towns – Merimbula & Tathra



Merimbula

(maps on the last page)

The Imlay Brothers, who owned land at Bega, Kameruka, Cobargo and south of Twofold Bay also had holdings in Merimbula. As a result of the economic depression of the early 1840s they lost their Merimbula property to their Sydney bankers, the Walker Brothers, who in turn sold their leases in 1852 to the newly formed Twofold Bay Pastoral Association. Later, Matthew Munn and his family took over the enterprise.

Merimbula began its existence as a private village belonging to the Twofold Bay Pastoral Association, which opened it as a port in 1855. A wheat flour and maize mill was built but eventually the port closed in 1917 due to labour disputes and litigation. All that remains of the original port are two sheds. Allotments of land went on sale in 1860 when the Association was dissolved with the introduction of the Crown Lands Acts. The first ferry service across the lake was established in 1857 and a bridge constructed in 1908. It was replaced with the current bridge in 1935.



Merimbula Bridge 1935

As happened in Eden and Pambula, the discovery of gold in Kiandra stimulated the development of Merimbula and facilities in the town were increased to cope with an influx of up to 200 persons a week. Once again, a gold rush helped a town to grow.

During the gold rush in the 1860s, there was a weekly steamship service and later an eight-horse wagon providing road transport on a weekly basis. After the gold rush finished, the town continued to grow slowly as a service centre for surrounding rural areas.

The town of Merimbula was not gazetted until 1912 and little changed until the 1950s when it first became a popular holiday resort.

Merimbula Wharf



Merimbula Wharf c 1930



Rebuilt Merimbula Wharf

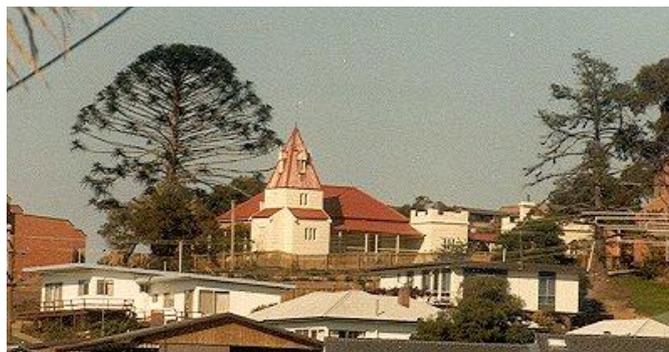
The Merimbula wharf was built in the mid-1800s and operated until 1952 when the last steamer called in. The old wharf was demolished in 1979 but rebuilt as the result of community enthusiasm. It is now a recreational site with magnificent views of Merimbula Bay.

Built heritage in Merimbula

Courunga

'Courunga' is a substantial stone cottage on a commanding hilltop site. The cottage was built in about 1870 by Matthew Munn. It contains elaborate joinery and originally had a shingle roof. Later additions were the cast iron stanchions and, in 1880, an extraordinary Victorian Gothic corner tower of timber construction, together with two Gothic pavilions also of timber, one a kitchen, both complete with castellated parapets. 'Courunga' is listed on the NSW State Heritage Register.

The Munn name is synonymous with the development of Merimbula as the family had large holdings and milling operations in the district that were central to the economy of the early town. The physical prominence and landmark status of 'Courunga' (also called 'Munn's Towerhouse') reflect the social and economic prominence of the Munn family in Merimbula in the period of its early development.



'Courunga', or Munn's Towerhouse

Former School and Residence

In 1875 a school and residence were built at 85-87 Main Street. The building was a single-storey construction of hewn sandstone walls and originally had a shingle roof, but this was later replaced with corrugated iron. It is currently a museum managed by the Merimbula-Imlay Historical Society. See:

<http://thebegavalley.org.au/oldschoolmuseum.html>



The Old School Museum Merimbula

Tathra

Following an 1851 inquiry into the transport system serving the NSW south coast, the Illawarra and South Coast Steam Navigation Company was formed from the amalgamation of various shipping enterprises.

Tathra came into existence as a small jetty which served as a shipping outlet for a group of Bega Valley farmers led by Daniel Gowing. Gowing had offered financial reward to anyone willing to ship produce from a place further north of Merimbula, which is 25km to the south of Tathra. The small jetty was replaced in 1862 by another wharf using funds donated by local farmers and the shipping company. The wharf was built of native turpentine timber (a relative of eucalyptus) with its piles embedded in solid rock. The site was chosen because the adjacent headland provided shelter from southerly winds. It was the only site suitable between Merimbula and Bermagui.

The Tathra township was surveyed in 1861 and regular shipping commenced in 1862 when the wharf was built. Passengers travelled to and from Sydney with pigs and other produce – the origin of its contemporary fame as the 'Pig and Whistle Line'.

The region's population increased after Crown lands were opened up for free selection in 1861. The region's growth is mirrored in the expansion of the wharf. The shipping company built a cargo shed in 1866 and increased use led to the enlargement of the wharf several times - in 1873, 1878, 1886, 1889, 1903 and 1912. A cattle yard was built in 1901, the existing two-storey shed was constructed in 1907 and a jib crane added in 1912.

The steamer service was crucial to the region because of the absence of a railway line and poor roads. The Princes Highway from Batemans Bay to the Victorian border was still a gravel surface in 1940. The bridge over the Clyde River at Batemans Bay replaced the punt in 1956, the year south coast shipping finally ceased.

Tathra Wharf heritage

Tathra Wharf is listed on the Register of the National Estate and the NSW State Heritage List because it is the only surviving wharf and building complex on east coast Australia that dates from the 1860s coastal shipping period.

The wharf is an excellent example of a marine building constructed entirely from hardwood. It has architectural consistency in detailing and construction. The basic structure is timber decking and superstructure supported on timber piles into a rock seabed to a maximum depth of 7.6 metres. At the inshore end the structure terminates on a stone and concrete retaining wall finishing well above mean high water level. On the western half of the wharf are two timber-framed structures. An original two-storey shed is at the landward end and a single-storey shed, built about the turn of the 19th century, abuts the larger shed. The larger shed has interesting roof trusses with a monitor scissor truss. All timbers are constructed with traditional jointing and metal fasteners. The construction of the wharf and the sheds are of a high standard of craftsmanship typical of the period.

The landscape setting of the wharf and structures is little changed, allowing the visitor to visualise it in its heyday. The small promontory, which is mostly parkland, gives extensive views up and down the coast, especially to the north. There is a popular restaurant in the wharf building.



Tarthra Wharf today



Farewelling World War 1 recruits from the Tathra Wharf



Merimbula (Google Earth)



Tathra (Google Earth)