

2004 - Establishing the Tweed River Regional Museum

In 2004 the three Historical Societies of Tweed Heads, Murwillumbah and Uki and South Arm in the Tweed Shire of Northern NSW made history. After extensive discussion and negotiation over a number of years, they entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Tweed Shire Council to ensure a future for their collections and a sustainable model for ongoing research and preservation of the rich history of the Tweed Valley.

This MOU tackled one of the most difficult issues facing historical societies around Australia: How, in the face of very limited resources, growing collections and a dwindling volunteer population do communities continue to house, preserve and promote the collections of many decades.

At the core of the ground-breaking agreement developed in the Tweed was a commitment to sharing responsibility. The Historical Societies transferred ownership of the collections to Council: in return Council committed to providing professional staff, operational support and dedicated Museum facilities. The parties further agreed to work in partnership to manage the future of the newly created Tweed River Regional Museum (TRRM). In 2013, the Museum changed its name to Tweed Regional Museum.

2004 - 2011

Following the development of a Tweed Regional Museum Strategic Plan and its adoption by Council (2004), employment of staff (2004/5) and the adoption of a Collection Policy (2006/7), work began on developing new Museum facilities and on major new projects.

As planning toward a new TRM building at Tweed Heads continued, albeit slowed by planning and funding issues, major exhibition and publication projects documenting the rich and diverse history of the Shire were completed:

- *Our Valley our People: the early years of the Tweed Shire* (exhibition, 12 March - 22 April 2006)
- *The Other Side of the World: International Migration to the Tweed 1940s to 1960s* (publication 2007)
- *Families of Fortune: Chinese People in the Tweed* (publication, 2009)
- *Caravans and Communes: Stories of Settling in the Tweed 1970s and 1980s* (publication, 2011)
- *Sweet Harvests: stories of Indian and South Sea Islander workers in the sugar cane and banana industries, Tweed Valley Northern NSW* (DVD, 2011)

At the same time, new policies and procedures were introduced to help bring together the separate collecting activities of the Historical Societies under the combined umbrella of the TRM.

2011

A combined collection storage facility

In 2011 it became clear that planning and zoning challenges impacting on the chosen site for the TRRM at Tweed Heads would further delay construction of that facility. The Tweed Shire Council therefore decided to focus on redevelopment of the Museum at Murwillumbah in the first instance, and on construction of a dedicated purpose-built collection storage facility to service Museum collection storage needs across the Shire.

Collection Assessment and Relocation project - Murwillumbah

The net result of this decision was the need to pack up the entire collection (estimated at around 8,000 objects) housed at the Museum in Murwillumbah and to relocate it into storage so that renovation and construction work on the Murwillumbah Museum could commence.

The respective deadlines for these projects (both overlapping in 2012) meant that the Assessment and Relocation project needed to be completed within a year. The project was mainly reliant for its 'people power' on volunteer resources.

Hence the need to develop an approach and a document that described the task, set out specific stages and provided logical and workable systems and process. We also needed to maximise every opportunity to value add to the body of existing knowledge about the collection.

This manual was developed at the outset to achieve these goals. With some modifications, it has largely done what it was designed to do and served the project well. We therefore felt it was worth sharing.

The manual provided a ready point of reference for volunteers and staff alike. It incorporated changes and updates to 'how things were done'; it served to introduce new participants to the project, and to give those who weren't sure about their potential interest, an idea of what was required. It also provided all involved with a ready reference as well as 'how to' guides to refresh the memory from one week to the next.

As indicated in the following introduction, the process designed for the Tweed Regional Museum drew on projects that had gone before and adapted these to our particular circumstances.

Other important preliminaries which proved invaluable were:

- A pilot stage which 'road tested' the planned procedures with volunteers and incorporated feedback; and
- Practical workshops for all those who put a hand up to be involved.

These workshops, conducted by Conservator Christine Ianna and Curator and Collection Manager Lisa Jones, put everyone 'on the same page'. The pragmatic, professional and empowering approach to conservation and collection management which is the cornerstone of Lisa and Christine's practice gave volunteers and staff alike a sense that the project was within everyone's grasp and - happily - so it proved.

We began the project with 13 volunteers and finished with 15 each committing to a consistent 4-5 hours per week on one day each week. These teams developed a real report and with a few exceptions to cater to the vagaries of life and travel commitments, almost all were still there at the end - and we also added some new volunteers.

Vital stats at the end of the intensive phase of the project in November 2012 give an idea of the scale of the project:

- 6,088 collection objects 'datasheeted' and photographed and this information loaded into a new Collections Management System (Vernon);
- 284 boxes - of various sizes packed;
- 15 volunteers who contributed in excess of 4,730 hours (a conservative estimate) and were still smiling.



Volunteers after receiving certificates of appreciation from Tweed Shire Mayor Councillor Barry Longland at the opening of the Museum store on 20 November 2012.

The Manual

I have left the Manual largely 'as it was written' at the beginning of the project. Things did change and evolve as we went on. It became apparent for instance that we would not be able to achieve some of what we set out to do due to time and resource constraints. Other aspects which we felt at the beginning might need to go by the wayside seemed to go very smoothly.

To provide a sense of this evolving process I've included reflections, commentary and some images within the text to give a sense of this evolution. I think this is the most useful way of passing on knowledge gained from the experience.

We have included Council-specific documents such as the Safe Work Method Statements (SWMS). Other organisations will have their own versions of these. Legislative requirements governing responsibility for safe workplaces, particularly where volunteers are active are becoming more formalised and require clear processes and attention.

Our motivation for making this tome - warts and all - available online is the hope that for any of you undertaking a similar task - even in part - it may make the journey just a little bit easier!

Judy Kean
Museum Director, Tweed Regional Museum, November 2012

Please contact us for additional information about the project jkean@tweed.nsw.gov.au (02) 6670 2500.

Acknowledgements

Project Volunteers

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Museum Staff

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Contributors

Andy's Removals
TSC Pest Management Team
TSC 'Town Gang', Carpenters, Traffic Control team, Franner driver

Celebrate!



Celebrating object 1000 - March 2012



Object 5000 - October 2012



and 6000 - November 2012

