



# Moruya's Newspapers and the people who ran them. Part 3.

by Wendy Simes

## The Moruya Liberal



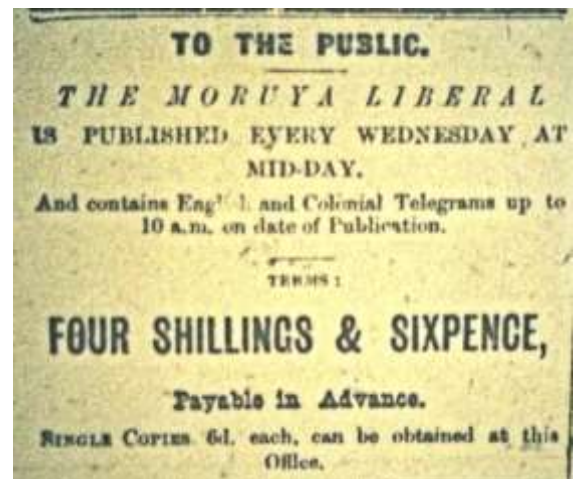
### Robert Burgess

Robert Burgess started the Moruya Liberal in October 1878, prior to this he had also started the Milton and Ulladulla Times. In February 1880 he had sold the papers to John Hobbs who was also not able to make a success of it.

In 1878 Robert Burgess was insolvent with liabilities of £458/1/11 and assets of £17/6/0<sup>1</sup> which explains his need to sell the paper and move on. Robert was always a man on the move editing or owning many newspapers in both NSW and Queensland.

He was born in Wollongong and was said to have done his apprenticeship with the Illawarra Mercury before moving to Bega to work on the Bega Gazette.<sup>2</sup> Here he met and married Harriett Read in 1865.

Harriet was the sister of the Read brothers, Horrex, Charles and Albert who settled in the Tilba area.



Robert started the Bombala Times in 1863 before moving to the Bega Gazette. By 1870 he had relocated to the Hunter Valley area where he was involved in a number of different newspapers including the Singleton Times and the Times Murrurundi, before moving up to New England with the Tenterfield Star and Tenterfield Independent. From here he moved back to the South Coast and established himself at Milton and Moruya.

The 1880's saw him in Queensland where he was involved again with a number of different papers. He died in Ipswich in April 1889.

Like many local newspaper proprietors he managed to get involved in litigation. One well reported matter happened during his time in Moruya and was reported rather gleefully in other areas he had worked. The Moruya Examiner reported the following:

*“Intense excitement was created in our usually quiet and orderly township on Thursday evening upon hearing frantic cries of “murder” proceeding from the direction of the bridge. But laughter soon gave way to consternation when the crowd which had been attracted by the cries found out that it was only the landlord of*

<sup>1</sup> Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser 5<sup>th</sup> December 1878

<sup>2</sup> The Qld years of Robert Burgess by Ken Sanz. Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Qld v.14, no. 8 Aug 1991.

a well known and popular hostelry settling accounts in his own peculiar way with Mr Burgess, the editor of the *Moruya Liberal*, who had been guilty of writing and publishing some very nasty strictures upon his domestic affairs, and also most damaging reports respecting his famed draught sire, “Invincible”; and as “mine host” of the “Big Bonanza Hotel” is much more familiar with the use of the whip than the pen, he chose his weapon in accordance with his taste.”

Robert writes his version of the attack in his paper of the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1879 titling it “A brutal Assault upon the Editor of the *Liberal*.” The second paragraph of his article however is devoted to elaborating that the day of the assault was his wedding anniversary which he had forgotten so we can only surmise that he did not receive much sympathy when he returned home with his injuries. He refers to Martin Keating as “his wood-be assassin” who attacked him with a shot whip. (A short whip has a conical leather tube filled with lead shot.) The Magistrates Court does not however appear to have taken the matter very seriously and did not judge it to be attempted murder and saw no need to refer the case to the Braidwood Court. The full transcript of what he wrote in his paper follows on page 13 for those interesting in reading further. It gives us some idea of the tension in the town between the Temperance movement and the local publicans.

In referring to the incident the Singleton Argus gives a description of Mr Burgess who they obviously did not like. “Most residents of Murrurundi, Tamworth and Tenterfield will remember a florid complexioned, red haired, rather small man, a sort of diminutive Rufus – who used to run the Murrurundi Times. He made things rather unsettled for many of his acquaintances in the sweet valley of the Page, and libel actions were a sort of perennial product of his pen.”<sup>3</sup>

The Allora Guardian who reported his death said “Burgess who recently gave up the ghost in Ipswich, was the Tom Stylus of Australia, having established more papers than any other pressman in this part of the world. The North Rockhampton Times is an offspring.”



His wife Harriett, sons Robert and Alfred and daughter Eveline had all been trained in the running of a newspaper and all carried on in the newspaper industry after his death. In 1902 Harriett, Alfred and Eveline moved to Byron Bay and established the Byron Bay Record with Harriett living in Byron Bay in 1922 at the time of her death. Her body was returned to Central Tilba for burial with her family.

Alfred and Eveline inherited their uncle Horrex Read’s property “Haxstead” in 1924 and moved down to the property. Eva continued to live at “Haxstead” with the help of her nephew Victor Burgess until her death at age 92 in 1959.

## John Hobbs

John Hobbs brought the *Moruya Liberal* from Robert Burgess in February 1880 but the paper ceased publication very soon after, with the last issue on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1880. Mr. Hobbs and his family featured in our Journal of September 2013 with the story of their journey to Wagonga with Captain Moonlite.

On arrival in Sydney John who was well educated secured a job with the Sydney School of Arts. In 1867 he resigned this position to move his family to a property of 640 acres he had purchased at Wagonga Inlet, in the area now known as Hobbs Bay and Hobbs Point. Though he tried a number of things including mulberry trees and silk worms he was not a successful farmer. Unfortunately he was also not a successful newspaper editor.

He sold his original property and bought “Merriwingah” at Wallaga Lake but he mainly earned his living from Government appointments – as Mining Registrar for the Montreal Goldfields, Clerk of Petty Sessions at Milton and other Government positions.<sup>4</sup> He did not venture into the Newspaper industry again.

<sup>3</sup> Singleton Argus and Upper Hunter General Advocate 26<sup>th</sup> November 1879

<sup>4</sup> Narooma’s Past – steamers, sawmills and salmon by Laurelle Pacey.

## The Horse whipping of Robert Burgess Editor of the Moruya Liberal As reported in the Moruya Liberal November 5 1879

### A BRUTAL ASSAULT UPON THE EDITOR OF THE LIBERAL

Under the most genial circumstances the editorial chair is not a peaceful realm wherein to rest the wearied limbs. Its occupant is a man born to trouble, and is subject to every conceivable annoyance; but in this peaceful land of Australia, his life is generally held sacred and is tolerably free from the insults of villainous ones and murderous dogs who infest the earth. Were it not so bloodshed would be the inevitable result, as writers would be forced to carry weapons suitable to prostrate miscreants. But thanks to a judicious law, hitherto the uncorrupted atmosphere of sunny New South Wales has not been fettered with the carrion of cowardly skunks in human form, who are wont to steadily prowl about under the mantle of darkness, armed with bludgeons, to assail and murder an unwary and unarmed foe. During the past week Moruya has immortalised itself in this respect. The editor of this Journal was murderously attacked last Thursday evening and no doubt were it not for friendly aid he would have shuffled off his mortal coil and would now have been the undisputed occupant, free from payment of the inevitable peppercorn, unembarrassed from taxes, proof against foreign invasion, of all that piece or parcel of land, situated in the County of Dampier, containing by measurement 6 feet by 2, more or less, to enjoy and hold the same till the day of judgement. However man proposes, God disposes.

### THE DAY OF THE OCCURRENCE

On the thirtieth of October, 1879, the anniversary of our wedding day, exactly fourteen years since we placed upon the hand of a blushing bride the golden circle of union, that the memorable epoch in our career, of which we are now writing, occurred. It is a singular co-incidence, and one that taught us a salutary lesson to be more mindful in future of the revolutions of the cycles of time, for we really had been egregiously at fault in forgetting that nuptial period, and not impressing the signet of affection on the brow of her who had taken us for better or worse, as a mark of cherished recognition of the happy return of the day.

### THE WOULD-BE ASSASSIN

Martin Keating was born in the South of Ireland, is uneducated, and uncultivated. He is about 5 feet 9 or 10 inches in height; sullen in anger, cunning in business. He is honest to a degree in his dealings, but selfish beyond measure. He is the proprietor of a drinking shop in Queen-street; is an adept at euchre, and gambling has been carried on almost nightly, or at all times when a few dupes could be mingled together, to join in the game. The chief of the gambling fraternity, the so-called editor of a journal, does not frequently resort there, as cards are not his forte (dice being in the ascendant), hence the house has not been prominent or conspicuous among the more respectable class of black legs who move about in Moruya society. On the evening of the threatened murder we were engaged in a friendly chat on the bridge with the owner of a superior draught stallion. At twilight, or a little after, Martin Keating rode past on a bob-tailed nag, with a peculiar gait, reminding one of a rudderless ship. He was dressed in corduroy knee breeches, silk coat, and was the *beau ideal* of a thorough horsey man. No notice was taken, or even a saluting syllable was uttered. From here Keating appears to have rode direct to his house, from thence proceeded to a neighbouring shop, bought a loaded whip, and then hurried back to the Bridge. Through the deceptive light his form was seen to approach, and it was imagined that he was about to pass. But not so: in the twinkling of an eye, the loaded whip was brandished over our head, and came down on the left temple with pitiless violence. This initiatory amusement was followed by a succession of taps at quick march time. Our unfortunate cranium, not being made of metal of sufficient calibre to withstand this injudicious application of steel, weakened the inner membranes of the shell and a collapse was the speedy result. Keating for the once had all the fun in his own hands, and with boot, fists, and whip, right merrily he appears to have rendered a lively war dance tune upon our prostrate carcass, as our legs dangled on the side of the bridge. Some time ago Martin Keating made himself conspicuous by beating an old lady named Mrs Farrell.

### A MAN COMES TO THE RESCUE

The next realization that flitted through our palsied frame, was the cry of Mr. T. Coxon for help to drag the furious blood-hound away. At length Mr H. Thompson rendered aid, and we escaped, and we believe it is to the courageous, and manly conduct of Coxon we owe our life, who out a crowd of the larrikin type of gallant citizens, he was the only one to be found to seize the ruffian.

### **CONSTABLE WILLIAMS ARRIVES ON THE SCENE**

After sufficient time had elapsed for Keating to execute his nefarious plans, Constable Williams who is domiciled some three hundred yards from the spot, put in appearance at a sluggish pace notwithstanding the frantic cries for help from a female voice in the crowd. He approached Keating who was seething with rage, and making the night hideous by howls and frightful curses and oaths to the effect that he was not an insolvent b\_\_\_\_\_ and that he would murder the b\_\_\_\_\_ b\_\_\_\_\_ etc. To appease and quell the turbulent pet, Williams applied mild words of advice and rebuke, but was answered by a rebuff and a cuff, which disturbed his horizontal. Women clung to his garments, men rallied round but not until Keating had exhausted his vengeance by copious imprecations and expressions of his murderous intent upon us and Mr Coxon, could he be subdued. In the face of all this, however, Williams permitted him to depart to his home in peace. Such is the unvarnished conduct of a prejudiced policeman.

### **JONNY MARTIN SPEAKS**

The notoriety is also a publican, who says his trade had been injured by our interference with his gambling propensities, and referring to a felony that had been committed in his house, and which was compounded by security of a watch being given. Martin is a tall dark individual, with a short head, decorated with coarse curly locks, savouring of the American gentleman, with a restless eye, which can just be distinguished through his heavy lashes and crimped eye-lids. If anything he lacks the courage of Keating. After quietness had succeeded the storm Martin advanced the opinion that Keating ought to have thrown us over the bridge, and if he had been there he would have assisted. At any rate if Keating were fined he would not have to pay it, as Windsor would give a L1, Harkus a L1, and he would contribute what he could afford. This attack, quoth Martin, was only the first of a number that was in store for us. He (continued Martin) is only a Good Templar and deserves all he got.

### **AFTER TOPICS**

Information was conveyed to the Rev. Mr. Love in whose residence enthusiasm prevailed. Mr Harvison was exalted. During the evening he visited the various public houses in Queen Street and “shouted” copious libations. Keating was applauded for his courage. Williams for his chivalry, the crowd for their non-interference to save the life of the grovelling villain, and Coxon denounced for his maudlin pretensions in the aid of suffering humanity.

### **MORE ASSAULTS**

Arising out of above Mr Carew has had to submit to a “rough handling” from Johnny Martin for daring to sympathise with Burgess, whose name in future must not be mentioned except to degrade.

### **WINDSOR DENOUNCES GOOD TEMPLARY**

William Windsor who is another publican, and enjoys the reputation of being the most liberal of his tribe, in the way of attending to his customer’s comforts, etc. But Bill detests Good Templars, and in the beneficence of his soul exclaims, “serves him right”, that is how all Good Templars should be treated.

### **WHY HE DONE IT**

Because we published the following truthful paragraph (evil scallywags have attributed other false motives):- There does not appear to be a brilliant prospect for the renowned “Invincible” stallion, advertised in such glowing terms in our “Locals” this season. The wily, proprietor preferring his room to his company, took him to Sydney last week for the purpose of disposing of him. However the Fates have decided otherwise, the “Invincible” is not to leave us, as his chagrined and disappointed owner was forced to bring him back to his old quarters, which a short time since promised to be his last earthly home.

### **WHAT THE MAGISTRATES THINK**

No grievous bodily harm was inflicted, consequently they refused to send the case to a higher court, which must now assume a different attitude, in order to give the liberal-minded a “chance for glory” in the shape of paying a fine.