



MORUYA AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2024

INTRODUCTION

The Moruya and District Historical Society (MDHS) was established 50 years ago by Harry Louttit and Frank Finlayson (the editor of the Moruya Examiner) at a public meeting in the CWA hall on 14 June 1970. It was then known as the Eurobodalla Historical Society and aimed to cover the whole of the Shire. Other historical societies now exist within the Shire that have localised spheres of principal interest. MDHS interests generally cover the region close to Moruya not including Batemans Bay or Narooma.

In January 1972 the MDHS moved into rented premises at 39 Queen Street, Moruya and opened the Museum. Shortly afterwards, 39 Queen Street was auctioned and the Society was once again seeking a permanent home. With the aid of loans from members, one of two historic semi-detached houses built by Abraham Emmott in 1875 was purchased on 17 April 1976. The name of the Society was also changed to Moruya and District Historical Society at this time. The Society then set about repairing the building in preparation for the establishment of a Museum.

The work of the MDHS still involves maintenance and repair of the building that houses the Museum, as with any building of its age. The Society also maintains other buildings on the site – in particular the Genealogy Research Room and other separate spaces housing significant items in the Society's collection (for example the granite lathe).

Today MDHS has on display many artefacts depicting the history and culture of Moruya and its district, along with a library containing detailed information and documentation on local history and genealogy. There is also an extensive archival collection of information from local businesses and families.

The Museum's collection has been created over many decades and comprises over 6,000 objects. It has the potential to be an outstanding cultural resource about the people, places and history of the area. This includes significant object and photographic collections as well as archives, research files and oral histories.

This Strategic Plan was developed in 2019-20 by the MDHS Management Committee and agreed at the MDHS Committee meeting on 24 June 2020. Its development has been guided by the Society's overarching mission statement:

...to promote the preservation of local history through active conservation, education and involvement of the local community

2020 – A DEFINING YEAR

2020 is a special milestone for the Society marking 50 years since its establishment. . At the beginning of 2020 MDHS was looking forward to celebrating a special milestone to mark 50 years since its inception and had commenced planning several special events. These events would provide an opportunity to bring the community together

after such a devastating summer of fire which saw destruction and damage to homes, businesses, livelihoods and community enterprises.

However, with the emergence of the COVID pandemic March 2020 many plans are now being rethought and delayed to 2021. This Strategic Plan has been drafted in the context of these events and reflects the difficulty of setting timelines at a time when there is some uncertainty about our financial situation in coming months. Importantly, it also affects the availability of our very valued volunteers both in the Museum and the Genealogy Research Room.

The fire emergencies in December 2019 closely followed by the COVID-19 restrictions on community gatherings and building access from March 2020 have had a significant impact on the MDHS operations and resulted in disruption to many of our MDHS activities. Further, these twin emergencies have also imposed a significant financial burden.

We further note that the achievement of many of the objectives of this Plan are subject to the availability of resourcing through grant funding and the time our volunteers are able to make available. The COVID pandemic has impacted on our sustainability and also limited the contribution that volunteers are able to make. Should restrictions on movements, meetings etc reappear our ability to meet some of the objectives laid out in this plan will be severely constrained.

THE BUILDINGS

The heritage-listed building and its grounds operate as a museum, and a separate building houses the well-used Genealogy Room which assists people researching the history of the district generally and also family history.

There are also two other buildings on the property – the Rotary Shed housing a “technology and tools” collection and Shed 2 which is used as storage. A unique display of a granite lathe and associated machinery like that used in the Moruya quarries for the production of the granite pylons on the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the columns of the Sydney GPO, is housed on the site in an open shed on land leased from the Council.

A Preservation Needs Assessment prepared in 2017¹ noted that the Museum, a heritage-listed building is well-maintained and that there were no significant issues such as leaks or other structural issues, although disability access is difficult. The attached Strategic Plan includes some measures which address ongoing maintenance needs of the Museum building. It also addresses the need for significant renewal of drainage from the Genealogy Room, a non-listed building, to prevent flooding and water damage to the collection housed there.

¹ Kay Sonderlund, Preservation Australia Pty Ltd, *Moruya District Historical Society, Preservation Needs Assessment*, June 2017

The Society publishes a quarterly journal, maintains a website and an active blog and other social media featuring local history, extracts from letters and diaries and genealogical resources, and maintains and houses its collection of some 6000 objects, over 5000 photos and extensive local archival records for the district. All activities are staffed wholly by volunteers.

THE COLLECTION

The MDHS collection preserves artefacts, memorabilia, photographs and publications relating to the history and settlement of Moruya and surrounding areas. It is a representation of the way of life of the families in the past dating from the mid 19th century and many items are displayed in the historic house. The Museum provides an opportunity for visitors to step back in time, with each room of the house containing objects appropriate to the building's original use as a home.

The collection also contains records, photographs and artefacts from the granite quarries of Moruya, where stone was quarried for the pylons of the Sydney harbour Bridge, the Cenotaph and the Sydney GPO.

The current Collections Policy 2017-2022 guides the decision making processes for shaping the collections of the Museum. It sets out principles for collecting activity and management processes for museum that should be used in conjunction with appropriate professional expertise and resources within a framework developed by the NSW Heritage Office. They include detailed acquisition criteria (eg historic, thematic), deaccessioning, loans, and a research collection strategy.

An important tool to manage the collection is the e-hive system used by many museums in Australia and overseas. It is a web-based system that assists with the cataloguing, organising and sharing of museum collections and is widely used by museums in many countries, and replaces a dated paper-based system. There has been considerable progress in entering all of the items in the collection on the system but it is an ongoing task. It is possible to search for items in our collection on the internet through e-hive.

THE GENEALOGY RESEARCH ROOM

In 1985 the Society's interests were expanded to include a Genealogy Group. The Genealogy Room contains computers, microfiche and microfilm readers and other electronic resources used by family and other researchers. It also houses a comprehensive library and local archive records for the district. These are valuable resources for the community. It is staffed by experienced volunteers and operates 3 days a week and managed by a small committee.

The entire collection has been catalogued on a number of databases which can be searched on site. Volunteers also assist visitors with family research and will also undertake research for a small fee on request.

The Genealogy Committee also produces an extensive series of publications relating to the history of the Moruya district. Most are published in-house and are available for purchase. Regular publications include a journal, weekly pieces in local media providing a glimpse into what local newspapers were reporting on 100 years ago and a blog with similar extracts from old newspapers. These regular contributions to local media – both traditional and online - are an especially valuable way that the Society can strengthen links with its community.

MEMBERSHIP

In its April 2020 submission to a NSW government inquiry ², Museums and Galleries NSW (MG NSW) noted declining numbers of volunteers across NSW museums in recent years and further commented that:

“A decline in volunteer input, now hastened by COVID-19 will directly affect the sustainability profile of many community museums – leading to a loss of association and connection between local stories, cultural knowledge and collections.....The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on collection care is also of great concern, potentially leaving many community collections uncared for and increasingly under threat of degradation and theft.”

The general trend for declining numbers of volunteers noted by MG NSW above is reflected in MDHS membership numbers. MDHS membership grew in its early years until around the year 2000 after which it stabilised at around 180. Membership now stands at less than 150.

This Strategic Plan recognises that MDHS needs to build its membership and volunteer base and the key objective of this plan is to maintain MDHS on a sustainable path forward (Strategic Objective 1). Objectives 2, 3 and 4 relating to maintenance, preservation and digitisation of the collection address ways we might do this. Objective 5 concerns ways we might engage and market our organisation to the local community more – directly or in an online environment.

MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The MDHS Constitution was developed in accordance with a model developed by NSW Fair Trading in 2016 and registered in 2017. It sets out the structure of the operation of the Society including membership eligibilities and entitlements, fees, the roles and responsibilities of the principal office bearers and other matters such as insurance and funding.

The MDHS Management Committee is the key governance body for the Society. It is chaired by the President and comprises the Vice President, the Treasurer, the

² Museum and Galleries NSW, Submission into Government’s Management of the Powerhouse Museum and Other Museums and Cultural Projects in New South Wales, 29 April 2020

Secretary and 3 other members with functions as determined by the Management Committee. Currently the Committee includes 2 members representing the two important functions of the Society – the Collections Committee and the Genealogy Research Room and 1 other member with responsibilities as determined by the Committee. A Public Officer is also appointed.

The Management Committee has approved a Disaster Preparedness Plan and also has a Health and Safety Plan, a Collections Policy and a Volunteer Handbook in place. These are published on the website and available to members on request.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2022

The key strategic objectives identified by the Management Committee are set out below together with a brief description of some activities which the Committee considers would achieve these objectives. As noted above achievement is constrained by the availability of funding and volunteer time.

Strategy Objective 1

Maintain MDHS on a sustainable path forward

Key activities

- a. Develop a marketing strategy
- b. Attract new members through focussed events (eg a presentation on WWII bunkers at Moruya Airport, 50th birthday celebration, and a presentation on the restoration work on the Moruya manse)
- c. Consider and report on ways to enhance mobility access to the Museum including moving some part of the Remembrance Room downstairs and/or virtual internet access to the collections in the upstairs rooms
- d. Roster Secretary to monitor visitor numbers and website visit numbers on a monthly basis and report to each Committee and General meeting
- e. Develop building maintenance plan

Note: Progress to date has been delayed due to the disruptions caused by the COVID restrictions. There has been some progress in developing a marketing strategy and a building plan.

Strategic Objective 2

Maintain and manage the Society best practice guidelines for small museums staffed by volunteers

- a. Participation in MG NSW Standards Program in 2021 or 2022

- b. Finalise and publish on the website Volunteers Handbook, MDHS Health and Safety Policy, MDHS Strategic Plan 2020-2022
- c. Continuation of regular meetings with Museum Adviser and other relevant external bodies (eg Eurobodalla Shire Council, other historical societies in our district)
- d. Electronic distribution of general meeting papers (agenda, minutes and tabled papers)
- e. Attendance at relevant workshops

Strategic Objective 3

Update technology to maintain connectivity with members, external bodies and agencies, and user expectations

- a. Regular reporting to the Committee of visitor numbers to the Museum and Genealogy Research Room and online visitation numbers

Strategic Objective 4

Ongoing preservation of the diverse collection

- a. Update the Preservation Needs Assessment (2021-22) should funding become available to assess the condition of the collection and monitor any deterioration
- b. Explore options to improve and expand physical storage
- c. Develop and document a plan for a practical digital preservation system for the Society's documents and digitised collection items for consideration by the Committee
- d. Review of Collection Policy

Strategic Objective 5

Using the collection to promote the appreciation of the distinctive history (eg granite, dairying and mining industries) of the town and district of Moruya within the Society and also the broader community

- a. Promote activities that will attract new members and visitors to the Society and strengthen social connections to the Society including:
 - i. Preparation of a list of specific tasks and approach individual members to undertake them (eg "ads" on the website, the Journal or local media)
 - ii. Preparing and writing labels for the collection in consultation with the Collections Committee
 - iii. Writing labels on photos displayed in the Museum
 - iv. Working bees to undertake specific tasks in the grounds and garden surrounding the Museum's buildings

- b. Develop a program for “Museum in a Suitcase” visits to schools, aged care facilities and other interested groups
- c. Letter to key organisations in our district introducing our Committee and the work it does to promote the history of Moruya and the surrounding region
- d. Development of a trail of discovery through the Museum for younger visitors and a Junior Newsletter