

Lloyd's "Oxford" block - ready for harvest



April 2015

Gday...

You're right ... it does seem like a lifetime since I last put finger to keyboard and provided a tale of my goings on. I have still not done much "travelling" for the first quarter of 2015 but have been focussed on the family 'issues' that have drained my time and energy which has meant I have not been able to stray too far from Sale. Thankfully the majority of those 'issues' have now been resolved and only some 'tidying up' needs to be done.

I have once again been up to Nyah to work at Lloyd's Vineyard for the harvesting season – which I must admit is something I look forward to. The weather this year was extremely kind to us. After the initial couple of weeks of high 30degC days, it was followed with a wonderful autumn of chilly mornings but sunny, warm, still days. Thankfully, the crop had not been adversely affected by the weather leading up to harvest, so there was a good crop and plenty of exercise for me



The dam on Lloyd's "Oxford" block



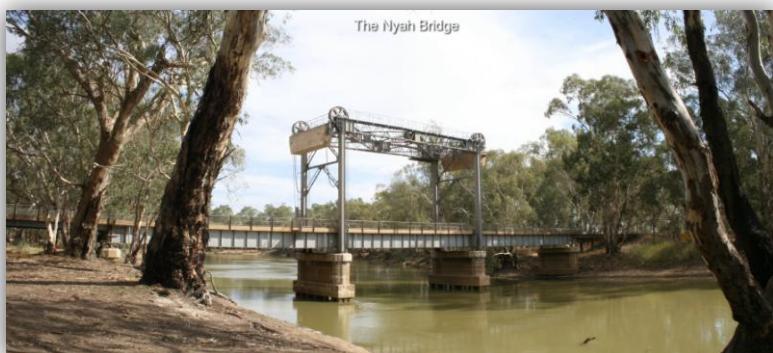
Given the fine weather and the Vineyard still in final preparation for the harvest season, I was lucky enough to have some free time to wander around the area and soak up the rural atmosphere and learn more about the area.

The town of Nyah, on the banks of the Murray River was formed as the "Taverner Community Village Settlement" in the 1890s by Jim Thwaites as a utopian socialist community, one of many established along the Murray, including Waikerie in South Australia. The communities were established in imitation of the New Australia settlement of William Lane in Paraguay. Lack of access to water for fields and a falling-out of favour of socialism led to the end of state support for these communities. The Post Office opened on 4 May 1894 (though known as Tyntynder for some months).



Nyah was the only Victorian village settlement established as part of a campaign in 1894 introduced by the South Australian Government to combat unemployment during the economic difficulties during the 1890s.

The Victorian Government offered land for settlers, with 20ha per person but without pumping assistance. In 1906 the Victorian Government at last provided a steam pump and opened up 800ha of Mallee adjacent for more settlers. Nyah, as it became known, was a success, supplying both fresh grapes to Melbourne and dried fruits more widely. A significant iron foundry for agricultural machinery & pumps also developed.



On the NSW side of the River, but inland from it, Koraleigh had developed similar irrigated fruit crops. To make better communications between Nyah & Koraleigh, a bridge was planned in 1939 & opened with a lift span in 1941.

The lift span is necessary as a clearance above normal water level is only 7.6m with the lift span chord and 16.4m with the lift span. The bridge has remained unchanged since 1941.

The main axis of the bridge is East/West. There are 5 main spans including one lift span, supported on concrete piers. There are 2 approach spans at each end. The approach spans have steel L beams on concrete piers. All decks are concrete. The lift span is unusual for Murray Bridges. The Nyah bridge has considerable social significance as a main artery across the Murray, and hence of considerable importance to the lives of residents.

Nyah, with a population of 480, is adjacent to the Murray and the Nyah & Vinifera state forests of magnificent river red gum. Camping, picnic, swimming or fishing spots abound throughout the forest and there are numerous tracks for bushwalkers or bird-watchers.

While I was at Nyah doing all this hard work, I was visited by my daughter Jem and her man Alex. Jem had not visited Lloyd's Vineyard for about 12 years or so and was keen to once again catch up with Darren and look over the vineyard.

While they were there we went for a walk or two along the river tracks and enjoyed the river and forest of huge river red gums.



Despite the many trips I have made to and through Nyah over the years, I had never visited the Speewa Ferry which is located on the Murray River on Speewa Road, approximately 16kms from Nyah. This year I made a point of driving over and having a look.

The first Speewa Ferry is believed to have operated in about 1914. The Tooleybuc Ferry, built in 1888, was relocated to Speewa in 1928 when it was made available for public use. That ferry was replaced in 1979 at a cost of \$100,000. The Ferry has a load limit of 8 tonnes.



Council has placed the Ferry as a heritage item under its Local Environmental Plan (LCP).



The Speewa District is a community which straddles the Murray River, with residents in VIC & NSW. The Speewa Ferry is the last ferry in the Shire in operation on the Murray River. There is no other crossing point between Swan Hill and Nyah.



Nyah West, on the railway line about 5km west of Nyah, is a 1920s town with an old world charm. With a population of 552, it is the business and commercial centre of an irrigation district which produces wine and dried fruit, as well as vegetables and wool. However, like so many small rural towns, it is suffering the ravages of time and the loss of their young population.

It was given a Heritage Precinct listing in 2002 and in 2006 the town received the National Trust's Judges Choice Award in the "Most intact Streetscape" category.



The town was established when the railway line was extended from Swan Hill to Piangil in 1915 passing some distance to the west of the established township of Nyah. A full Post Office opened here on 1 December 1917.

From 1919-1925 the town grew like a mushroom, including homes, businesses, community facilities, churches, a hall, hotel and school extension so that the 2002 National Trust survey stated "it was the most substantial and intact commercial centre in the entire municipality". Today, the town retains most of its 1920s streetscapes with little alteration or new construction.



I had a whole day off from the Vineyard when the grape press broke down so I decided to go over to Moulamein for the day, which is about 80km east of Swan Hill in NSW. Moulamein is at the junction of Billabong Creek and the Edward River – a tributary of the Murrumbidgee River – surrounded by a large stretch of towering river red gums.

The town's name is derived from a local Aboriginal word meaning "meeting of the waters" and is rich in history. It is known as "the oldest town in the Riverina". On the banks of the Edward River, just on the edge of town, is the historic 52 stand Mooloomoon shearing shed which was built in the late 1890s. The shearing gear was originally driven by a steam engine and the shed was purpose-built to roll bales of wool directly onto paddle steamers. The shed was still in use until early 2001.



A highlight of the town is the old service station in the main street. It is still in use as a motor vehicle workshop but is no longer serving fuel. The bowsers are no longer in use but rather than remove them they have simply covered them with a clever, Australian country construction.

It wouldn't be a proper Australian country town without the pub and there are two pubs in town – the Tattersalls and the Royal.



The old wharf was constructed in 1908 when paddle steamers were used to cart wool and other products to and from Moulamein ... until the railway arrived in 1926. The wharf has been recently restored with the entire deck replaced with new red gum. A carved statue of a riverboat captain has also been erected near the wharf to symbolise the past use of the wharf by barges and paddle steamers.



I really enjoyed strolling around the town. I find the 'feeling' of these old towns that are no longer the thriving commercial centre they once were is very relaxing. I often feel as if I have gone back a century or so.

After having lunch at the old wharf I decided to take The Big Tree walk along the Edward River. I was keen to see the Big Tree that was featured in the brochure detailing the walk. It is believed the tree is the biggest living red gum in Australia with a circumference over 11 metres and it has been proven to be over 800 years old. Of course I had to take a photo of me with the tree – just to show how big it is (or is that how small I am?).



The Big Tree



*This old stick has seen better days
(the tree is pretty old too)*

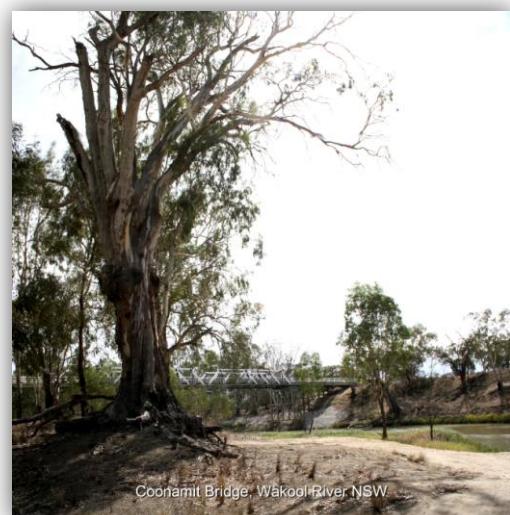


The Ring Tree, Moulamein NSW

There was one other interesting old red gum on the river walk – the Ring Tree which is of significance to local Aboriginal tribes as they used to tie young branches of gum trees together so that they grew to form a ring. These “ring trees” were to indicate tribal boundaries.

The Coonamit Bridge, across the Wakool River, on the road between Moulamein and Swan Hill, is a Dare timber truss road bridge and was built in 1929. It is a representative example of a Dare timber truss road bridge and is assessed as being of state heritage significance, primarily on the basis of its technical and historical significance.

Restoration of the bridge began in July 2009 with the objective to increase the capacity of the bridge while maintaining the bridge’s heritage significance.



Coonamit Bridge, Wakool River NSW

Salt lake near Chinkapook VIC



Chinkapook is about 40km west of Nyah and is now known only as a 'locality'. The road between Nyah and Chinkapook passes through a series of salt lakes which I found very interesting.

The area often has water in the late winter – if the rains have been kind – but by the end of summer there is little water.

Salt lake near Chinkapook VIC



So, now I am back in Sale giving thought to what short duration trips I can do as I try to wrap up those 'family issues' and prepare for the winter weather.

Stay well and enjoy life.

John Bamford

