**Commencement of the Museum**

*This was written by John prior to his death. With Paul Brown now Museum Curator and Colin Gould MBE Assistant Museum Curator, the museum is in good hands, John*

After the closure of the Wacol army barracks in 2000, the area was unoccupied – eventually the national servicemen’s association of Australia, Queensland Branch (NASAAQ) was granted 15 hectares of land and five historic buildings on the site. Through our association with the NASAAQ, we were invited to bid for the use of one of the buildings for a museum. Our bid was successful and we were asked by the NASAAQ in late 2005 to have the museum ready for its official opening on 12 February, 2006. This gave us about three months to do the job. Joe Fisk was the original proposer of this project and devoted much time and effort to see its completion.

Thirteen volunteers of our association worked round the clock to meet this deadline and we were ready on the opening day. The work involved to get the museum ready was extensive and demanding. We had to pull down walls, replace timber, paint and put down carpet tiles, re-wire the whole building, and of course, get display cabinets and organise and put in artefacts, memorabilia and signage.

My father had been involved in the war and had accumulated useful memorabilia and artefacts including a Samarai sword, Japanese battle flag, PNG carvings, sea shells etc., which he had passed on to me so I had items which could be used to prepare displays. Since I had these artefacts, and since I had already been involved in organising displays for ANZAC days and other events in the city, I was given the job as Museum Curator. I was grateful to the members for their trust in me to do the job. Also I acknowledge the Papua New Guinea Association (PNGA) who donated $1,000 to assist us with the work to turn an old unused army building into a museum. Other artefacts were also donated over time.

The museum was officially opened by the then Australian Minister of Veteran Affairs, Bruce Billson MP and the then PNG Consul General of Brisbane, Paul Nerau, LLB. Where over 300 Members of NSAAQ, our members and guests were present. We displayed flags of many nations on our veranda which added colour to our festivities.

Subsequently, Grants were received to help pay for manikins and cabinets from the Minister, and we applied to the Queensland State Gaming Fund for $18,000 to install ducted air conditioning and this was successful so that the museum is fully air conditioned. Since that time, a wheelchair ramp has been installed with the donation of steel worth about $3,000 organised by our late member Tom Dowling and installed by Paul Brown and last year, the museum was extended and has another ten metres of display space. The extension was built by John Nicol. As a community project, the Rotary Club of Jindalee were kind enough to paint the old building (without charge) to blend in with the colour of the new extension with paint donated by Taubmans Paints so that the whole museum is uniform in appearance.

I have been fortunate to have worked with the same committee for the past eleven years. A great team where we all chip in and work well together. We have been able with a minimum of funds to raise awareness of the museum’s existence through a variety of means, not the least of which has been through the generosity of King & Co Property Consultants. They have produced and supplied our museum brochure from the start. Through this publication and our newsletters and in recent years, through Facebook and our web page, more people are aware of our association and of the museum’s existence.

I am pleased also that in the last year or so I applied for membership, and we have been accepted into the Brisbane Living Heritage Booklet and the Brisbane Open House Weekend Event which occurs in October. Both these organisations print booklets about the various museums and historic places in Brisbane and are a wonderful way of advertising the museum. Last year over 100 people attended the museum on our first open weekend in October.

The museum has visits from schools, retirement villages, probus and rotary clubs, RSL’S, army and airforce cadet units, and even two car clubs have enjoyed a day at our precinct using the grounds to display their cars and enjoy a BBQ lunch.

A big assistance to our fund raising has been the ability to conduct sausage sizzles, initially at Greenbank RSL and for the past two years at Bunnings, Oxley. We are indebted to these organisations for the support they have given us.

Over the past eleven years we have organised many events at the Precinct. We had one event of which I am very proud. His Excellency Governor Paul De Jersey, AC attended the precinct on 14th September, 2014. On his arrival, the Army Cadets from Beaudesert and Air Force Cadets from 219 Squadron, Archerfield formed a guard of Honour at the ground’s entrance for the Governor’s arrival. This was his first engagement after he had become the new Governor of Queensland. We were also fortunate to have a re-enactment army group form and fire a Fusillade.

The day had to do with the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the battle of Bita Paka. A little known fact of history is that Bita Paka (on the island of New Britain about 50 miles from Rabaul (is where the first Australian soldiers were killed in World War 1, and these six men are buried at Bita Paka. Also this is where Australia lost its first submarine, AE 1 with the loss of all 35 crew. The sub has never been found. So we were fortunate that the Governor was able to attend the occasion. Also in attendance, was Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk.

Other important occasions in addition to the openings and the Bita Paka anniversary have been the Rabaul centenary celebration and the opening of the wheelchair ramp.

Many cups of coffee have been served from the museum’s kitchen for the many visitors who attend and enjoy morning tea or a BBQ as part of their visit. Apart from paying visitors, other friends of ours from the Nasho’s, our landlords, to neighbours who call in also have joined me for a coffee. Thus, I have built a rapport with Metroplex (the developers of the site) who are located next door and Vermeer who were located across the street and also have good rapport with the Serbian community nearby. In addition, we are fortunate to have had a good relationship with politicians from the local, state and federal arena who have supported us by attending our functions. We had a large crowd of supporters present to celebrate the opening of the extension by Councillor Matthew Bourke on 3 September, 2016, and councillors have helped in other ways. For instance, after speaking to councillor Strunk about the large trucks which parked in front of our fence line blocking the view of our location sign, he had yellow lines painted on the roadway to prevent vehicles parking there.

Along with our artefacts, we have accumulated over 500 books in our library, as well as many war time magazines, and CD’s and hundreds of photographs. The books have all been catalogued into our computer system along with other items. Our artefacts have also been catalogued. A filing system has been established housing correspondence and other useful, important and historical information.

As curator I am appreciative of the many items that have been donated to the museum, which enable the displays about NGVR’s wartime activities and other Australian military campaigns to do with PNG to be displayed and preserved for the benefit of the community. I am also appreciative of the work done by friends of the museum Jessica Harrington for coding all the library books and setting up and maintaining the file system and to Brian Collin for his donation of the computer and printers and his work in cataloguing the artefacts. I am grateful also to Colin Gould for all the secretarial work he has done including the invitations, brochures and protocols over the years.

In addition to politician and dignitaries we have had visits from men and women from the armed services, as well as authors, publishers and historians wanting to gather information for publications. One such author was Kathryn Spurling who wrote the book, “ *Abandoned and Sacrificed – The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru”*. She also wrote “*Cruel Conflict – The Triumph and Tragedy of HMAS Perth*”. She spent many hours at the museum photographing museum artefacts. Our organisation has also produced two substantial books, one about the History of the NGVR and another one about the History of the PNGVR. Which can be purchased from the Museum.

Amongst our artefacts are a few rare and sought after items – we have one of these on display – it is a handkerchief which was thrown by Rudi Buckley to Barry O’Neil who was about to board the Montevideo Maru.

We also have Japanese battle flags which were surrendered to my father by Lt Ushida of the Japanese Imperial Army in Borneo in 1945. He also surrendered his 600 year old Samurai sword to my father which is on display when there are visitors in the museum.

A very popular item was the hand cranked air raid siren originally on display. School children loved having a turn at winding the handle to hear the extremely loud air raid sound. However, when this sound was produced for a group of elderly visitors, it was not appreciated as it frightened one elderly female visitor who was in London during the blitz and hadn’t heard an air raid siren since then. And she genuinely thought we were being attacked when it went off. So we learned a lesson from that occasion that we should always ensure before winding it, that no one else was suffering the same type of trauma.

Sometimes I tried to bring some humour into visits when I told my Dunnie story about why Japanese did not continue their invasion of Australia after they bombed Darwin – ‘The story goes, Japanese pilot sitting in his aircraft looking out the window at the ground below him, saying ‘We no invade Australia because sentry box in every back yard.’

The museum has been my passionate interest for the past twelve years. I have spent many hours working at the museum and many hours promoting it to the public and organising and attending fund raising activities. It is my hope that the museum will continue to operate and that members and the community will support its objectives well into the future, I wish every success to those who come after me.

The initial museum curator John Holland died in 2018 and the curator now is Paul Brown with Colin Gould MBE as assistant curator.