The Collective Spirit

Brought to you by the Members of George's Hall Probus Club.
Issue 91 - The Port Macquarie Edition - October 2026

A Special Port Macquarie Edition

Compiled by Sue Brown with contributions from our travellers. Thanks to Denise Ericsson, Heather Wicks, Elizabeth Rea. Photographs by Sandra Baker, Carol Coates, Denise Ericsson, Gai Cavanough, Carlia Touma, Elizabeth Rea, Sue Brown.



Thanks

A trip like this takes a lot of organisation and it wouldn't have been the success that it was without the following. So we would like to thank:

- Hopkinsons who provided an excellent tour, organised at the last minute when our Grafton tour fell through.
- Our driver, Sonny, who looked after us very well.
- The Country Comfort Water's Edge Hotel, our home for four nights. The rooms were well appointed, the staff were friendly and the food was excellent.



- Jan Brown (the Boss Lady) who became the tour director and worked very hard sorting out our little issues as they arose. And all her helpers.
- Ray Cook (Captain Cook) who assisted Jan and sorted out the financial issues.
- Colleen for organising our lolly jar and all those people who helped top it up.
- Cathy Dice for providing the questions for our trivia game. Sue Brown, and her helpers Elizabeth Rea and Carol Coates for organising and running it on the night.
- All the Georges Hall Probus participants for being such a wonderful friendly group. Everyone looked out for each other. Nothing was ever too much trouble.
- Club Condell Park and Canterbury/Bankstown council for the grant that made this trip more affordable for us all.

And some special thanks

Maureen has asked that we thank everyone who helped her and Liz Conway on the trip. Their help and kindness was much appreciated.



Glenda has asked that we thank everyone for making her feel so welcome and part of the group. She had a wonderful time and enjoyed the trip and our company.

Sue Brown who would like to thank everyone for their help and for making her birthday such a special day.

Day one – Travelling to Port Macquarie

We set off for Port Macquarie on the Monday of the Long Weekend (5 October). It was only a small group, 23 Probus members and one ring-in, Glenda, a friend of Gai's. It was a public holiday and school holidays and the traffic was very light. We made it through Sydney and onto the motorway in record time.



Our first stop was an old favourite, Heatherbrae Pies where we tucked into pies and cakes and satisfied our caffeine urges. The new section of the M1 Pacific Motorway Extension to Raymond Terrace has only recently been opened and it certainly makes the trip faster and easier. However Heatherbrae has now been bypassed and I don't know what the impact will be on the pie shop. We still took the detour to go there, so I hope others do too. I know they have other locations, but the original is an institution!

Lunch was at the Greenhouse Cottage Nabiac. Its only a tiny café and was very busy so we had quite a wait for our lunches (amazing hamburgers). There were some complaints, Nabiac looked like an interesting place to shop and by the time we got our lunch, it was straight back on the bus. If we'd known, we could have gone shopping while we waited. But a couple of intrepid travellers managed to shop regardless!

St Thomas Anglican Church, Port Macquarie

Thanks Denise Ericsson



After our morning tea stop at Heatherbrae, for pastries and coffee, and then a welcome stop at Nabiac for lunch, we pushed on to Port Macquarie, arriving mid-afternoon. Before heading to our accommodation, we visited the historic St Thomas' Anglican Church Port Macquarie for a conducted tour.

St Thomas' is the fifth oldest Anglican Church still in use in Australia, and one of the few remaining that was convict built. The church was built on top of a hill, and with quite a few stairs leading to the main entrance, and with some assistance, we all eventually made our way up to the entrance, and ventured inside. Taking our seats inside the enclosed timber pews, we began to hear the story of how the church came about.

The church was built under military supervision in the reign of King George IV when Australia was still part of the Diocese of Calcutta and Port Macquarie was still a penal settlement. The foundation stone was laid in 1824, and building work was undertaken between 1824-1828, with the first service held 24 February 1828.

The church was built with over 365,000 hand-made bricks, which were locally made, and the walls were three foot thick in the nave, and even more in the tower. Finger marks can be seen on some of the exterior bricks to indicate the progressive tally. The mortar was made from oyster shell which was transported from Lime-Burners Creek on the North Shore of the Hastings River, with most of the timber used in construction, made of locally hewn cedar, except for the 40- foot bearers in the ceiling. A lath and plaster ceiling was replaced by cedar boards in 1856. The shingle roof was replaced by iron in 1883 and by terracotta tiles in 1923.



The earliest music in the church included the clarinet, two violins and a bass violin. A Walker Finger and Barrell Organ was purchased in 1856 for 161 pounds sterling, and is the only one of its kind still in the southern hemisphere, and contains 33 tunes in three studded barrels. The stained-glass window depicts St Thomas the Apostle and was a gift in 1906, as a memorial to Police Magistrate of the time Mr E.D. Day. All of the plain-coloured windows of blue, gold and ruby red were replaced in 1978, with the current plain glass, which allows more light into the church.

Later with the arrival of free settlers, farmers, merchants and government officials, the congregation grew, and box like, timber family pews, were erected, and they were rented out forming the basis of income for the Parish, until the system was abolished in 1905. Beneath the floor of the front pew is the grave of the commandant of the settlement Captain Rollands who died one month before the foundation stone was laid.



The tower is seen as a square from the outside, but once inside, a magnificent cedar circular staircase is revealed which leads to a monuments room containing historic documents, photographs, records, old Bibles and Prayer books, and musical instruments. From the roof of the castellated tower, an excellent view of the town, river and coastline can be observed. Only two of our intrepid travellers, Bill and Gai, were able to make it to the very top. The view kept them captivated for quite a while.









Day two – Around Port Macquarie

The highlight of today was the visit to the Koala Hospital. Koala Conservation Australia (KCA), is a small team of experts (supported by an army of volunteers). They rescue, treat, rehabilitate, and care for sick and injured koalas. They also manage visitor experiences, koala food tree plantations, conservation research, education, and habitat restoration programs. And have now launched a world-first Wild Koala Conservation Breeding Program.

Our volunteer tour guide, Anne provided a very informative commentary about the hospital and the work that it does. She introduced us to the permanent residents there, koalas who are unable to be returned to the wild.









Do you know that you can adopt a koala to help with KCA's programs. While most rescued koalas are treated and released, some can't safely return to the wild. These koalas remain at the hospital, with lifelong care made possible through donations by adopting a resident koala and creating a lasting bond.

One of our members, Elizabeth Rea, adopted Campbelltown Phil while we were there. But its not too late, you can also adopt a koala online.
https://adopt.koalaconservationaustralia.org.au/



Neighbouring the Koala Hospital was Roto House, built by surveyor John Flynn in 1891, this 11-room heritage weatherboard house constructed from local red mahogany was occupied by his family right up until 1979. It is now maintained by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. Their café was a lovely place to relax out of the heat.



Lunch was back in town at the Beach House, located right on the waterfront. We enjoyed the first of our barramundi dinners, which was beautiful.







Next stop was Ricardoes Tomato and Strawberry Farm. It was school holidays and very busy, so our tour there was cancelled. This was only a flying visit, but it gave everybody a chance to buy tomatoes and other goodies.

Our last stop for the day was at the Sea Acres Rainforest Centre and Boardwalk. The centre provided a wealth of information about local Aboriginal culture and the surrounding rainforest environment. And of course, there was a gift shop (there's always a gift shop!) and café. Some of our group visited the café, others experienced the boardwalk which rises seven metres through the forest understorey to the canopy above.

Unfortunately, the coach cannot park close to the centre and it was quite a steep and lengthy walk. A number of people decided to remain in the coach, but that wasn't at all boring. We had a wonderful chat with our driver, Sonny and learned all about his amazing family and heritage.







Day three – Further afield

Thanks Heather Wicks

Wednesday we woke up to a rainy morning with mist over the mountains. It was an on the bus morning, Mitch McKay from Port Macquarie Heritage joined us for a guided historical/heritage tour of Port Macquarie. It was perfect for the morning. Mitch explained that much of the creek, including the site of our hotel, had been reclaimed. He described Port Macquarie's beginnings as a settlement built by "special" convicts with useful skills, the settlement needed availability of food, water and building

materials but lacked a safe harbour. The population boomed from approximately 6,000 to now, 60,000 in town and 80,000 across the district.

We saw historic CBD buildings, significant parks and public sculptures reflecting earlier land uses, including a grinding wheel with a large post through it. This represented shells once ground to make mortar for the many convict-built structures. Beyond the CBD, we visited what is now "millionaires' row". When the properties were first offered, prospective buyers were flown from Sydney, yet sales were difficult as it was considered too far from town, just ten minutes away. How things change! One striking exception among the immaculate homes belonged to a local antiques dealer. It appeared derelict, with a long, sloping, rusted corrugated-iron roof that looked distinctly out of place.

Although we had already had a tour of St Thomas's Church, Mitch relayed extra information. The tower was square on the outside but circular inside, with a spiral staircase. It originally had one clock, while the other three faces had louvred panels; clocks were added to these later. Mitch also highlighted the extensive use of cedar in the family boxes and ceiling lining. Mitch was very informative and entertaining, and we dropped him back at the motel before heading off to Hannan Vale.



The drive through the hinterland was fabulous, with rolling green hills, black Angus cattle, dairy herds and stunning scenery. We crossed the Manning River as it meandered through the freshly washed countryside. Short on time, we diverted to Moorland Cottage Café for morning tea and enjoyed the best scones with jam and cream on the coast. The delightful café occupied an old converted shopfront. The bay-style display windows retained their coloured glass panels, while inside was a vaulted ceiling giving extra space. There were chickens roaming out the back and reportedly, a sheep and an alpaca. We were all fascinated by humorous signs scattered around.















Back to the coast to Pilot Hill Lookout, Harrington with a flag post at the top flying in the windy conditions, but with terrific views of the coast. Next was Wingham Golf Club where we had lunch. The initial offering of lunches included crumbed cutlets which was the most popular choice. But when phoned in by Jan, she found that there were no cutlets, creating great disappointment. Despite this, we had a lovely lunch and the staff were very accommodating.





The next stop was Manning Valley Historical Society Museum, which was run by volunteers. It was spotless, informative and the content variation was fantastic, including a jet engine along with farming, building, tatting/sewing, machines of all types in country/early life. There was a Jet fighter raised on a pole in the park opposite, less the engine.

Though, true to form for this little holiday, there was a little hiccup there. When we arrived (a little bit late), Jan found that they were just locking up, ready to go home, there had been some mis-communication there. But the two volunteers were wonderful and opened up for us allowing us to spend quite a while enjoying the museum.

The last stop was meant to be Wingham Brush Nature Reserve, but it was getting late and we were all exhausted, so unfortunately, we gave this a miss and returned to the hotel. We may have been tired, but a good day was had by all !!

Trivia Night

We held our trivia night that night. Cathy Dice was unable to come on the trip but still provided the questions for us. Sue ran it with help from Elizabeth Rea and Carol Coates. It went well but it was organised chaos. And as usual, everybody went home with chocolates (some more than others). We had to hold it in the dining room where there were other guests enjoying their dinner. But that resulted in a very pleasant surprise.



A young couple sitting nearby looked interested and we asked them to join us, which they did. Ellie and Kane were lovely people, they split up and joined separate teams, even brought their dinner over with them. When we asked if they were celebrating anything special, we learned that they had just been married the weekend before. But they were very happy to spend time with us oldies. And the teams they joined were grateful for their help, they did very well. But the biggest surprise, was as we chatted afterwards, Bill Brown discovered that Ellie was a friend of his niece. It's a small world isn't it?

Day four – Forster/Tuncurry

Thanks Elizabeth Rea

Once again, we started our morning with a smorgasbord of breakfast foods – hot and cold (and pancakes) – to prepare us for the day's adventures. We started our journey to Forster with an initial stop at the Forster Visitor Information Centre before moving on to Boatshed Number 1 for our Free Spirit Cruise.



A surprise awaited us at the 'dock'. As we were alighting from the bus some of us noticed a familiar figure standing on the area outside the Free Spirit Cruise area – a fellow Probus member and newsletter coordinator, Dave Lupton. We weren't surprised to see that Jan was so focused on letting the Cruise Shop know we had arrived (she was on a mission), that she walked right past Dave, not recognising or even seeing him.



We heard that Dave's grandchildren wanted to know why Grandpa knew every person who got off the bus! (Probably watching him get lots of hugs and handshakes). After many hugs and chats, "what are you doing here???" we moved out to the docking area where our cruise boat awaited us. Some people thought that this had been planned, but no, Dave and his family just happened to be there, one of those amazing coincidences that happen sometimes.

Our cruise was very pleasant and the seas calm, the captain provided a very droll and informative commentary. The lake is quite shallow in many places and there are many oyster farms. Our captain pointed out lots of wildlife, including pelicans, ospreys and eagles. A few times, he told us he could see stingrays, but they turned out to be old bits of oyster farms. Apparently, there are stingrays in the lake, but we didn't see any.











And then the dolphins joined us on our journey back to the dock. Alfred was the first in our group to spot them and was rewarded with a Slurpee. We saw two at first and then after looking from one side of the boat to the other, we saw three dolphins, a family group – they have such happy faces!



We had a lovely light lunch during our cruise consisting of a fresh salad with a bread roll followed by apple pie







On the way back to the hotel we stopped at the Forster Arts and Crafts Centre which was amazing. Full of beautiful and varied locally made arts and crafts. And you won't be surprised to hear that lots of purchases were made.







We returned to our hotel for time to relax, freshen up and prepare for dinner. Plans had already been made to purchase a birthday cake for Sue's birthday which the kitchen staff looked after and brought into the dining room after we had finished our dessert. We all sang Happy Birthday to Sue with great 'gusto' – watched Sue blow out her candles and then cut her cake. Then we all (or those of us who could) ate more cake!! Which we shared with Ellie and Kane and our wonderful waiters.







Sue finished her birthday with a cocktail in the bar area, joined by a few others. In all a very pleasant day with a lovely ending.

Day five – Homeward Bound



We were all up bright and early to join the coach for our trip home. We drove via Lake Cathie (who knew it was pronounce Cattai!) on our way to our morning tea stop. Lunch was at the Lakeside Village Tavern, Raymond Terrace. Originally cutlets had been on the menu, but once again, this was not to be. More disappointed people. But the meals they provided were nice and the service was excellent. The staff were lovely and the meals came out very fast. And I've never seen so many coffees brewed so quickly.

Back on the coach for our last leg home. We had a good trip until we reached Sydney where we hit Friday afternoon traffic. However, we made our trip home in record time because Sonny dodged all the traffic and took lots of amazing short cuts. I'm sure some of those streets we went down had never seen a coach drive down them before. But he loved using his horn when cars were slow to move.

Before long we were back at Club Condell Park where friends and relatives were waiting to meet us. We all agreed that it was a wonderful trip. But its always nice to come home.

Our Driver



Our driver, Sonny was a lovely man, originally from New Zealand. He was a courteous and very safe driver and he looked after us all very well (especially the mummas). We were fascinated to learn of his family history. He was one of nineteen children (he was number thirteen) and has ten children and eighteen grandchildren of his own. Can you imagine his family get togethers!

Thank you, Sonny.



As usual on a trip like this all sorts of interesting things happen and people have little adventures. Here's a few.

❖ Guess who lost their room key, frantically searched their room to no avail, sheepishly asked for a replacement? The key remained hidden until the last night when they found it while packing

- ❖ Guess who thought she'd left her jacket behind and found it on the shelf above her head? Luckily before we drove back to get it.
- ❖ Guess who kept leaving her walking stick behind (including in the taxi on the way to the club, luckily the driver found it before he drove off with it).
- ❖ Guess who didn't get her ordered meal (there was confusion and they ran out) and was then last being served her dessert?
- ❖ Guess who had barramundi three times in two days?
- ❖ Guess who was devastated when the cutlets on the menu were not available? TWICE!! There are multiple responses to this one (at least 19).
- ❖ Guess who got very excited to find a pancake making machine at breakfast? There were long queues every morning after that.



- ❖ Guess who had to wait till the chooks were shooed out before she could use the toilet?
- ❖ Guess who had a cup of tea made for her at the Arts and Crafts Centre?
- ❖ Guess who won the raffle and couldn't find her ticket? Your guess is as good as ours, it was never claimed and we still don't know who that was!
- ❖ Guess who spent the most money? This one was hotly contested! Everybody walked away from every place with paper bags full of goodies. We certainly helped the Port Macquarie economy during our short stay.

If you think you can turn to the end of the newsletter and find out the answers, you are sadly mistaken. What happens in Port Macquarie, stays in Port Macquarie!

Ode to Port Macquarie

Note from Sue. I didn't have the time nor the energy to write this while we were away, so there was no great poetry recital on the last night. But I couldn't break the tradition, so put my poetry cap on when I got home.

We wanted to go on a holiday
But all our plans kept going astray
Our proposed trip to Tasmania fell through
Then the Jacaranda festival in Grafton did too.

But Hopkinsons came good and saved the day
And twenty four of us left on Labour Day.

Heatherbrae pies was our very first stop
Then Nabiac where folks wanted to shop
Our hamburgers were great, but took ages to come
No time to shop which disappointed some.

The Country Comfort Waters Edge was just out of town
But a wonderful place to lay our heads down.
Excellent food, breakfasts and dinner
Excellent staff, the place was a winner.



We fell in love with koalas on our private tour
And bought tomatoes and jam at the farm door.
Lunch was at the Beach House at the edge of the bay
And grilled barramundi was the order of the day.

Some ventured along Sea Acres boardwalk
While others stayed in the coach for a rest and a talk.
Sonny regaled those with stories of his life
His heritage, his eighteen siblings, his children, his wife.



Day three saw us at the Moorland Cottage Café
Where, before using the loo, they shooed the chickens away
We had homemade scones, jam and cream
We were all just living the dream.

Our next food stop wasn't far away
It was Wingham Golf Club for lunch that day
But there was disappointment all around
There wasn't a cutlet anywhere to be found.



We just made it in time to the Museum in town
The volunteers were about to close the place down
But they opened the doors and welcomed us
Shared this amazing place, without a fuss.

Thursday was Forster, quite a long coach trip
But well worth it for our cruise on their ship
A good lunch and beautiful calm seas
And plenty of dolphins swimming around us with ease.



The Arts and Crafts Centre was truly a delight
People could have stayed here all day and all night
But the community did very well out of us
Lots of bulging shopping bags made it back on the bus.

Our short trip away was a lot about eating
And the food that we got really did take some beating
Great buffet breakfasts with pancakes on hand
And the quality of the dinners was really quite grand.



Barramundi became the fish of the day
And we all managed to tuck all those desserts away
We may have missed out on crumbed cutlets twice
But all the replacements were very nice.

And I'll end this poem by saying that I'm sorry
It was very hard to find something to rhyme with Port Macquarie!