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"Good morning everyone"

I reckoned when I was first asked to make this address that I was on a hiding to nothing, having to talk about the history of Braidwood to the people whose families, or even themselves, were the history of Braidwood. As a hick from over the hill, I hadn't been here more than a handful of times in my life before I became involved with Council. But here I am nonetheless, having accepted the challenge.

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It's not every day that a Mayor of a shire has the privilege of inviting the community to share in the celebration of the 175th anniversary of their town. But so it is today. Before proceeding, however, I would like to follow on from Uncle Max's comments and acknowledge that there were indigenous communities in the area long before European settlers arrived. In these proceedings I would like to formally recognise their living culture and their unique role in the life and history of this region.

The last time I stood up here to talk about some aspect of Braidwood history, I was roundly berated for propagating false myths about a locally bred thoroughbred racehorse. I'll endeavour to avoid doing anything of the sort on this occasion, having enlisted the assistance of a couple of local historians in preparing these notes.

What I'd like to do is to briefly step back in time and trace the steps of our fair Braidwood, from its genesis to the present day, having become in the process the first town in Australia to be listed on the State Heritage Register.

The 20s and 30s

European settlers first appeared in the area in the early 1820s, as the early explorers crossed the Great Divide and searched for alternate routes to the coast. It wasn't until 1839, however, that a town plan was surveyed for Braidwood, and that is what is recognised as the birthday of our town. Some years earlier, however, one Dr Thomas Braidwood Wilson settled in the area. Dr Wilson, of Scottish heritage as many will be aware, was the surgeon superintendent on a number of convict vessels that transported some of the earliest European immigrants to Australia's shores. He originally took up land in Van Diemen's Land, but ultimately moved to the mainland, around Lake Bathurst, and then subsequently to the site on which we find our town of Braidwood today.

Even before the township was actually surveyed, Dr Wilson was playing a pivotal role in the establishment of the settlement. He was not only a surgeon, but also a pastoralist and community leader, even filling to the role of local magistrate at times, having organised the construction of the first courthouse in the town in 1837.

While this might seem a little unusual, that a courthouse might be one of the earliest public buildings constructed in the area, we need to remember that a significant proportion of the local population in those days were "government men", convicts that had been assigned as labourers to the local landholders. While the names of many of the pastoralists carry on, we shouldn't forget the contribution made to the establishment of our town by these less fortunate souls.

As fate would have it, Braidwood's early days were marked by events that would prove to characterise the Australian landscape. The area was hit by severe drought in the late 30s and early 40s, something with which many here today will be only too well acquainted. The general economic situation was desperate, and many immigrants would undoubtedly have returned home to Ireland except that Ireland too was similarly stricken, 1840 being the height of the potato famine. Ireland lost almost 50% of its population in a five-year period from either starvation or emigration.

The 40s and the Drought Breaks

Nonetheless, the drought broke in the early 1840s, and transportation of convicts ceased not long thereafter. Convicts had to serve out their time of course, so free labour was still available for some time thereafter. Even so, many convicts continued to live and work on their assigned properties after their tickets of leave expired, and settled down into the local communities.

But recovery from drought is a slow process as we know, and rebuilding flocks and herds in those days was not just a matter of going to the **sale** yards and buying stock.

The **Gold** Rush Years (50s & 60s)

As fate would have it, however, in the mid-1840s, there were rumours of **gold** discoveries in New South Wales. The publication of such stories was strongly discouraged, with the government of the day actively impeding the flow of related information. The discovery of **gold** in California a few years earlier had resulted in massive social and economic dislocation, with people leaving the regular workforce on farms, in shops and in government employ to find their fortune on the goldfields. This was the last thing the government in Sydney wanted, with the country needing all available labour to help get the colony thriving again after the drought.

It was only going to be a matter of time though, and in 1851 **gold** was found down the [Araluen] Valley, and shortly after at the [Majors] Creek, then Mongarlowe "it was everywhere. And yes, everyone then had much better things to do than herd sheep and plough paddocks. For a while, properties were abandoned by their workforce, and the often absentee landlords and owners had to return to safeguard their properties and manage the work themselves.

But these thousands of prospectors and miners who flocked to the district had to be fed, clothed, and provided with services, household goods, hardware and building materials. They came to town with money in their pockets, and created their own boom, not just in Braidwood, but also throughout much of central NSW and Victoria.

The squatters made fortunes supplying meat, milk and grain for the miners, and townsfolk did well supplying them with all manner of other goods and services. The town prospered, and began to look the part, and it is no coincidence that most of the heritage-listed buildings in Braidwood were constructed around this time.

And yet the town stayed nicely contained within its original boundaries, with a clear demarcation between village and rural landscapes"no urban sprawl for Braidwood. Part of the reason for this was that after Dr Braidwood Wilson died in 1843, his land was bought by John Coghill of "Bedervale". This gave Mr Coghill and his family something in the order of 60,000 acres in the district, containing the village on three sides. Apparently, Mr Coghill never liked to part with his property, and so Braidwood development was restricted to the original town plan.

Easy Money"Bushrangers

Gold was moved through the district by horse drawn coach, an excellent example of which has been restored and is on display in the Braidwood Museum. At the time, a variety of less scrupulous individuals saw opportunities for personal enrichment without the unpleasantness of getting down and dirty in a mine shaft.

The Jingera Mob, also known as the Clarke Gang, comprising members of the Clarke and Connell clans ably assisted by their vast extended families dwelling mainly up the Gully (Jerrabattgulla) and in the surrounding mountains, began holding up coaches and general stores from about 1865. Their audacity, horsemanship and bravado was world class and the newspaper reports of their hold-ups held the entire colony transfixed with both horror and admiration for a period of about eighteen months between 1865 and 1867. So accurate was the gang's information, so financially rewarding were their depredations, and so successful were their escapes from the forces of the law, that Braidwood briefly became the local centre of the crime universe, its name synonymous with the breakdown of law and order, and a place where decent folk lived in fear of their lives"well, in fear of their **gold** getting nicked at least.

The Premier of New South Wales at the time, Henry Parkes, stepped in at this point and in 1867 proclaimed the first ever Royal Commission in Australia, to Enquire into Crime in the Braidwood District. The commission sat in Braidwood, in the Court House, with details of collusion and corruption revealed, and certain magistrates and landholders named.

The Jingera Mob was largely unaffected by the legal proceedings in town, and continued to lay waste to the security arrangements of the **gold** convoys in transit to Sydney. But following the cold-blooded murder of four special constables near Jinden Station, after a hold-up down the coast, the Clarke brothers were betrayed by one of their own relatives. It was a huge, triumphal and good-natured cavalcade that rode with them from Berry's Hut, beyond Jinden Creek, back to Braidwood. They were remanded in Braidwood, then went down the mountain to the Bay to go by boat to Sydney. They were tried, found guilty, and hanged at Darlinghurst Goal in June of 1867.

I always find it quite sobering to reflect on the fact that many of these bushrangers were only young men, in their twenties, and their careers as bushrangers rarely lasted little more than a couple of years. It may have seemed a colourful life they led, but it was also a very short one.

The **Chinese** Influence

The **gold** rush also saw the immigration of a large contingent of **Chinese** miners. At times there were as many as 2000 in the area, mainly at Jembaicumbene and Mongarlowe, and many stayed after the diggings were exhausted, having established successful enterprises in Braidwood. Their presence thus added another element to the cultural tapestry that is Braidwood today.

The Railway that Never Was

While the discovery of **gold** had been a boon for Braidwood, by the late 1870s, most of the precious metal accessible to small or individual **mining operations** was gone. Parkes was Premier again, and he was getting the railways under way in NSW. The railway could move goods and people very efficiently and quickly, compared to horses and bullock drays, and the movement of agricultural produce could be particularly advantaged.

When the plans for a railway line to be built linking Sydney to Melbourne via inland NSW were announced, all the little towns along the way started sending delegations to Sydney, putting forward their cases for inclusion on the line. It was always going to Goulburn, and to Yass, and when he came to Braidwood in 1888 as part of the centenary of NSW celebrations, Sir Henry Parkes promised, yes, the spur line from Tarago would be built to Braidwood. (I am reliably informed that the line was going to end in Station Street"plans were already in place).

Parkes came in November, the best month climatically in Braidwood. The town gave him a huge welcome, including an official banquet at the Literary Institute (one of the organisers, in his diary, notes that it cost in excess of -60). Parkes also addressed the townsfolk from the balcony of the Albion, and my sources tell me that a choir of 500 children from the district sang the national anthem for him.

But the budget for 1889'90 was not good to Braidwood, and the railway never came south from Tarago. In many ways, this was a blessing. Braidwood became an old fashioned little backwater, a quaint, quiet place supplying the services required for the prosperous, surrounding rural district. And indeed, wool and cattle have been the long-term backbone of Braidwood's economy.

A Stable Community

There has always been an extraordinary stability in Braidwood's population. The town's tribal memory is long, and there would be more than a few of you present today who had family here six, or even seven generations back, and who could tell stories relating to those generations. There is a strong sense of place and permanence in Braidwood, and it comes from families who have lived in the one area for a very long time. In fact, my sources also tell me that one of the smaller claims to fame for Braidwood is that it is the home of a family who are the last in New South Wales, if not the country, to still retain ownership and residency of their original grant of 1827. The continuity of communal memories, relationships and stories that many older Braidwood residents share is a cherished aspect of community here, and something later blow-ins, when they perceive it, can only envy.

So there was no railway, but wool was good, and while there were wars, and a great depression, still wool sustained Braidwood. With no startling economic stimulus the town just ticked over, and very few new buildings were built.

The Movie Industry

The end result was that when the movie industry established itself in Australia, and there was a need for an authentic 19th century streetscape, here was Braidwood. So, for the 1920 production of the Ralph Bolderwood classic Robbery Under Arms, interestingly one of the first novels I read at school, the film crews came to Braidwood and we provided the backdrop. And here we were again, in 1970, when Mick Jagger came to town to play "Ned Kelly". Then there was "The Year my Voice Broke", in 1987, and the 1995 production of the Dad & Dave classic, "On Our Selection", starring amongst others, Joan Sutherland.

And here we are today

Which brings me near enough in our little historical tour to today. Braidwood has had its ups and downs, its fortune and misfortune during the past 175 years, but it also had the endurance of its community and the enduring love of this part of the country from Mongarlowe to Majors Creek, from Nerriga to Araluen, from Bombay to Ballalaba and beyond. The names of pioneers and early settlers that would have appeared in the telephone books, if there were any back then, still appear in today's white pages, and the names of the streets of its Georgian grid pay tribute to its pioneers. I'm certainly not going to try to list them all, because I'll be bound to leave someone out and there'd be hell to pay!

Braidwood of 2014 is now a place to visit and enjoy for its historic charm, as well as remaining a place that attracts people to come and live. In this respect, I must also welcome the blow-ins who make the fabric of Braidwood that little bit richer" a bit of new blood is always a good thing for the gene pool.

Local Leadership

Finally I would like to acknowledge the contribution of my own local government predecessors, the long list of Municipal Mayors, Shire Presidents, and again Mayors of first the Braidwood municipality, then Tallaganda Shire, and most recently the Palerang Local Government Area. It is a privilege to be walking in their footsteps today in celebrating the 175th anniversary of our town. Although I am from over the hill, I would like to express my appreciation for the welcome that you have shown me as your Mayor

So welcome everyone. To those who have returned for the 175th anniversary celebrations, welcome back, and thank you for your contribution to Braidwood's history. To everyone, welcome to our gathering and have a great day, or week, or however long you choose to stay."

Pete Harrison

Palerang Mayor

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