

IMAGINING OUR PASTS, PRESENTS AND POSSIBLE FUTURES: A CULTURAL PLAN FOR THE SHIRE OF FORBES, NSW

Forbes Arts & Culture Working Group

www.geocities.com/forbesculturalplan

Draft 17 March 2006

Culture in its widest sense is about what matters to people and communities. It is about relationships, shared memories and experiences. It is about identity, history and a sense of place. It is about the different cultural and religious backgrounds found in most communities. It is about the things we consider valuable for passing onto future generations. It is our way of connecting the present with the past and the future.

Cultural Planning Guidelines for Local Government,
Ministry of the Arts and Department of Local Government, NSW, 2004



The [Shire of Forbes](http://www.geocities.com/forbesculturalplan), in central New South Wales, Australia: From tiny Derriwong in the west to Eugowra in the east, from Daroobalgie in the north to Wirinya in the south, with the river town of Forbes in the middle.

Source: NSW [Department of Local Government](http://www.geocities.com/forbesculturalplan).

For more information please see www.geocities.com/forbesculturalplan

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- Letter to Forbes Arts & Culture Working Group from author Merrill Findlay, 6 March 2006, accompanying the first uncorrected draft of the cultural framework.
- Email from Forbes Shire Council Chris Devitt re. the independent status of the Working Group.
- Participants in the Working Group – *still to be collated from the web site and minutes*. See <http://www.geocities.com/forbesculturalplan/minutes.html>
- SWOT analysis – *still to be collated*. See <http://www.geocities.com/forbesculturalplan/SWOTanalysis.html> (page last updated July 2005)
- Survey analysis - *still to be completed in Melbourne*.
- Survey questionnaire. See <http://www.geocities.com/forbesculturalplan/Assets/ForbesCulturalPlanSurveyForm-July2005.pdf>.

[Please note: the final version of the cultural plan should also include a letter to the people of Forbes Shire from the Mayor, and from Council’s General Manager, plus a generalised budget for items listed in the Action Plan.]

PREFACE: WHAT IS “CULTURE” & CULTURAL PLANNING, AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

Culture, like *nature*, is an extraordinarily difficult concept to define and many different understandings are used concurrently. In this document, we are following the general definitions outlined in the State Government’s *Cultural Planning Guidelines*, which suggests that “Culture in its widest sense is about what matters to people and communities.” Culture thus includes our “relationships; shared memories, experiences and identity; diverse cultural, religious and historic backgrounds; values and aspirations; and what we consider to pass on to future generations” (NSW Ministry for the Arts, 2004, p.7).

“Culture” can also mean creative activities and their outcomes, such as “the performing and visual arts including digital and website art, craft, design and fashion; media, film, television, video and language; museums, art galleries, artefacts, local historical societies, archives and keeping places; libraries, literature, writing and publishing; the built environment, heritage, architecture, landscape and archaeology; sports events, facilities and development; parks, open spaces, wildlife habitats, water environment and countryside recreation; children’s play, playgrounds and play activities; tourism, festivals and attractions, and informal leisure pursuits” (NSW Ministry for the Arts 2004, p.22).

Cultural planning is a way of identifying these *values* and *things* which contribute to people’s quality-of-life and give us our sense-of-place or belonging, and of enhancing them, or developing them further. The *Cultural Planning Guidelines for Local Government* publication suggests that good cultural planning supports and promotes a community’s ongoing wellbeing and future sustainability by “providing opportunities and removing obstacles to people’s cultural expression, creativity and sense of place” (p.9).

The *Guidelines* insists that in healthy and vital communities *all* residents, regardless of their ages and backgrounds, have opportunities to express themselves creatively and to engage with local cultural heritage, such as historic buildings and landscapes, visual art, literature, music, community traditions and folklore. They are also able to experience new artistic productions, such as travelling exhibitions, theatre, books and musical performances which challenge them with new ideas; and to develop uniquely

local forms of cultural expression through individual or collaborative projects. Such opportunities can be encouraged and facilitated by local government through strategic and integrated cultural planning.

Developing a cultural planning framework and action plan is a necessary first step in conserving, nurturing, supporting, enhancing and promoting the *things* and *values* that are important to people in ways that enrich everyone in the broader community. This would seem a very legitimate goal of local government. But Forbes Shire Council also needs a Cultural Plan for purely pragmatic reasons, since funding bodies, including state and federal government departments, now assess a shire's cultural planning processes when allocating resources for cultural activities. So without a cultural plan all cultural practitioners and other residents are disadvantaged when/if they seek external funding for cultural activities.

The State Government's Cultural Planning Guidelines are available online from www.arts.nsw.gov.au/WhatsNew/CPG.htm, or on www.geocities.com/forbesculturalplan. Other information about cultural development and planning, and the cultural plans from other local government areas can be downloaded from the NSW Local Government and Shires Association web page on <http://www.lgsa.org.au/www/html/882-28-february-2006.asp?intSiteID=1> or from the Forbes Arts & Culture Group's website, www.geocities.com/forbesculturalplan.

IMAGINING OUR PASTS, PRESENTS AND POSSIBLE FUTURES: A CULTURAL FRAMEWORK

By honorary 'writer-in-residence' Merrill Findlay
for the Forbes Arts & Culture Working Group
Forbes, March 2006

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Version 11 March 2006

Synopsis/Executive Summary: *To be inserted*

1.0 WHERE IS FORBES SHIRE AND WHO ARE ITS PEOPLE?

What we now know as the Local Government Area (LGA) of Forbes spans 4,720 square miles of the mid-Lachlan Valley in central New South Wales. It shares boundaries with the Parkes, Carbonne-Orange, Cowra, Weddin, Bland and Lachlan shires,¹ and is bisected by the Lachlan River and three major state and interstate roads, the Newell Highway, the Lachlan Valley Way and Henry Lawson Way. This inland shire is home to approximately 10,000² people who live in the historic town of Forbes, in the villages of Bedgerebong, Corinella and Eugowra,³ and on farms or 'acreages' in the many named rural localities.⁴

1 See http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/dlg_regions.asp?region=region®iontype=3

2 The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated the population to be 9,974 with a median age of 39.4 years at the end of June 2005. See ABS document 3218.0 - Regional Population Growth, Australia, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3218.0Main%20Features22004-05?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3218.0&issue=2004-05&num=&view=2004-05> (accessed 7 March 06).

3 The shire's eastern boundary passes through the town of Eugowra.

4 Villages and localities within the Shire are Back Yamma, Bandon, Bandon South, Bareenong, Bedgerebong, Bonny Dell, Bundaburrah, Calarie, Carawandool, Carrawabbity, Cookamidgera, Corinella, Corridgery, Cumbijowa, Daroobalgie, Derriwong, Eugowra, Garema, Grawlin, Grawlin Plains, Grudgery, Gunning Gap, Inchgower, Ironbarks, Jemalong, Jemalong Weir, Mackay's Creek, Mafeking, Mandagery, Mulguthrie, Mulyandry, Mungarra, Ootha, Paytens Bridge, Pinnacle, Red Bend, Riversleigh, Slimbridge, South Lead, Tomanbil, Vychan, Wandary, Warroo, Weelong, Wirrinya, Wongajong, Wowingragong, Yarrabandai, and Yarragong.

The 2001 Census presents a snapshot of the shire's population as relatively ethnically homogenous but leavened by pockets of cultural diversity. The total population at the time of the Census was just over 9,700, a very large majority of whom were Australian-born and of European, or more particularly Anglo-Celtic ancestry. Around 500 people, or approximately 5% of the population, identified themselves as of indigenous descent, while 34 people were of Southeast Asian background (predominantly Filipino and Vietnamese), 33 Northeast Asian (predominantly Chinese), 12 Southern or Central Asian (Indian or Sri Lankan), 9 Sub-Saharan African, and 9 claimed North African and Middle Eastern descent. Less than 4 percent of residents were born overseas, and of these, most came from Britain (149), with smaller numbers from New Zealand (35), Italy (21), Netherlands (15) and the Philippines (14). Other countries of birth include Canada (3), China (3), Egypt (3), Fiji (3), France (6), Germany (9), Greece (6), Ireland (8), Lebanon (3), Malaysia (6), Malta (3), Poland (6), South Africa (7), Sri Lanka (5), USA (6), and Vietnam (8) and 'Elsewhere' (28), a category which includes Japan, Southern and East Africa, and Indonesia.

In specifying their religious affiliations in 2001 most shire residents stated that they were Catholic (3,666), Anglican (3,136), or were associated with one of the many other Christian denominations represented in the Shire. Three people identified themselves as Hindus, three as Jews, 10 ticked the box marked "another religion" and more than 500 stated that they had no religious affiliation at all, a category which includes atheists, agnostics, secular humanists and rationalists. Just 112 people in a total population claimed to speak a language other than English, which included Italian (31 speakers), Cantonese (10), German (7), Japanese (3), Macedonian (4), Netherlandic (3), Polish (3), Sinhalese (3), Tagalog/Filipino (5), Vietnamese (8).

Although the local economy is dominated by rural industries and most of the land within the shire's boundaries is used for agriculture and horticulture, the number of people actively engaged in food or fibre production is relatively small, and on many farms at least one partner earns off-farm income. Many people within the shire also depend on welfare benefits of some kind. As one interviewee commented, the town of Forbes has become "a haven for pensioners"⁵ with its good health and aged care services. Welfare beneficiaries also include many families with children, including single parent families. The high number of "struggling families" means that both

⁵ Clive Thomas, interview 27 February 2006.

Forbes Primary and North Forbes Primary Schools are officially designated as disadvantaged schools.⁶

The relative poverty of many shire residents, along with the aging of the population and its continuing decline need to be considered if we are to develop an equitable cultural strategy to enliven and enrich all people's lives, and attract more settlers and visitors to Forbes to ensure its ongoing economic sustainability. A cultural plan that only responds to the needs of one group in the broader community -- those who can afford to pay for cultural goods, services and amenities, for example -- would be both unjust and discriminatory.⁷

2.0 SENSE OF PLACE, VALUES AND IDENTITIES: 40,000 YEARS OF CULTURE IN THE FORBES SHIRE

Forbes Shire has a cultural heritage stretching back many thousands of years. Archaeological evidence suggests that people have been living within the present-day boundaries of the local government area for X,000 years, but it is safe to assume that people have occupied the river valley for at least 40,000 years, a date confirmed from skeletal remains buried in the dunes of Lake Mungo, a Pleistocene lake that was once filled by the Lachlan River system (Bowler, Johnston et al. 2003) p. 839). People may thus have been creating 'art and culture' in what is now the Shire of Forbes for at least two thousand generations.

Many locals – though not all, of course -- take great pride in their cultural heritage, especially in the historic buildings and streetscape of Forbes and in the billabong or lake around which the town has developed. These distinctive features induce warm and fuzzy feelings which several interviewees described as "belongingness". Forbes shire is unimaginable for them without its old buildings and the lake in the centre of town, or without the river, floodplains and the big skies of the surrounding countryside. People draw sustenance, inspiration and knowledge from this environment, and continue to express their relationship with it and their own identities through bush poetry, for example, or in music, song, dance or the visual arts.

This much loved physical environment is as much a cultural artefact as are the relics in the Forbes & District Historical Museum, the books of the Paul & Hettie Wenz

⁶ Phil Thurston, principal Forbes North Primary School, interview 27 February 2006.

⁷ It is worth remembering that in Australia the median adult income is \$26,000 per year, according to a recent HILDA survey (Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia), but the figure for Forbes Shire could be much lower, given the shire's high level of welfare dependence.

Collection, the dance music performed and transcribed by Harry Schaeffer⁸ and more recent musicians, or the contemporary paintings hanging in the Forbes Art Gallery or Railway Arts and Crafts Centre. The landscape is the handiwork of generations of “resource managers”, including the Wiradjuri with their ‘fire-stick farming’ and other proto-agricultural land use strategies (Rose, James et al. 2003, Rose 1994); the nineteenth century pastoralists with their sheep and cattle; the miners with their picks, shovels and heavy machinery; the farmers, horticulturalists and timber cutters with their axes and ploughs; and the townsfolk and villagers who constructed the unique urban forms. The river and its creeks, billabongs and remaining wetlands have also been modified to such an extent over the last 180 years that they, too, must now be considered artefacts and part of our shared cultural heritage, as well as our natural heritage. The changing beliefs and values of all shire residents are embodied in the river and its broad alluvial plains.

3.0 WIRADJURI PASTS, PRESENTS, FUTURES

For the Shire’s First People, the Wiradjuri, the river they called Galiyarr (Kass 2003), or Kalara, traced the presence of ancestral beings, such as Baiamai, the father of creation, and Wawi the rainbow snake (Mathews 1896; Kass 2003; Commonwealth of Australia 2001, p.8), as they created and shaped the earth and filled it with life (Findlay 2006). The journeys these mythic ancestors made are embedded in the landscape as Dreaming trails or songlines, many of which criss-cross Forbes Shire and remain culturally potent for Wiradjuri descendants.

Tragically many of the stories the Wiradjuri ancestors told have been lost under the pressures of colonisation, as has much of the material culture created in the millennia before Europeans arrived. Artefacts from this period include countless stone tools which continue to yield important information about Wiradjuri proto-agriculture and other subsistence strategies; many elegantly carved wooden shields, spears, throwing sticks, clubs and boomerangs; and a number of dendoglyphs, or carved trees, that are preserved in museums, including Forbes and District Historical Society’s museum, or are still standing on private or Crown land. But the well-constructed permanent villages, complex grave mounds and ‘hayricks’ that the early British explorers, including John Oxley and Thomas Mitchell, described in the early

⁸ The Harry Schaeffer Collection is currently in the possession of Forbes folklorist Rob Willis, but is expected to be acquired by the National Library of Australia, where it will be available to anyone who wants to see it. Rob Willis suggests that Forbes Shire Council could acquire facsimiles of the Schaeffer material, along with copies of all the recordings he has made in the shire for a local cultural heritage centre, for example.

nineteenth century have not survived; and nor have any of the symbolically significant possum skin cloaks that Wiradjuri people created as 'wearable artworks' in pre-Contact times. These cloaks were manufactured from treated marsupial skins which were incised with symbolic designs, coloured with ochre and other pigments and stitched together with fine gut or plant-fibre thread. One such cloak was presented to Governor Lachlan Macquarie by a delegation of three Wiradjuri warriors in Bathurst on 10 May 1815, for example;⁹ and Wiradjuri descendants still make cloaks from animal skins as an affirmation of their cultural identity.

The completion of the road across the Blue Mountains in 1815 began an era of frontier warfare, "extirpation" (Mundy 2003, p. 130), disease and forced displacement as British 'squatters' and their assigned convicts and other workers drove mobs of cattle and sheep into the inland. By the 1840s most Wiradjuri survivors had been forced either to withdraw to isolated refugee camps along the rivers, creeks and billabongs, or to pragmatically accommodate the squatters and the missionaries who followed them (Findlay 2006). There is strong evidence that, despite the psychological trauma and social dislocation Wiradjuri people experienced at this time, their elders continued their traditional cultural practices, including initiating young men and women, well into the early twentieth century (Read 1983, p 14). Colonial anthropologist Robert H. Mathews documented several Wiradjuri initiation ceremonies, or burbungs, in the 1890s, for example (Mathews 1896; Mathews 1897; Mathews 1901). One of these took place at Bulgeraga Creek, an anabranch of the Macquarie River, between March and July of 1893 and was attended by ninety-eight men, women and children (Mathews 1896, pp. 298-312). Although the people who attended this particular burbung were from the Macquarie, Castlereagh and Bogan Rivers (Mathews 1901), it is reasonable to presume that ceremonies held within what is now the Forbes Shire in the nineteenth century were very similar.

The scale of the symbolic transformation of the landscape and the individual 'art works' associated with the burbungs, as Mathews describes them, is truly impressive. One sculptural 'earthwork' of a giant man "lying face downwards, with his arms spread out" was seven metres long, half a metre high and nearly two metres wide, for example. Nearby were "imprints of a gigantic hand in the soil" which the initiates were told had been left by Baiamai, the Wiradjuri's father of creation, while

9 ALL Project, 2005, Bathurst Region in *Journeys in time 1809-22: the journals of Lachlan and Elizabeth Macquarie*, the Macquarie University and the State Library of NSW. .
http://www.lib.mq.edu.au/all/journeys/people/peoplea_f.html accessed 9 February 2009.

some distance away were sculptural figures representing Baiamai's wife Gunuanbul, one of his sons, and an eighteen metre long snake figure representing "Wahwee" the rainbow serpent. Mathews also describes screens made from branches, chairs made from the roots of upturned trees, pits dug into the ground, a *goombo*, or large clearing in which the earth was swept clean of every twig, thirty smaller sculpted figures, or *yam'munyamun*, up to four metres in length, a total of 59 carved trees, and a *mil'lendee* or "Baiamai's fire" which was kept burning throughout the ceremonies (Mathews 1896, pp. 299-302). The sight of men painted in coloured ochres and pipeclay mixed with fat, their bodies glowing in the firelight as they danced through this mythic landscape to music played by the women on kangaroo or wallaby skin drums must have been unforgettable.

By the 1890s an estimated 150 Wiradjuri people were living within the Forbes district. Two graves in the Forbes cemetery connect townsfolk with this time. The first is of a Wiradjuri elder remembered today as "Bundaburra Jimmy" who died in the Forbes Hospital on 26 February, 1908, at the age of 104. The other is of "Bundaburra Jack" who died in the hospital the following year, 1909, on 1 January. Bundaburra Jack is said to have been born "at or near Wyalong around 1830" and spent much of his adult life working as a shearer. Both men were probably named for Bundaburra Station, a colonial run which may have included their ancestral clan estates (Hildred 1997).

A reserve of 20 acres was formally gazetted for Wiradjuri people in the parish of Forbes, County of Ashburnham (AR 43462/3 on parish maps), in the year "Bundaburra Jack" died (Kabaila 1996, p. 48), but it was revoked in 1915 after "the clearance of the town camps by local councils" (Kabaila 1996, p. 48). Many of the Wiradjuri people who had lived in and around the town of Forbes up until this time were forced onto reserves, missions or informal refuges at Condobolin, Cowra, Euabalong and Gooloogong (Kelton 1997, p.14), while others "hid their Aboriginal descent so that their families could move with ease amongst white society" (Kabaila 1996, p. 49). A number of families, like the Beulahs of Forbes, retained their Aboriginal identity and apparently integrated successfully into the broader Forbes community (Kelton 1997).

The indigenous population of Forbes has grown substantially over the last twenty years. At the 2001 Census around 500 people claimed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities, roughly half of whom (244) were under 18 years of age. In 2006

the estimated population is closer to xxx. Thirty percent of students at Forbes North Primary School are of indigenous decent,¹⁰ xxx percent at Forbes Primary and xxx percent the Forbes High School. [*Please note: a consultation process has been initiated with the shire's indigenous people through Yoorana Gunya Family Violence Healing Centre Inc.*]

In recent years Wiradjuri descendants, like other indigenous peoples, have experienced what some see as a cultural Renaissance. Elders have reintroduced many of their traditional stories and practices in innovative cultural programs, such as those provided for young people throughout central western NSW by Tirkandi Inaburra Cultural Development Centre in Griffith; and a new generation of cultural practitioners is expressing their indigenous identity through music, literature, theatre, and the visual arts. A major exhibition of indigenous art at the Orange Regional Gallery in June 2005 featured a number of prominent Wiradjuri artists,¹¹ for example. And against all odds, Wiradjuri language is being revived and is being taught at Forbes North Primary School by both indigenous and non-indigenous teachers.¹² These examples of cultural renewal offer all Shire residents exciting opportunities to acknowledge the past and learn from it, and to celebrate the continuation of Wiradjuri culture in ways that are life-affirming and reconciliatory.

4.0 FORBES PASTORAL HERITAGE

Non-indigenous people have occupied the inland plains of what is now the Forbes Shire for just “three human lifetimes” (Flannery 2002, p. 2). In this period we have transformed the landscape to such an extent that it is now impossible to reliably determine what it was like before settlement (Austin, Cawsey et al. 2000, p. 139). Until the discovery of gold in 1861 the total *non*-indigenous population was just a few hundred people (Munro 1997, p.175), including the predominantly British squatters, their families and assigned convicts; the overseers, stockmen, shepherds, housemaids, cooks, tutors, governesses and other station workers employed by the squatters; and the many shearers, drovers, haulage contractors, tradesmen and women, publicans, grog shanty proprietors, sex workers, wool buyers, accountants,

¹⁰ Interview with Phil Thurston, principal Forbes North Primary, 27 February, 2006.

¹¹ See <http://www.geocities.com/forbesculturalplan/newsletter-winter2005.html#exhibition>.

¹² The Wiradjuri Language Reclamation Program was initiated in the 1990s by Stan Grant senior, a member of the Wiradjuri Council of Elders from Cowra, his brother Pastor Cecil Grant Wongamar and anthropologist and linguist John Rudder (Maza and Tamou 2003; ATSIC 2002). The NSW Board of Studies selected Forbes North Primary School to pilot its Wiradjuri language program in 2004 because of the work already done in this field by North Forbes teacher, Michelle Herbert. See <http://ab-ed.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/go/languages-2004/> (accessed 7 March 06).

lawyers and other goods and services providers who supported the sheep and cattle industries.

Although sparse, this population may have been more culturally diverse than is generally acknowledged. By the 1830s many of the stockmen and women were of mixed European and Wiradjuri descent, for example, and a number of the shepherds and other station workers may have been indentured labourers from southern China, India and the Pacific islands who had been shipped to New South Wales by some of the colony's wealthiest squatters and their agents when convicts were no longer assigned as cheap rural labour. From the 1860s Afghan cameleers may also have arrived in the district as haulage contractors and traders, and established their own very basic mosques¹³ and "ghan towns" in the shire.

Forbes Shire also has a significant cultural heritage associated with the labour movement and the foundation of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in the late nineteenth century. Union organisers pedalled their bicycles to meet with the station workers at Burrawong Station in the 1890s, for example, and that station's shearing shed, said to have been the largest in the colony at this time, may have been a setting for a shearers' strike. These and many other pastoral stories await further research and interpretation.

Forbes's ongoing pastoral heritage is embodied in the river and the landscape itself, in the many historic homesteads, shearing sheds, workers quarters, camps and Aboriginal settlements along the Lachlan River and its tributaries, in the infrastructure constructed to support the sheep and cattle industries, such as the multimillion dollar cattle sale yards near Daroolgalbie, the sheep yards on the Newell Highway, and the stock pavilions at the Forbes Show Ground. It is commemorated by the buildings erected, or re-erected on the Lachlan Vintage Village site, in displays at the Forbes & District's Historical Society's Museum, and at Burrawong West Station, a five-star eco-tourism resort on Gunningbland Creek on the Shire's western frontier, where tourists come in search not only to experience of the "romance" of the pastoral era, but to also connect with the shire's Wiradjuri roots and the unique biodiversity of the inland plains. This heritage is, of course, very important to Wiradjuri people who have been part of the pastoral industry since the first squatters drove their sheep and

¹³ These nineteenth century mosques may simply have been circles of stones on the ground with a stone *qibla* signalling the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, similar to the mosques used by Macassan fishers and traders in northern Australia from before the European era.

cattle into their homelands over 180 years ago. The pastoralism is very much a shared cultural heritage (Harrison 2004), and all the sites associated with it are potential subjects for future works of art and possible venues or settings for community arts activities.

Countless poems, plays, short stories and novels, paintings, drawings, photographs and other visual arts works have, of course, already been produced within the Shire about the pastoral era. But probably the best known and loved artwork 'about' the shire's pastoral heritage is set not within the Forbes shire itself, but on Brocklesby Station at Corowa, on the Murray River, and was painted by an Anglo-Australian painter, Tom Roberts, who may never have visited Forbes. Prints of his *Shearing the rams* still hang on walls throughout the shire beside calendars from stock and station agents and rural suppliers showing sheep or cattle under Hans Heysen-style¹⁴ eucalypts, for example, and drovers following their flocks, bullock teams carting bales of wool, or stockmen on their horses. Such images are as authentically 'Forbes' and the Lachlan as they are of anywhere else in central NSW, and they remain very important to many shire residents as markers of their sense-of-place and their identity as country people.

5.0 THE GOLD ERA

Gold was discovered near the boundary of two large pastoral runs, Bugabagil and Drowbalgie, in May 1861 (Elliot 1997, p. 44),¹⁵ at a place which became known simply as Black Ridge for the iron bark trees that proliferated there. News of the discovery precipitated a mini-Rush of miners from the nearby goldfields of Kiandra and Lambing Flats at Young, but when Harry Stephan, or "German Harry", struck a layer of gold-bearing sediment on Christmas Eve of that year, he launched a population explosion. In three months somewhere between 28,000 and 40,000 people rushed to Black Ridge hoping to make their fortunes (Williams and Williams 1997, p. 51-52). The lyrics of *The Diggers' Song* performed at a concert on the Forbes goldfields and published in *The Empire*, a Sydney newspaper, on 31 July 1872, evokes the optimism that drew so many men and women from all over the

¹⁴ German-Australian artist, Wilhelm Ernst Hans Franz Heysen (1877-1968), migrated to Australia as a child with his family in 1884, and is now best remembered for his paintings of eucalypts, and his images of inland Australia. See http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/collection/australian/painting/h/heysen_h/education_kit.html.

¹⁵ Gold mining still makes a substantial contribution to the Forbes economy since many of the workers from Barrick Gold's open cut mine at Lake Cowell live in the shire, and the company purchases goods and services in Forbes. Barrick Gold is also a potential sponsor for forthcoming cultural activities in and around Forbes.

world to what is now the Forbes Shire at this time: *By the side of the creek, with shovel and pan,/ I see the gold diggers, a bold, sturdy clan;/ They are sinking for wealth, and 'neath the red mould,/ Lies all that they seek for, the long wish'd for gold* (Wongawilli Colonial Dance Club Inc 2002).

Dozens of hotels, “concert rooms”, and grog shanties emerged from the mullock heaps of Black Ridge to service the cultural and other needs of the diggers. “Of amusements we have no lack of,” one contributor to a local paper, *The Miner*, boasted in December 1861. He described the opening of one favourite cultural venue, the Shamrock Concert Hall, as “crowded to suffocation” and deservedly so, because it was “the most creditable thing we have as yet seen, and quite a wonder in so young a town” (Hildred 1997, p. 84). Another observer of the cultural life of the goldfields saw “men of all shades of colour” perched on benches along the walls of another concert room in the Exchange Hotel to watch “15 men and one young woman going through the various positions of a set of quadrilles, a piano and violin forming the splendid quadrille band”. The nearby Exhibition Theatre was offering opera and comedy on a stage with “machinery and scenery not to be surpassed in or out of the colony” (Williams and Williams 1997, p. 57).¹⁶

A visitor wandering around the goldfields at this time might have heard Gaelic, Welsh, French, a range of Italian and German dialects, Danish, Cantonese, and perhaps even Yiddish being spoken, along with many different English dialects. There were enough Jews at this time to warrant the construction of a synagogue, the first west of the Blue Mountains, for example. In the spirit of inter-faith cooperation the Jewish congregation shared their place of worship with the Methodists after their church burned down (Williams and Williams 1997, p.196) and bequeathed to future generations an image of inter-religious mutuality, respect, harmony and cooperation to inspire us all.

In 1862, the year in which a 235,044 ounces of gold (just over 6.6 metric tons) was escorted from the diggings to the Royal Mint, raucous Black Ridge was somewhat ironically re-named for the Bermuda-born lawyer who became New South Wales’ first Chief Justice, Sir Francis Forbes.¹⁷ Acquiring the surname of one of the colony’s

¹⁶ A year later, 1862, the German Dance Band was playing at the new Empire Hotel and 200 couples where whirling around the dance floor. Tweedie, D. and J. Hildred (1997).

¹⁷ Francis Forbes was born in the British sugar colony of Bermuda. He went to England at 19 to study law and returned to Bermuda as Crown Law Officer. He was appointed Chief Justice of Newfoundland in 1816, and Chief Justice to the much larger penal colony of New South Wales in 1823 (Law Courts

most distinguished lawyers did little to improve law and order in the Lachlan goldfields though, it seems, because in this same year Frank Gardiner and his gang pulled off one of Australia's most daring gold heists near the town and escaped with 14,000 pounds worth of gold and notes. One of the bushrangers who is said to have participated in this robbery was a young squatter from near Forbes, Ben Hall. On this occasion he escaped the law but he visited Forbes some three years later and was allegedly involved in a number of other robberies. The police found him near Billabong (or Goobang) Creek: a popular folksong continues the story: *Come all you Lachlan men and a sorrowful tale I'll tell/ Concerning of a hero bold who through misfortune fell/ His name it was Ben Hall a man of good renown/ Who was hunted from his station and like a dog shot down.*

This ballad, *The Streets of Forbes*, is now sung by folk enthusiasts around the world: indeed, one of Australia's most loved international performers, Paul Kelly, made his professional debut singing it in Hobart in 1974.¹⁸ The Combined Choir of the Primary Schools of Forbes¹⁹ also recorded their own version in 2003 when local musician and folklorist, Rob Willis, and fellow enthusiasts organised a Streets of Forbes Folk Gathering to celebrate the shire's folk heritage.

Ben Hall is buried in the Forbes cemetery not far from the grave of Kate Kelly, the sister of another even more famous bushranger. Kate Kelly married a Forbes tradesman, Bill Foster, in 1888, had six children with him, and drowned in the Forbes lagoon in 1898 while her husband was working on Burrawong Station on the shire's western frontier. Kate Kelly is, like Ben Hall, now remembered in film, literature, folklore and in song: *The noble Kate Kelly, so noble of mien,/ As she sits on her horse like a true born queen./ She rides through the bush with revolver in hand,/ Well guarded from danger, a David she stands.*²⁰

Library 1999, Attorney General's Department, NSW 2006). He arrived in Sydney in 1824 and began what amounted to "a legal and constitutional revolution" by re-establishing the Supreme Court of New South Wales and institutionalising the rule of law (Holloway, I. 2004). Francis Forbes' contribution to Australia was referred to by another Chief Justice, Murray Gleeson, AC, in his 2000 Boyer Lectures. See <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/boyers/stories/s227020.htm>. Also see <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/lhr/22.2/holloway.html> and <http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/history/lah.nsf/pages/forbes>.

¹⁸ Paul Kelly's official web site <http://www.paulkelly.com.au/bio/1997.html>, accessed 14 February 2006.

¹⁹ See <http://simplyaustralia.net/Forbes/index.html> Also see <http://www.mcdonaldstrings.com/schaeferbook/schaeferindex.html>, accessed March 2006.

²⁰ See <http://www.rowethmusic.com.au/library/aganlyrics.html>, accessed March 2006.

For some reason the people of Forbes, including many of the shire's artists and musicians, have been slow to appreciate the mythic heritage Ben Hall and Kate Kelly bequeathed to them. And although tourists from around Australia visit Forbes cemetery to see the graves of these two folk heroes, their lives and deaths have not yet been commemorated or interpreted in ways that are appropriate to the national, even global interest in bush rangers and the social conditions that produced them. Nor have Forbes people taken full advantage of their association with one of colonial Australia's most distinguished lawmen, Australia's first Chief Justice, Sir Francis Forbes, for whom the shire is named. The relationship between the law-breaking bushrangers and the law-making Sir Francis is an eminently exploitable one which could yield substantial economic, social and cultural benefits – and even national and global fame and glory!

A national bushranger festival of folk history, music, bush dancing and street theatre could do much to enliven the shire and attract thousands of visitors. It could be accompanied by a public oration in honour of Sir Francis Forbes by a prominent legal identity,²¹ and/or a national mini-conference on 'law-breakers and law-makers' at the historic court house and other venues around Victoria Park. The Vintage Village could also be re-integrated into the cultural life of the shire through such a festival.

Forbes may have "more bushranger ballads than anywhere else in Australia", as folklorist Rob Willis claims, but ethnomusicologists are also "blown away" by the diversity of the music from the Forbes goldfields and the many Scandinavian, Italian, German, Anglo-Celtic and other influences that can be heard in the melodies.²² Many of the tunes which have survived from the 1860s "only existed in people's heads" until gifted local musicians, such as Harry Schaeffer, wrote them down, Rob Willis says. Schaeffer's handwritten manuscripts, with their idiosyncratic cigarette burns and "wonky bar lines", will soon find a permanent home in the National Library of Australia,²³ but facsimile versions could also be given to Forbes for permanent display if an appropriate request were made by the Forbes Library, the Heritage Committee, or the Historical Society, for example; and digital copies of all the sound and video recordings Rob Willis has made in and around Forbes could also be made available on DVD for use in an interactive interpretation in a twenty-first century

²¹ The Francis Forbes Society for Australian Legal History hosts an annual Francis Forbes lecture to commemorate the judge's contribution to Australian law. See http://www.forbessociety.org.au/Lectures/lecture_index.htm. Accessed March 2006.

²² Interview with Rob Willis, 27 February 2006.

²³ Ibid.

heritage centre. This offer represents a rare opportunity for Forbes people to reclaim their oral history and music heritage and “value add” it for the benefit of present-day and future generations. In the mean time, the dance tunes Harry Schaeffer transcribed and preserved have been published online by local publisher, Carrawobitty Press,²⁴ and are available to musicians anywhere in the world who want an authentic taste of the Forbes goldfields.

Water seepage, infectious diseases such typhoid, and simple bad luck made mining a risky occupation on the Lachlan diggings, and by Christmas 1862 the population of Forbes had fallen to less than 12,000. By June the following year only 3,000 tenacious diggers and business people remained [ref]. Most of these mid-nineteenth century settlers were probably of English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish descent and many of their stories are well documented and remembered, but French, German and Chinese settlers also made lasting contributions to the district from this time, and the multicultural heritage they left behind is increasingly valuable because of the impacts of globalisation on the shire’s economy impacts and the rise of China as an economic superpower.

5.1 Chinese connections

One of the most prominent Chinese settlers from the gold era was William Ah Foo who came to Forbes as a single man and built up a successful market garden business employing dozens of Chinese workers. In later life Ah Foo married Margaret Kang, a teenage orphan from Orange, and raised a large family with her in Forbes. Every year Ah Foo and his family and staff observed Chinese New Year and other festivities with traditional food, fireworks and gambling and these parties became famous throughout Central Western NSW (Smith 1997).

Former Forbes resident Jean Glanville (Jean-Marie Long) describes, in her unpublished memoirs, similar Chinese celebrations in Forbes in the 1930s and ‘40s²⁵ for which trunks of traditional food, drink and fireworks were ordered from Sun Quong Hing’s Chinese emporium in Sydney. Mrs Glanville spent much of her childhood on Chinese market gardens around Forbes and recalls the large number of Chinese and non-Chinese workers who produced organically grown vegetables for shops in Cowra, Young, Grenfell, Orange, Parkes and Condobolin (Glanville 2004).

²⁴ See <http://www.mcdonaldstrings.com/schaeferbook/schaeferindex.html>. Accessed March 2006.

²⁵ As a child Mrs Glanville lived on market gardens owned by George Wing, George Hing Lee and Sing Lee in Forbes.

Most of the shire's Chinese migrants came from the southern Cantonese speaking provinces of Greater China. Although their numbers remained substantial throughout the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth centuries, the Chinese population may have peaked in the late nineteenth century when teams of contracted Chinese labourers cleared tens of thousands of hectares of land for farming, and sunk many of the dams and wells in the district. Chinese gardeners also planted and managed many of the shire's rural and town parks and gardens; and Chinese cooks catered for generations of station workers and townsfolk, a tradition that is now continued by the proprietors of Forbes' three Chinese restaurants. Many of the Cantonese speakers returned to China to die in the land of their ancestors but others, including Ah Foo, remained in Forbes and are buried in a local cemetery with their descendants.

Greater China is now the fastest growing economy in the world and is expected to challenge the global economic dominance of the United States of America in coming decades. It could therefore be very beneficial to the Forbes Shire to re-establish trade and cultural links with the now-booming southern provinces of China from which Ah Foo and other Chinese settlers emigrated in the nineteenth century. A new generation of middle class Chinese consumers is now looking for new tourist destinations and, with appropriate cultural enticements, could be encouraged to visit the shire's wide open, clean and green spaces. Forbes is lucky to have a number of excellent Chinese speakers who could help Council, tourist operators and cultural practitioners exploit the shire's Chinese heritage and extend it in new directions.

One way of re-establishing such links would be through a sister-city relationship with Ah Foo's home town which could be launched on the 150th anniversary of his arrival in the shire. Such a reciprocal relationship between regional China and Australia could be marked with traditional Confucian, Daoist or Buddhist ceremonies to honour the Chinese men and women who are buried in the shire's cemeteries, and by celebrating Chinese New Year in Forbes as William Ah Foo and his extended family and employees would have done, with dragon dancers, fireworks and traditional Asian food.

5.2 French connections

From the 1860s French settlers also made a distinctive contribution to the development of the town and its rural hinterland. Joseph Laneyrie is said to have grown the district's first grapes, for example (Giot 1997); while Auguste Nicolas and Joseph Bernard Reymond established an early saw mill and a flour mill (Giot 1997), along with one of the first wineries. Other French settlers arrived in later decades of the nineteenth century, including Auguste Nicolas's nephews Daniel and Jean Nicolas, both of whom made pioneering contributions to the district's horticultural and irrigation industries (Giot 1997), and Pierre Auguste Giot, his wife Marie Naal, and their business partner Celestin Blanc who developed several river blocks for the production of Granny Smith apples and other fruit (Giot 1997). Forbes's nineteenth and early twentieth century French rural heritage now includes three wineries, all of which offer excellent venues for cultural events, as well as the orchards.

Another prominent member of the French-speaking community, farmer/writer Paul Wenz, also made a lasting contribution to the shire's cultural life. A collection of books, photographs and memorabilia from before Wenz's marriage to Australian Hettie Dunne, and from their lives together on Nanima Station is now divided between the Forbes Library, the Forbes Historical Society's Museum and the Mitchell Library in Sydney. A number of people in Forbes and elsewhere now hope that all the Wenz material can one day be reunited under a single roof as a focus for a French Heritage or Literary Centre within a larger multifunctional cultural complex in Forbes.

The recognition of the Paul and Hettie Wenz Collection as part of Forbes' cultural heritage opens up exciting opportunities to develop the district's literary and bush writing traditions through an international rural writers festival, for example, and to re-establish the shire's cultural links with France through regional exchanges. Indeed, a number of entrepreneurial French-Australians are already exploiting the shire's Wenz heritage through an international exhibition of designer-bound special editions of two Wenz short stories in both French and English. This exhibition, *Double Book Binding*, is organised by Bookbinding Exhibitions Australia, and will open in Sydney on 28 March 2006. It will then go to Japan and return to Forbes for three weeks in August 2006, before travelling to the historic city of Reims, France, where Paul Wenz was born. This is an excellent example of what can be done to develop international cultural links with the homelands of migrants who have settled in Forbes Shire.

It is worth noting that Paul Wenz's wife, Hettie Dunne, also made an important contribution to the shire's cultural heritage by gifting the couple's joint library to the shire and other institutions, and is herself an identity of some historical importance, as historian Stephen Gapps noted in his report to Council on the Wenz Collection (Gapps 2005).

6.0 THE AGRICULTURAL ERA

The Lachlan Gold Rush of the 1860s coincided with profound social changes that were occurring throughout the colony as a series of reforms were enacted to "throw open" the land the squatters had occupied for wool and meat production and make it available to new generations of aspiring farmers and other smaller investors. The men and women who selected farming blocks in what is now the Forbes shire transformed the physical landscape yet again, and added new dimensions to the Shire's already rich cultural heritage. These changes are documented in the work of Scottish lyric poet, Will Ogilvie, who worked as a jackeroo on Nelungaloo Station near Forbes from 1889,²⁶ and by his mate, Harry "Breaker" Morant, an Anglo-Australian "back-block bard" who also visited Forbes in the 1890s (Willis 1997), for example. They are also celebrated in dozens of poems and yarns by lesser known writers that are still being recited by local balladeers, such as Bill Looney and xxx.

French-Australian writer, Paul Wenz also used the shire as a setting for some of the short stories he wrote in the early twentieth century, including *55 Minutes Late*, which evokes rural life during the early days of rail transport.²⁷ More recently singer/songwriter Neil McCann commemorated the life of his grandfather who lived near Bedgerebong, with a ballad he called *A Night At Daisy Park: The road runs north from Bedgerebong, the sulky runs rough on the track./ They're out for the night for a song and dance, not sure when they'll be back./ Past Gunning Gap church on the right now they're close, there's excitement in the air./ When you see the tall pines line the road to the house, it's tie-up and straighten your hair.* And then the chorus: *Play us a tune on your old concertina, they ask young Jimmy McCann ...* (Wongawilli Colonial Dance Club Inc 2002). *A Night At Daisy Park* can often be heard down by

²⁶ Kathy Tisdell, *Ben Hall: I'm Wounded, Shoot Me*, brochure published by Forbes Heritage, Forbes Shire Council, August 2005.

²⁷ *55 Minutes late* was published in 1910 in French by Paris publisher, Plon, in a collection of Wenz's stories, *Cortes australiens: sous la Croix du Sud* [Australian stories: Under the Southern Cross]. It was republished several times in French and English the 1980s, and again in English in 1990 in *Paul Wenz, Diary of a New Chum and Other Lost Stories* (Imprint/Angus & Robertson). In 2004 it was published on-line with permission as part of the Wenz Project on www.merrillfindlay.com.

the Lachlan river, Forbes, being sung by descendants of the selectors who danced at Daisy Park, a farm near Gunning Gap, to Jimmy McCann's concertina – but now they're gathering around an electronic keyboard and a gas barbecue at the regular community concerts in the Apex Caravan Park.

Many small rural settlements emerged to service the families who selected blocks under the various New South Wales Land Acts in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or drew them in the soldier settlement ballots that followed World Wars I and II. One of these was the village of Boyd which was named for colonial entrepreneur and landholder, Benjamin Boyd, who owned Boyd Station. By the mid-1990s all that remained of Boyd was a cedar tree and “an indentation in the ground ... believed to be where the cellar of the hotel was” (Evans 1997, p. 101), however. The landscape is littered with many similar relics, or material memories, of the agricultural era of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that are awaiting interpretation by the shire's artists, writers, musicians, historians and digital imagers before they disappear completely under the pressures of natural processes and twenty-first century agribusiness.

6.1 German and Italian connections

From the 1880s German farmers, such as the Mattiske, Mahlo, Kupkee, Hohnberg, Pietsche, Miegel, Luhr and Bauert families, travelled overland from South Australia or the Western District of Victoria to settle the Lachlan plains. Many of their descendants are still farming in the shire (Beddie 1997; Williams and Williams 1997), and a number of them have retained some of their German language and personal links with Central Europe. Much of the shire's German cultural heritage remains under-narrated, however, including the discrimination and abuse many German-Australians experienced during the years of the first and second world wars when they were interned as enemy aliens.

Some of the Forbes Italian community were also interned during the war years, although those who, like the Bernadi brothers, worked in “essential services” (in the Bernadi's case, it was food production) escaped imprisonment (Bernadi 1997, p. 610). Other Italians, like Gennaro Melisi and Natale Allegri, first came to the district as POWs assigned to work on local farms, while yet others arrived as post-war migrants and experienced all the hardships of poverty, loneliness, inability to speak English, and being discriminated against as “wogs” by the majority Anglo community. Such stories are exchanged privately but are yet to be told in the public sphere. Like

so many other community histories they await future storytellers to give them the attention they deserve.

6.2 Other kinds of farming

Although it is still not widely acknowledged, the Wiradjuri people were also “farmers”, or at least proto-agriculturalists, in the sense that they managed the landscape to favour the plant and animal species they used for food, fibre and medicine, and planted, harvested and stored the grains of wild grasses and yams (Keen 2004; Rose, James et al. 2003; Findlay 2005). As we now grapple with salinity, loss of native biodiversity, soil erosion and other environmental problems associated with European-style agriculture, many contemporary farmers and “resource managers” are learning important lessons from the land management strategies utilised by Aboriginal peoples before the arrival of Europeans (Archer and Beale 2004). Forbes people can now take pride that their agricultural, or proto-agricultural heritage, extends back much further than many settler-descendants might have hitherto imagined.

6.3 Twenty-first century celebrations

For more than a century shire residents have celebrated their rural heritage at annual agricultural shows at which locals have displayed their stock, produce, skills and handiwork. These shows remain important to many people, although they no longer engage the broader community as they used to. But the recognition of the shire’s diverse multicultural rural heritages opens up many new opportunities for alternative or parallel celebrations, and for more creative and inclusive twenty-first century interpretations of old traditions.

A number of people commented in the consultation process that there were no regular “farmers markets” at which local primary producers could sell their produce and small livestock in an authentically country-town atmosphere, as they can do in some other local government areas, for example. Integrate this concept with Church thanksgiving and harvest festivals, Aboriginal Reconciliation, the traditions of country fairs and car boot sales, and the international Slow Food Movement, for example;²⁸ add some culturally diverse street performances to evoke the diverse ethnic backgrounds of the shire’s people, plus with some savvy promotion, and you have a recipe for a new attraction capable of drawing hundreds, if not thousands of visitors

²⁸ See http://www.slowfood.com/eng/sf_ita_mondo/sf_ita_mondo.lasso

to Forbes. A farmers market held at least four times a year – to celebrate Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter, for example – could lift the spirits as well as the cash incomes of primary producers, artists and crafts people without disadvantaging town businesses. (Research shows that farmers markets can actually *increase* retail sales in supermarkets and other shops instead of reducing them through competition, as many business people might fear.)

Farmers' markets might also create opportunities to establish interesting cultural and trade links with regional trading partners, including China and the European Union. Reciprocal cultural relationships with rural regions of Britain, Italy, Germany, France, Greece, Lebanon, and China from where people associated with the shire's food industries migrated could have many unforeseen economic, social and cultural benefits, including opening up the rest of the world to the many people who rarely, if ever, physically leave the town of Forbes.

7.0 THE TOWN OF FORBES, THE SHIRE'S CULTURAL CENTRE

[NB: There are many gaps in this section and more research into the current situation of the arts and cultural development in the shire still needs to be done.]

Since the first tents were pitched at Black Ridge, the mining camp which was to become the township of Forbes, people have been playing music, dancing, singing, painting, writing and expressing themselves with whatever means the can. In 1861, the new Shamrock Concert Hall was "crowded to suffocation", for example, and there was "no lack of, music and dancing [to] bring nightly crowds together", as one goldfields newspaper boasted (Hildred 1997). By the following year more than 200 couples were kicking up their heels to the German Dance Band at the Empire Hotel (Tweedie and Hildred 1997, p.402), and from 1878 musical recitals, dance competitions, circuses and performances by local glee clubs, dramatic societies, and visiting entertainers were bring held in Osborne Hall, the concert hall which now houses the Forbes & District Historical Society Museum (Hildred and Symmons 1997). Bandmaster, brass player and "brickie", Bill Acret, conducted the Forbes Town Band in this hall from [1883], for example. The Town & District Band continues its proud tradition and each year trains yet more brass and percussion players, but it now has its own hall for rehearsals and performances (Tweedie and Hildred 1997).

[More on the Forbes brass band.]

The Shire's many contemporary pubs also sponsor local music by hiring bands and hosting musical events. A few of the Forbes hotels can still attract large crowds for "pub rock" nights and performances by singers such as pop-rock musician, Shannon Noll, from Condobolin, who was a runner-up in the 2004 Australian Idol television competition. The Forbes Services Club, with its small stage and public auditorium, now offers a greater range of live popular entertainment, however. The Forbes Country Music Club holds regular entertainment nights there, including Talent Quests, for example (Toole 1997).

The pubs and clubs provide many people with their only exposure to live music, but they offer very little beyond the genres of country, "pub rock" and "pop". Indeed, as one young classical music teacher (who should remain anonymous!) commented in an interview, "People are in a bit of a loop out here" and are unaware of the wider world of music and the arts. [*More on the potential of Valley FM community radio from the interview with coordinator Lauren Gorton.*]

Hundreds, perhaps thousands of other Forbes people do, however, regularly listen to and perform musical repertoire that do not necessarily include pub rock, pop and country. The music academy established by Constance Mackaen on the goldfields in the 1860s (Green 1997, p.209) was the forerunner to a number of classical music institutions through which locals have been able to develop their skills and engage with the arts at a regional, national and global scale. The most recent of these is the Forbes branch of the Mitchell Conservatorium of Music established in the 1980s. [*Background on the Con from interview with Marg Willmott.*] Generations of aspiring performers have also been taught classical music by nuns and independent music teachers, and/or have learned dance and speech and drama from the many other professionals who brought the arts to rural communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and by dedicated staff in the shire's schools. [*More from interviews here.*] The teachers in the small public schools of Corinella and Bedgerebong, for example, offer their students the opportunity to play in marimba orchestras, and acknowledge the importance of music and the arts to children's intellectual and social development.²⁹

[*Jazz festival from interview with Peter Moore, and on contemporary music groups, including the pub rock bands, and country & western.*]

²⁹ Interview with Paul Fawkner, principal, Bedgerebong Primary, 2006.

Forbes has also benefited from the many dance teachers who have cultivated a strong European dance tradition in the shire. Hundreds of people of all ages regularly attend ballet, jazz, ballroom, tap and other classes and enjoy social dancing in styles ranging from line dancing and ballroom to bush and folk. A succession of dance academies, such as Georgie Wheatley's Dancing Studio in the 1950s, Hazel Lawson's Dance Studio and Sharee's School of Dance in the 1980s (Hildred, Symmons et al. 1997), and Lia's School of Dance from the 1990s trained the shire's young people to a high level of competence. A number of their students were able to continue dancing professionally on leaving Forbes. As of 2006 dance classes are only available on weekends when dance instructors travel from Dubbo. What the loss of a local dance school will mean for the shire is yet to be seen.

[More on dance, including ballroom and bush dancing]

Young musicians, dancers and other performers have been able to "strut their stuff" at the Forbes Eisteddfod, and through competition, have developed important performance skills and gained confidence and self esteem. The eisteddfod was initially established in the 1950s but went into recess during the [1970s or 1980s]. it was reconstituted in 1994 by a local committee with Council's support. The following year, 1995, it attracted 1,385 entries,³⁰ and performances were held in the Town Hall, the High School auditorium and the Forbes Services Club's auditorium (Hildred and Girot 1997). In recent years the number of entries and audiences have declined with only 800 entrants recorded in 2005.³¹ Organisers are now reconsidering the future of the Forbes Eisteddfod, and are accepting that the traditional format might not be as culturally relevant as it once was, and that it is time for some serious cultural innovation and change.

For generations the School of Arts was the hub for the shire's more serious cultural activities. This institution was established in the 1870s with "the aim of advancing knowledge and literature", and it appears to have been absorbed into the Literary Institute at some time in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. The Literary Institute was reinvigorated in 1929 by a committee of dedicated locals who secured a

³⁰ Most of the Eisteddfod participants enter more than one event so this figure does not represent the total number of young people involved in the Forbes Eisteddfod.

³¹ Interview with Vera Reed, Forbes Eisteddfod Committee, 2006.

loan through the Education Department and raised additional funds to construct a permanent public building for the Institute.

The Literary Institute building now houses the Forbes' Public Library, which is now part of the Central Western Cooperative Library service³² and administered from Orange. The Forbes branch continues to be an important focus for community cultural and intellectual life, despite its many practical limitations, however. Librarian Bronwyn Clark enthusiastically services the reading needs of the [hundreds] of locals who visit the library each day, and also supports at least three book clubs; packages books for housebound people, including the elderly; conducts holiday activities for primary school students; visits local schools; holds storytelling sessions for small children; and encourages young and old to surf the internet on the in-house computers. As the shire's only formal librarian, Bronwyn Clark is keen to expand the use of the library services further, and is especially looking for ways to engage teenagers, many of whom think it's "uncool" to read books and visit the library. Like many locals who care about the state of the Forbes Library, she would like more modern amenities *and* more space made available for books, new facilities and services and increased public access.³³

The numbers of people who visit the library each day demonstrates that reading for pleasure and knowledge, whether online or with traditional books, journals and newspapers, is an important part of the daily experience of thousands of shire residents. But some of the library's readers are also writers themselves. Professional writing, including journalism, has had a long and honourable tradition in the Shire since the Gold Rush days. In 1861 there were three newspapers, the Lachlan Observer, The Miner, and the Lachlan Reporter, competing for readers and contributors, for example, and in 1862 another paper, the Forbes Times, increased the competition. Other local papers have included the Forbes & Parkes Gazette, and the Forbes Advocate, both of which have had an important role in shaping community identity. The Advocate, which was established in 1911, is the only local newspaper to have survived into the twenty-first century.

Many of the shire's amateur writers prefer to write short stories, poetry, family or local histories, and for them there is little support. The Forbes Advocate occasionally publishes the work of local creative writers, but they do not, as yet, have the benefits

³² See <http://cwl.nsw.gov.au/about.html>. Accessed March 2006.

³³ Interview with Bronwyn Clark, 2006.

of a local writing group. (The closest active writing group is in Condobolin.) The Forbes Shire has, nevertheless, produced a number of well published authors, including Paul Wenz, who wrote in both French and English in the early twentieth century; Charles Shaw³⁴ who began his writing career as a reporter on a local paper, the *Western Sun*, in the 1930s (Parry, Williams et al. 1997); and Merrill Findlay, who began her professional career on the *Forbes Advocate* in the 1970s.

Like the many professional and amateur writers, local visual artists and photographers have been documenting and interpreting everyday life in the shire for generations, and have helped to shape the way people think and act. The many artists who now exhibit at the Forbes Art Society's small shopfront gallery in Rankin Street and at the Forbes Arts and Crafts Centre in the old railway station, for example, are part of a strong European art tradition that was brought to the Lachlan Valley by the first squatters and their workers. Wiradjuri descendants have their own much older traditions to draw on, of course.

A number of individual artists, such as watercolourist Pammie Thomson, conduct regular classes for both children and adults at the small Forbes gallery, and the two high schools, Forbes High and Red Bend College, also encourage young artists to develop their skills and knowledge further by offering art as a Higher School Certificate subject. There is no established culture of *public* art or community arts in Forbes Shire, however. Public works of art in the shire to 2006 include a Wiradjuri mural painted by an indigenous artist on a pylon of a Forbes bridge, a back-drop painted by other indigenous artists for the Forbes Town Hall, and a number of sculptures, including one of bushranger Ben Hall outside the Railway Arts & Crafts and Tourist Centre. A number of interviewees commented on the lack of public art in the shire, and noted that the many blank walls in Forbes, such as that at the Youth Club, could be enlivened with large public murals, and that many streets could be improved with mosaics in the pavements and other public art installations.

Public artworks have been used in other shires to enhance the urban environment, to represent the things that give people their sense of place, or belongingness, and as

³⁴ Charles Shaw (1900-1955) carried his swag to Forbes in 1929 and was employed on a local station where he must have composed the poems that won his a job at the *Western Sun*. He later worked on Sydney papers, contributed to the *Bulletin*, and wrote a number of novels, including *Heaven Knows, Mr Allison* (1952), a war story set in the Pacific during WWII. This novel h was adapted for the screen by American director John Huston and John Lee Mahin. The film, completed in 1957, starred Robert Mitchum and Deborah Kerr and was nominated for several Academy Awards. Unfortunately Shaw died before he could see it or benefit from it.

tourist assets to attract people to the shire. They can be created by individual artists-in-residence; commissioned by through bequests or public art funding, or by individual benefactors; or executed by local volunteers under the direction of professional community artists. Public arts activities can involve just one person, or hundreds in community arts projects which have multiple benefits for communities. Tracey Prior, the Operations Officer at the House With No Steps, commented on the positive impact a community arts project conducted by Blayney artist, Nirer Reynolds, with House With No Steps clients in Millthorpe, for example. This project was funded through Arts OutWest, and involved painting workshops and a group exhibition. Tracey Prior reports that all the disabled participants gained increased self-esteem, confidence, personal fulfilment and improved social skills from the project.³⁵ She is now hoping to repeat the workshops in Forbes. At least one local artist, Jane Bennie, has expressed interest in working with House With No Steps to develop such a community arts project.³⁶ Similar community arts workshops could be conducted by local artists and musicians at the retirement villages, and with other groups in the community. Chelsea Ridley, the coordinator of the Forbes Youth and Community Centre, is keen to repeat the success of the art activities she organised in 2004 with Bogan Gate artist, Pol Cruz, in which young people created a series of giant paintings, some of which are now hanging in the Centre to bring relief to the stark walls. But Chelsea wants to see *all* the Youth Centre's walls, both inside and out, covered with art.³⁷

While many visual artists have been interpreting the shire's natural and cultural heritage, along with their own interior lives, through painting, drawing and sculpture, others have been "capturing" their external environment with their cameras. A number of photographers, including a "Mrs Feed", recorded life on the goldfields from the 1860s and exhibited their work in photographic galleries and studios on the diggings; and they probably also presented magic lantern shows, the precursors to "moving pictures". Professional photographers still live and work in the shire, but most of them are now using digital technologies.³⁸

Photography is the most democratised art form in the shire, in that nearly all families have a camera of some sort, or access to one, and people take it for granted that their lives will be documented in photographs or video. Children in all the primary

³⁵ Interview with Tracey Prior, 2006.

³⁶ Interview with Jane Bennie, 2006.

³⁷ Interview with Chelsea Ridley, Forbes Youth Centre, 2006

³⁸ Interview with Peter Moore, Forbes Video & Photography, 2006.

schools are now familiar with digital imaging technologies and many, including the students at Bedgerebong Primary and North Forbes Primary, for example, can already shoot and edit their own short digital films. The introduction of interactive “smartboards” in all primary classrooms means that digital imaging, in all its forms, will soon be considered a “normal” everyday practice by these young people.³⁹ These new skills and technologies expand the scope for community arts activities in the shire and challenge older residents to open their minds to new and exciting creative possibilities that they might not have encountered yet.

Given the familiarity of young people with computer technologies, film and television it may be hard for them to imagine the impact of the first silent black and white films on the cultural and social lives of shire residents from the second decade of the twentieth century. This was the era of “picture palaces”, and a surprising number of them emerged from the dust and mud of Forbes to screen “moving pictures”. The “picture palaces” also created jobs for the shire’s musicians. From 1917 Bill Acret and Charlie Prow and their small orchestra accompanied screenings at the Olympic, an establishment that is said to have been “the most palatial theatre in the country” (Hildred 1997, p. 401), for example. But there were also many “open air picture palaces” operating in Forbes at this time, including several with a seating capacity of 2,000.

From the 1920s, when local theatres were taken over by regional and national chains, they became even more “palatial”, and were soon the favoured venues for school concerts, talent quests, M&D productions, and other special events between film screenings. In the 1940s the Sing and Swing Group gave public performances in the Strand Theatre, for example, and in 1960 Bernard Heinz conducted the Sydney Symphony Orchestra at the Studio Theatre. Unfortunately the Studio closed the following year and was demolished in 1978. The site is now the car park for Forbes Services Club. The grandest of Forbes’ theatres, the Century, with its tiered balcony and wide cinemascope screen, was destroyed by fire in 1984, and was replaced by a motel (Hildred 1997).

Unlike many small towns Forbes still has a “picture palace”, the Parkview Cinema, which offers weekly programs of new releases. The Parkview survives despite its competition from television and the town’s two video/DVD shops and is highly

³⁹ Interviews with Phil Thurston, Principal, North Forbes Primary; Michelle Herbert, teacher; Lyn Ellis, Forbes Primary; and Paul Falkner, Principal, Bedgerebong Primary.

regarded by locals and by the many visitors from neighbouring towns who come to Forbes especially to “go to the movies”. The twin theatres of the Parkview are obvious venues for a Forbes Film Festival and other cultural events.

But live theatre is also important to many Forbes people. Generations of locals have participated in and enjoyed home-grown theatrical productions by the various music and dramatic societies since the 1860s. The 1950s appears to have been a Golden Era for local theatre, however. It was in this decade that the Forbes M&D Society won the Western Zone Theatre Competition, for example. One Forbes thespian from this time, Reg Lye, later became a professional actor, and returned to Forbes in the Elizabethan Theatre Trust’s 1958 production of *The Shifting Heart*. Forbes still has a Musical & Dramatic Society, but its history has been “a difficult one,” according to local historian Harold Jennings. Even so, a number of M&D productions have entered local folklore, including the 1994 production of *The King and I* at the High School auditorium, which is remembered both for its stunning hired costumes and the overall quality of performances. The cast included a chorus of all the local choirs, and a combined orchestra of students from Red Bend College and Forbes High School. As Harry Jennings commented in 1997, “The value of such productions cannot be overstressed” because they contribute so much to participants’ sense of community, personal fulfilment, and social wellbeing (Jennings 1997).

Although there was no M & D production in 2005 local thespians are talking about “doing something for 2006”.⁴⁰ They look enviously, however, at the amenities available to the Parkes M&D, including the new Parkes public theatre with its excellent stage, lighting and sound system. A number of Forbes theatre enthusiasts said in interviews that they would love to see similar facilities in Forbes, perhaps as part of a multifunctional cultural or civic centre complex to encourage local theatre productions and to attract professional productions from Sydney or Canberra and other regional centres.

The M&D Society is not the only producer of live theatre in Forbes, however. Another group regularly produces a comedy review for the Kidney Foundation and such was their success in 2005 that they raised a total of \$14,000 through their performances. The communities of Wirrinya and Bedgerebong also have their own traditions of

⁴⁰ Conversation with Deb Prior, March 2006.

stage reviews and comedy and over the years have hosted many music-theatre events to raise money for local causes, including the maintenance of their local halls.

[More here on the shire's tradition of music-theatre, choirs and choral productions, and the role of U3A.]

For more than one hundred years the main venue for live productions in Forbes Shire has been the Forbes Town Hall. Rate payers made a leap of faith in the future of their town in 1885 by supporting construction of the hall and council chambers. Council conducted a design competition to find an architect for it and awarded the prize to Gordon McKinnon from Parramatta, for a design which, although relatively conventional, was of a scale that was both bold and visionary for a town the size of Forbes. The new Town Hall was opened in 1891 and soon after became known as "the White House of the West" (Scott, Decker et al. 1997). Dame Nellie Melba sang in it in 1909, and English contralto, Dame Clara Butt (1872 – 1936) may also have performed there (Hildred 1997), as did generations of less known artists. Around 1915 Forbes Musical Society presented HMS Pinafore, a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, with a full ballet troupe and orchestra, for example. From 1918 Lorne Pictures screened silent films at the "White House" to the accompaniment of its own orchestra, and a decade later, in 1928, the National Art Gallery of NSW exhibited paintings in it. In the 1930s the hall was the venue for the Forbes Orpheus Society's Grand Concerts, and in 1954 Australian pianist Rachel Valler performed on the new Bechstein piano after she won the instrumental section of the ABC Vocal and Concerto Competition (she went on to become a well-known performer in the international piano circuit). Many young entrants in the Forbes Eisteddfods have sought to emulate Rachel Valler and other professional performers in Forbes Town Hall in the decades since then.

In the 1980s the Town Hall was refurbished and restored through the efforts of a dedicated group of locals. In 1991 Forbes Musical and Dramatic Society donated the existing stage lighting and sound system, and in 1996 a backdrop representing the Shire's Wiradjuri heritage was painted by indigenous artist Rex Murray and some of his students. The "White House" remains a much loved local icon (although, in 2006, it is no longer white!) and is regularly used for Eisteddfods, concerts, recitals and other cultural events. *But* it is no longer an appropriate venue for contemporary theatre, or visiting orchestras. Many interviewees have commented that, although they love the Town Hall and want it to live on in its present form, Forbes also needs

more modern amenities to encourage visiting performers to the shire, and to enable local groups to produce their own shows to the standard that people in other shires now take for granted. [*more from interviews*]

8.0 CRITICAL TIME FOR THE ARTS IN FORBES

Community research for the Forbes Cultural Plan has revealed that the arts and cultural industries in the Forbes Shire are facing a critical time. The Eisteddfod no longer attracts the numbers it did a decade ago;⁴¹ the Music & Dramatic Society has not produced a play or musical for at least a year; the Jazz Festival has disappeared;⁴² pubs and clubs are no longer hiring as many live bands as they used to;⁴³ and, unlike other shires in the region, Forbes has so far failed to develop a landmark cultural festival to celebrate its rich cultural heritage and the achievements of its many creative people. And nor does it have a cultural/civic centre, modern heritage or tourist amenity, or a community hub. This suggests that it is time for some very hard thinking about the cultural development of the shire and, in particular, about the future of the arts and of the many community groups and private businesses that constitute the shire's cultural industry sector.

As this document shows, there are thousands of gifted and enthusiastic people of all ages working in music, dance, speech and drama, singing, comedy, the visual arts, photography, theatre, community writing, digital design and many different handicrafts in the shire's schools, community organizations and academies and quietly at home, but each group is generally working in isolation. This means that cultural practitioners cannot gain the inspiration and other benefits that come from engaging with people working in different media, and they are disadvantaged because of this. This can only be addressed by the Forbes cultural community itself, with the support of Council and outside bodies, such as Arts OutWest and Regional Arts NSW. But so far the many people who care about the arts in Forbes have not yet joined together to raise a collective voice in seeking community recognition and support – and better public amenities – as the shire's sports enthusiasts have done. They are therefore marginalised, and their interests hardly register a beep in the proceedings of Forbes Shire Council.

⁴¹ Interview with Vera Reed, 2006.

⁴² Interview with Peter Moore, 2006.

⁴³ Interview with Shannon Crowley, Bundabarra Music, 2006.

If arts practitioners united in the Forbes Shire they could light the fires of a creative “revolution” and begin a cascade of consequences that would have many unexpected economic, social and even environmental benefits for all other sectors of the community. Such a reinvigoration may even see a new understanding of and commitment to public art and community arts practices by Councillors, as well as an exciting new festival program, and plans for a twenty-first century community cultural and heritage centre to complement (rather than replace) the town’s much loved nineteenth century “White House of the West”.

It is clear, however, that, as of March 2006, there is no evidence that the knowledge, professional expertise or the political will to support such a reinvigoration of the arts and cultural industries exists within the Shire Council. This situation may change as the Forbes Arts & Culture Working Group’s cultural planning process progresses, however.

9.0 RESEARCH PROCESS/METHODOLOGY

This section is still to be completed. The feedback from the survey distributed by the Arts & Culture Working Group is still being analysed in Melbourne. Data obtained through the surveys was not sufficient to develop a cultural plan, however, so a new series of in-depth semi-structured telephone interviews was begun in February 2006. Twenty interviews have been conducted so far, but many more interviews need to be completed over the next six months to ensure that all groups are consulted.

People interviewed in February/March 2006:

Jane Bennie, Waroo artist

Brother John, Principal, Red Bend College

Bronwyn Clark, Forbes Librarian

Barbara Cowled, speech and drama teacher

Shannon Crowley, Bundaburrah Music

Lyn Ellis, Forbes Primary School teacher and theatre director

Paul Falkner, Principal, Bedgerebong School

Lauren Gorton, Coordinator, Valley FM

Michelle Herbert, Wiradjuri Language Program, North Forbes Primary

Marie Holstein, speech and drama teacher

Elaine Imrie, President, Forbes Art Gallery

Kim Kirkman, painter and musician (incomplete)

Stewart Lacey, Bundaburra Music and music teacher

Peter Moore, Forbes Jazz Festival and Forbes Video and Photograph

Dinh Nguyen, Vietnamese migrant and baker

Tracey Prior, House With No Steps and Kidney Car Review

Vera Read, Forbes Eisteddfod

Chelsea Ridley, Forbes Youth and Community Centre

Clive Thomas, retired farmer

Pam Thomson, artist and art teacher, Forbes Art Gallery

Phil Thurston, Principal, North Forbes Primary

Rob Willis, folklorist and musician

Marg Willmott, musician and coordinator, Mitchell Conservatorium

Urunya Gunya, community consultation process begun

THREE TO FIVE YEAR ACTION PLAN

Preliminary draft, 6 March 2006

Ideas contributed through the survey and interviews conducted through the Forbes Arts & Culture Working Group, 2005-06.

Concept	Proposed Organiser/s	Expected Outcomes	Year/s
Council rejoins Arts OutWest and ensure a Forbes person is on the Board	Forbes Shire Council & Arts OutWest	Support for local artists and cultural developers, information on funding opportunities, cultural development workshops, support in cultural planning processes, networking	1
Feasibility study for multifunctional cultural centre	Forbes Shire Council	A range of viable options for a sustainable cultural/civic centre	1-2
Combined Forbes arts group: Forbes arts and heritage organisations to form a peak body to support cultural development and lobby local, state and federal governments	Forbes arts practitioners and cultural service providers across all media and community arts/heritage organisations	United voice for the arts & culture, lobby & support group, shared insurance cover for arts events (?),	1
Arts newsletter and web site	Combined arts group Sponsor (postage & production costs etc)	Promotion of arts activities, people know what's on, networking, higher attendances at arts events, global reach via the internet	1
Address insurance issues	Council Combined arts group	Sharing of the risks of public events and reducing insurance costs	1
Forbes Arts & Cultural Centre	Combined arts group, Shire Council, independent community board of management, State and Federal funding	Community focus and meeting place, C21st amenities, visiting performances, travelling exhibitions, incentives to local artists & performers, tourist	4-5

	bodies Local politicians and representative organisations	facilities, local heritage interpretation	
Bushrangers Festival and Sir Francis Forbes oration (Law-breakers & law-makers celebration)	Community committee, service organisations with Council and professional support Local musicians, folklorists, historical society, heritage committee, service clubs Arts OutWest Festivals Australia Other funding bodies Lawyers organisations	Tourist focus, street festival, celebration of bush music, song and dance traditions	2-5
Sister-city relationship with Ah Foo's place of birth	Local historians, Council (with language support from Forbes Chinese speakers) Dep't of Foreign Affairs and Trade Chinese Embassy Local Government & Shires Associations	Re-establish cultural links with southern China, with potential for trade and tourism	1-5
Chinese New Year celebrations	Chinese restaurants Service clubs Council Arts OutWest Arts funding bodies Chinese community	Celebrating Forbes' Chinese heritage, honouring ancestors, cultural/tourist/trade links with China, education	3-5
Seasonal Farmers Market and Slow Food Days	Bernadi's IGA Service clubs Farming organisations Arts & crafts groups Local musicians/dancers, Arts OutWest	Celebrating the shire's multicultural rural heritage with social, economic and environmental benefits. Attracting tourists. Potential cultural links with Europe	
Wattle Café Centenary celebration	Local proprietors and local musicians dancers, with Council and Progress Association.	Celebration the centenary of Forbes oldest café and the shire's Greek heritage [See p.295 of the Forbes book]	More research required
Revive the Forbes Jazz Festival	Local musicians and enthusiasts, Progress Association, Council, Service Clubs, pubs, music shops, cafes, wineries and other businesses, Valley FM, Arts OutWest	More professional management plan Sponsorship and increased funding for festival promotion More visitors to the shire Increased custom at participating venues Many memorable musical experiences and an enlivened town	
Art workshops for disabled people	Lachlan House With No Steps Artists and arts organisations Arts OutWest	Increased self esteem, confidence and social skills, improved psychological wellbeing	1
New arts events for youth	Forbes Youth Centre Arts OutWest Council	Many social benefits to the young people (self-esteem, confidence, social skills,	

	Service organisations Arts funding bodies	psychological wellbeing) and the broader community (potentially reduced mischief rates) Exciting murals covering blank walls and other public artworks to enliven the town Self-promotional and cultural tourism opportunities for Council	
Forbes Community Mural Project	Arts organisations Arts OutWest and Artist-in-residence Arts funding bodies Council Service organisations Local businesses Local schools	Bare blank walls covered with exciting graphics (eg inside library, outside Youth Centre, Nocks newsagency lane, Discount Dave's bare billboard in car park) Social benefits for all participants New skills brought to town Potential tourism spin-offs Channel graffiti artists to positive projects, Incorporate images from all ethnic groups – eg chinese dragons	
Twenty-first century Eisteddfod	Arts organisations, especially dance, speech & drama, choirs and music Mitchell Conservatorium Local schools M&D Society Arts OutWest	A major renovation/update of the Forbes Eisteddfod to make it more relevant to C21st More support for the organising committee A strategic vision	
Wiradjuri song and dance troupe	North Forbes Primary Yorunya Gunya Arts OutWest Arts funding bodies	Acknowledgement of the shire's reich pre-European cultural heritage and the traditions of contemporary indigenous groups Revived Wiradjuri pride and sense of identity Sharing the culture and passing it on so it doesn't die Active reconciliation and public education Improved social skills, self esteem, confidence and feelings of belonging Dance group available for public events and Welcome To Country introductions	
Digital storytelling/imaging/design sections in Forbes Show and Heritage Week programs	Primary schools High Schools Local enthusiasts Computer shops Youth Centre	Introducing and acknowledging C21st art forms Making arts competitions more relevant and interesting	
Digital storytelling & digital design workshops (free)	Youth Centre Schools Arts OutWest Computer shops Artist-in-residence Arts funding bodies	Skills base applicable to future careers Arts seen as more relevant to youth New creative possibilities for public arts events	

		Improved social skills, self esteem, confidence and feelings of belonging	
Return Of The Brolga Festival of dance and music for villages and localities	Communities of Bogan Gate, Waroo, Wirinya, Coninella, Ootha, Eugowra, Bedgebong et cetera Artists in residence/festival director Community organisations Arts OutWest Shire Council Funding bodies Landcare groups Lachlan Catchment Management Authority	Localised celebrations of community identities, sense of place and heritage Small communities working together and sharing skills/resources Fundraisers for maintenance of local halls Ecotourism - bussing visitors to villages from larger towns Empowering and acknowledging small communities New skills developed Increased social cohesion and wellbeing Impacts on future sustainability of small communities	2-3
Subsidised access to live performances for disadvantaged children, youth and adults	Education Department Arts funding bodies Local performers Mitchell Conservatorium Service organisations Arts OutWest	Expanding world-views and futures options for young people Exposure to new experiences Inspiration for positive life decisions Engaging with creative people	
Register of arts practitioners able to work in schools	Combined Arts Group Council Schools Arts organisations	Ready access to creative people able to share skills Inspiration, self-esteem, social wellbeing et cetera	
More travelling exhibitions and live theatre/dance and music	This depends on having better amenities. See above.	People who leave town now to see live events/exhibitions can remain in Forbes Increased visitors to Forbes Attract "tree-changers" to the shire Increased social wellbeing and economic sustainability	
Forbes Folk Music Collection (return & interpretation of the Harry Schaeffer music manuscripts and oral history recordings by Rob Willis)	Rob Willis National Library of Australia Council Heritage organisations Forbes Library Forbes Museum	Invaluable local heritage assets Understanding of shire's musical heritage Oral histories available to local people Great interpretation potential for museum and cultural tourism	
Paul & Hettie Wenz Collection – re-uniting, interpreting and re-housing books, ms, and memorabilia	Forbes Library Council Forbes Historical Society Museum Forbes Heritage Committee Mitchell Library Funding bodies	Invaluable cultural asset Great interpretation potential for museum and cultural tourism Understanding of shire's multicultural literary and pastoral heritages Cultural links with France	

	State and national library & museum organisations French Government French community	Basis for literary events, eg a Rural Writers Festival	
Use the gallery at Mezzanine for music, art, dance and theatre	Mezzanine Style Council Arts organisations	Utilisation of one of the best and most unique exhibition space and performance venues in regional NSW	
Scholarships for music tuition	Local businesses Service clubs Council Conservatorium Music teachers	Make music lessons accessible to talented disadvantaged students	
Promote dance as physical exercise with other benefits through schools and recreation clubs	Sports groups Schools Dance teachers Youth centre	Alternative to traditional team sports Potential for public community classes and events Footballers and netballers trains through dance movements	
Amphitheatre by the lake (with national competition to design it)	Council Funding bodies Service clubs Engineering companies Urban Landcare Landscape designers	Open air venue for large events "under the stars" Integrate lake into cultural precinct Cultural tourism Opportunities for new music, dance, theatre and community arts events Evokes the old Open Air Picture Palaces	
Street busking – encourage more musicians and other performers into the streets	Council Local businesses, including cafes Conservatorium High Schools Music & drama teachers	Increase vitality of business district Free entertainment for local and visitors Confidence building for performers	
Drama skills workshops and special event	Arts OutWest Funding bodies Professional director as artist-in-residence Youth Centre M&D Society	Increased social wellbeing, self-esteem, community cohesions, practical theatre skills, live theatre event, new members of M&D Personal psychological benefits	
Continue Paint the West Read & community reading programs	Primary schools Businesses Council Community groups Forbes Library	Improved reading skills Engaging with shire's heritage Community cohesion Long term benefits of well-educated population	
Forbes ceramics street project (art project to inject life and colour into the streets of Forbes)	Youth Centre Heritage Committee Historical Society Family History Group Council Arts OutWest Funding Bodies Artist-in-residence	Interpret Forbes' history in creative ways using ceramics in the streets Engage both young and old New skills introduced Tourist asset Promotional asset Increased pride and belongingness for participants	
Big public dance event	Dance community (all	Celebration of shire's cultural	

	<p>styles) Arts Away Foundation All schools, including village primaries Arts OutWest Funding bodies Professional dancer-in-residence Retirement villages U3A</p>	<p>heritage Cast of thousands – maximum participation from children to elderly Cultural tourism/festival potential All the social and psychological benefits of arts participation</p>	
Promote and develop the Apex Park Thursday night concerts	<p>Apex Caravan Park Combined Arts Group Council Arts OutWest</p>	<p>Unique event by the river with many links to past Charming weekly gathering Only safe public access to river in town Potential cultural tourism appeal Performance opportunities for local groups</p>	
Choral workshop for all Forbes choirs and big creative join performance	<p>Choir groups U3A Conservatorium Arts OutWest</p>	<p>Develop and update existing music & performance skills Inspire new repertoires Build confidence Fun Large-scale community event</p>	
Regular Arts Hour on Valley FM	<p>Forbes Arts Groups Valley FM Musicians Interviewees Electronics experts</p>	<p>Accessible arts information & promotion Events diary Live performance opportunities Broadcast over entire region</p>	
Arts Network	<p>Forbes arts groups Other groups in region Arts OutWest</p>	<p>Solidarity and support from like minded people Exchange of ideas/cross-fertilisation Information about new arts events and ideas</p>	
Forbes Flicks Festival (out doors)	<p>Parkview Cinema Video shops Australian Film Commission Forbes library Council Combined arts groups Film and video enthusiasts</p>	<p>Entertainment to evoke old Open Air Picture Palaces Celebration of Australian film Cultural tourism potential</p>	
More obvious interpretive signposting in streets to heritage sites	<p>Council Heritage Committee Arts OutWest Funding bodies</p>	<p>People can find their ways to heritage and cultural sites without getting lost Interpret the histories in the signposting in fun ways Cultural tourism Sense of place/belonging/pride</p>	
Improved access to library after hours and on weekends	<p>Council Forbes library Schools</p>	<p>Safety for children and young adults without cars/adults to drive them</p>	
Rural Arts Program for schools (based on Victorian model)	<p>High Schools Education Department Arts Groups</p>	<p>Expose young people to galleries and excellent works of art Expand their consciousness of what's possible</p>	

		Break down insularity, insolation and parochialism	
Free Public venues and support for non-mainstream musicians who now play in their garages	Council Youth Centre Conservatorium	Support for talented non-mainstream musicians Expand community understandings of good music Encourage diversity	

PLEASE ADD YOUR OWN IDEAS TO THIS LIST.

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APPENDICES

Letter to Working Group from Merrill Findlay

66 Farrand Street
Forbes, 2871

6 March, 2006

Dear Forbes Arts & Culture Working Group

Re. Draft Cultural Plan

I submit this preliminary draft of the Forbes Cultural Framework and Action Plan to you as a work-in-progress for public comment, additions, revisions and recommendations. A final version of the full Cultural Plan will, I hope, be ready to present to Council by the end of the year, or early 2007.

As we know Forbes Shire has a rich and unique cultural heritage and a vigorous arts community. Thousands of people regularly engage in creative activities that range from singing, painting, writing, dancing and music to digital imaging, ceramics, drama, landscaping and needlework. Despite the high level of participation, many arts practitioners have told me that they feel Council undervalues their creative efforts in comparison to the support they give to sports activities, and that the cultural needs, concerns and aspirations of shire residents are not fully recognised by local, state and federal government decision makers. A good indicator of this lack of awareness, at a local level, was Council's withdrawal from Arts OutWest without any consultation with the many arts practitioners and community groups whose access to funding information and support was affected by this decision.

My brief analysis of the 20 interviews I've conducted over the last few weeks reveals the following concerns.

- The Forbes arts community is disadvantaged by not having a single hub, or gathering place where people can meet to share, exhibit or perform their work, conduct workshops or rehearsals, and see travelling exhibitions and performances.
- Existing public amenities for arts and cultural activities are sub-standard, especially for performance events and exhibitions, and this is a disincentive for both local and travelling theatre, music and visual arts groups.
- It is very difficult to find out what is happening in the arts in the shire because there is no single arts newsletter or accessible public notice board.
- Insurance costs are killing many good public arts initiatives and we need to think of creative ways around this problem.
- Participation rates are declining in traditional community cultural events, such as the Eisteddfod and the Jazz Festival, and volunteers associated with them are recognising that they need to change their formulae and encourage new people to get involved.
- While the support given to arts groups by Council is appreciated, local government does not have the knowledge or professional expertise to be proactive in promoting and supporting the arts and cultural development, and is slow to recognise their social, economic and environmental significance.

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- Unlike other shires in the region Forbes does not have a festival or community celebration to “put us on the map”, and has failed to take full advantage of the national interest in its unique bushranger and river heritage, for example.
- There is little understanding of the terms “cultural development”, “public art” or “community arts” as used by arts funding bodies, including State and Federal government departments and regional arts organisations, and this is retarding the capacity of local organisations to access arts funding and develop innovative and exciting community arts events and cultural development processes.

As you will see from the Draft Action Plan many excellent ideas have already been contributed to address some of these concerns, and many more may be added to the list in the coming months. The real challenge will be to prioritise the good ideas and mould them into an achievable strategic plan for presentation to Council. And then to work together to ensure that all the good ideas become reality.

I hope the next draft of the plan will include more research and analysis. We still need to do more telephone interviews, for example, to ensure that the views of all groups are represented, and we need to identify the full range of people’s concerns and cultural needs, and their visions for the future of Forbes. By the end of 2006 I hope the Working Group will be able to present a visionary yet practical and very credible final document to Council for consideration and adoption.

Yours creatively

Merrill Findlay

Email from Forbes Shire Council's General Manager, Chris Devitt
confirming the status of the Forbes Arts & Culture Working Group, following
an agreement between Merrill Findlay and the Mayor, Alistair Lochart, to
ensure that the Working Group can work independently.

From: "Chris Devitt" <Chrisde@forbes.nsw.gov.au>
To: Merrill Findlay
Date: Wednesday - April 27, 2005
Subject: Cultural Working Group

Merril

My apologies for the delay in replying-I'm just back from 2 weeks leave
and frantically playing catch up.

As discussed last week with Carissa Bywater, the cultural working group
functions independently to Council and any outcomes are communicated by
way of representation only. These representations are initially directed
to Council's Community Services Committee, who then make recommendations
to Council at its monthly meeting. It is only after an issue/item is
resolved by Council that it becomes actionable by staff.

Accordingly, Council will not provide any staff resources for the taking
of minutes, chairing of meetings or any other purpose unless expressly
agreed by Council. If a Councillor on the group agrees to chair the
meeting he/she needs to understand that this is not to be seen as
representing the views of Council, but rather their own views as an
individual. It would be preferable, for the sake of clarity and to avoid
confusion, for Councillors not to chair meetings of your group so that a
clear distinction between the roles of the working group and Council can
be established.

Council is pleased to extend its support by the use of the photocopier
and fax where reasonable to assist with the preparation for the working
party.

I trust this clarifies the practical workings of the cultural group.

Should you have any queries in relation to this matter please contact
Carissa in the first instance.

Chris Devitt

General Manager

Forbes Shire Council

