

*The Way
We Could Be*



Gerald McCalden

Cover Photo:

A felled hollow tree trunk, located on the eastern side of the Bucketts Way, about five kms south of Gloucester, evidently stimulated someone's creative imagination, resulting an innovative expression of folk art.

The Way We Could Be

**A Ruminatiion on Gloucester's
Past, Present, and Possible Futures**

Gerald McCalden

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Foreword

Hi !

Patricia and I first became landholders in this beautiful valley back in 1992. Granted, not several generations ago, but getting pretty close now to one generation, and to a quarter of a lifetime

We too “built our home” and, while we didn’t exactly have to claim and drain, we did have to reclaim an eighty acre property which had been taken over by bladey grass, bracken fern, and wattle re-growth. After three years of sawing, and slashing with an ancient inherited tractor, I knew every hummock and hollow, and every outcrop of rock, on the property. Not surprisingly, we named it “*Clon Garriff*”, which approximates to the Gaelic for a rough or stony meadow.

We also engaged with the local community, each following our own particular interests. Patricia initially gravitated towards View and the Garden Club, being President of the latter for three years. More recently, she has been involved in the vibrant local art and writing scenes. Given my own background in Regional Economics, I became involved in various Shire Planning Committees, and in Non-profit Associations committed to ensuring a sustainable future for our adopted community. I also developed an interest in local history, publishing a history of Craven Village in 2010, and currently planning a history of the local timber industry.

The first trainload of coal left the Stratford “Boutique” Coal Mine in the same week, in July 1995, that we returned from a nine month trip to Ireland. This was a shock, as the whole concept had blown up while we were overseas, and out of touch with local happenings. Since then, we have both been actively involved in the vigorous local opposition to open-cut coal mining and, more recently, to the toxic threat of CSG (Coal Seam Gas) extraction down the whole reach of the Valley. That’s twenty years of fighting for our right, as we see it, to peaceful enjoyment of our land, in opposition to aggressive resource extraction companies and compliant governments.

There it rests, as of October 2015. The following pages summarise my take on Gloucester’s recent history, where it stands to-day, and what possible and desirable futures there might be.

Several valued friends read this book in both first and final draft form, and offered a range of critical and constructive comments. They remain anonymous. But I have benefited eagerly from their contributions, while still, of course, being responsible both for errors (if any !), and for opinions advanced and the underpinning philosophy.

A book is a version of the world. If you do not like it, ignore it; or offer your own version in return.

Salman Rushdie

"We go about our daily lives understanding almost nothing of the world."

Carl Sagan

"I am not particularly religious or spiritual; I am just an ordinary person trying to make sense of the mysteries of life."

Nelson Mandela

"The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed."

Mahatma Gandhi

You, Me, and All of Us

Well, here we all are, sharing a relatively small patch of the Earth's surface a bit inland from the Mid North Coast of a State named New South Wales in a continent named Australia, and at a time in human history arbitrarily labelled in Western societies as the year 2015.

So, who is this "We" ? Well, it's the folk who live within the bounds of Gloucester Shire, with the addition of some others in parts of Great Lakes Shire a little to the south, and in the City of Greater Taree, a little to the east. Altogether, a present total of just over 6,000 people.

Collectively, this is the population group which looks to the town of Gloucester as its local service centre, and which can therefore be identified as the extended Gloucester Community.

At any given moment, some of us may be pondering the enigma of existence, that interlude of sentience which we each enjoy or endure between birth and death. Others may be focussed on their immediate personal or family concerns, while yet others will be just getting on with the next mundane matter of the day, or, quite possibly, simply not thinking about anything at all.

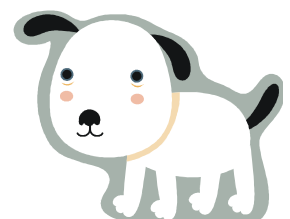
Without having any say in it, we are each born into membership of a community of some kind, which is itself in turn a part of some wider social group, and thus, eventually, through an escalating series of social hierarchies, to membership of the planet-wide community of the human race.

Apart from suicide, which, as Albert Camus has pointed out, is one philosophical choice, the pragmatic response is to accept this apparent reality, engage with it at some level, and then either go along with things as they are, or else try to improve society according to the light that is within us. Most of us opt to stay alive for the time being, and get on with a life as best we can. Some of us aspire to improve things, as we see it of course !

However, returning to earth at Gloucester in 2015, collectively we constitute what might be described as a smallish human community. That is, we live in closer proximity to each other than to the rest of the folk on the planet, and, on average, more of our routine economic and social transactions take place within the community, rather than outside it.

So, given this simple reality, it seems obvious that, as far as is reasonably possible, we should all respect each other, and work together to achieve a sustainable lifestyle, both for the present generations who have made, and future generations who may make, their homes in this locality.

The challenge is how best to achieve this . . . ?



Where Next Then?

Well, having decided to hang around for a while, and therefore of necessity to be involved in some way with the community of which we currently find ourselves members, we should also be prepared to accept some degree of responsibility for contributing to its day-to-day functioning, and perhaps even accepting a role in shaping its immediate and longer-term futures.

To do this effectively, it would seem necessary, as a background, to have some appreciation of how the social economy of a modern nation-state such as Australia operates, and how communities such as Gloucester are integrated into its fabric, and find their own, individual, and sometimes unique, role to play. So here is a very simplified account of how I see it all working.

(1) The Big Picture

Each State has available to it an extent of land, be it greater or lesser, and a range of natural resources such as climate, topography, water, natural vegetation, fertile soil, and minerals. It also has acquired resources such as the education and skills of its population; a given level of technology; and accumulated public and private infrastructure such as roads, bridges, dwellings, electricity grids, sewage farms, factories, schools, and hospitals.

States differ in their natural endowment, which is a given; in the quantum of physical infrastructure available, which is a consequence of past investment decisions; and in the current level of technology and education, which is a product of the intertwining of history, political choices, and culture.

(2) So What to Produce ?

These accumulated assets can be used, in an almost endless variety of ways, to produce a greater or lesser quantity of goods and services, with a concomitant choice as to which particular goods or services are produced, and what the relative quantities and qualities of each will be. In economic jargon there is choice as to both the volume of GDP (Gross Domestic Product), and the preferred production schedule.

There is also a less obvious dimension of choice available. We are conditioned to think in terms of GDP being allocated either to private consumption (tea-pots, TVs, and tomatoes), or to the provision of public goods, which may be in the form of capital goods (bridges and sewage farms again), or of services (education and health care for example). But increased personal leisure time is also a valid production choice, as are parks, nature reserves, and environmental enhancements in general. But because there is no market in these, and therefore no associated dollar value, they tend to be depreciated.

Then again for some people the acquisition of goods and services for personal consumption appears to be the sole object of existence, and the accumulation of wealth in excess of all

reasonable need their only measure of self-esteem. Others are satisfied with a comfortable sufficiency, have no need for ostentatious consumption, but are able to find value and fulfilment in the simple things of life.

(3) And Where ?

Two questions therefore present for consideration:¹

(a) What will be produced ?

(b) Where will it be produced?

While the first question follows naturally from the above discussion, and incorporates both the volume and make-up of production, the second may not be so obvious. But intertwined with the selection of a production schedule is the opportunity, subject to some constraints, of choosing the location for production of a particular good, or delivery of a particular service.

A society's economic activities, and consequently its population, are generally distributed unevenly over the earth's surface in a manner which depends partly on the location of natural resources, and partly on historical happenstance. The present situation is the outcome of decades of change and evolution, from which has emerged the particular distribution of population and economic production across cities, towns, and countryside which we see to-day.

It could have been otherwise, and it is probable that a more dispersed population distribution pattern than that currently found in NSW would be more efficient, both socially and economically. Yet the efforts in recent years of all three tiers of government to promote decentralisation have met with only minimal success. Somehow, the bigger cities keep winning, if that is a sane way to describe it.

In the beginning the land shaped us, so that we were contained and nurtured by it. Then we aspired to shape the land, not just to use, but to abuse. Inevitably, the land will reject our greed and hubris, and the human race will be no more. Will the land try again? Possibly not, but we will never know, and, anyway, why should it bother?

¹ Actually there are four questions, the third being how total GDP is to be shared across the population, while the fourth is who gets to make the first three decisions. But, important though the latter questions are, they have limited bearing on the present discussion, which is mainly concerned with question (b).

(4) So Then ?

Gloucester, as I see it, has neither the need, nor should it desire, to become an overnight growth centre success story. What is desirable though is to attract and retain a sufficient service area population to support an acceptable range of services.

Every service (hairdresser, butchers' shop, petrol station, or department store) has a threshold population, which is the minimum necessary to support a viable business. If a centre's service area population grows, some existing businesses may expand in scale, others may be duplicated, while entrepreneurs waiting in the wings may see that their particular threshold has now been reached, and decide to take advantage of a new business opportunity.

So if for some reason the range of services in a town is expanded this in itself may stimulate further expansion. This is because the owners and employees in new businesses themselves contribute to the total demand for goods and services. However, unlike the chain reaction in a nuclear explosion, the process tends to peter out quickly, so that the net outcome is that the town moves to a new equilibrium offering a slightly enhanced range of services. ²

(5) How Big is Beautiful ?

If we look at the distribution of town sizes in rural NSW we find that their populations fall into two main clusters, with a greater number of towns with a population in the range of two to three thousand, and again in the range from six to eight thousand, but with relatively fewer towns in between. This is consistent with regional economic theory, and aligns also with the distribution of threshold sizes for businesses mentioned above.

So, we can identify a hierarchy of service centres, ranging from villages (e.g. Stroud), through small to medium local centres (e.g. Gloucester and Gunnedah), and on to regional centres such as Taree and Tamworth. The regional centres provide higher level services (such as medical specialists and Regional Government Offices) to the lower order centres, which in turn service the surrounding rural population. Among the factors which determine the size and spacing of rural service centres are density of rural population and travel distances.

Gloucester is, to some extent, an atypical case. On one hand it is reasonably remote from the two competing larger centres – Taree and Newcastle, which is an advantage. But much of its potential rural service area is forested, and most of the remainder is devoted to broadscale farming and is sparsely populated. Apart from a potentially viable mixed agriculture sector, our natural marketing advantages reside in the district's scenic setting, coupled with an attractive town centre, and the appeal which these may have to visitors and retirees alike. These assets provide a sufficient platform on which to build a sustainable and adaptable economic base for our community.

It would seem reasonable, in my opinion, for Gloucester to aim for a total service area population of the order of 7,000 to 8,000 in the short to medium term.

² Note that a reverse process can also operate in some circumstances, for example Merriwa and Walget.

Looking Back

AA Company Days

Boomtime

Coasting

Recent Years

Our Early History ...

By the late 1820s, almost 40 years after the arrival of the First Fleet, European settlers were actively fanning out from the Sydney hub. While the Colonial Government tried to institute an orderly process of land grants, the 'squatters' were often a jump ahead. So, the greater part of NSW was settled by a mixum of 'Survey first and grant later' and 'Squat first and negotiate later'. The Stroud Gloucester Valley was a notable exception to this process, and the story provides a significant background to our community's history.

In 1826 a group of London financial adventurers established the Australian Agricultural Company, which was given a grant of about a million acres, bounded (roughly) by the Manning River, the Pacific, Port Stephens, and a line running north-south through what is now the locality of Berrico.

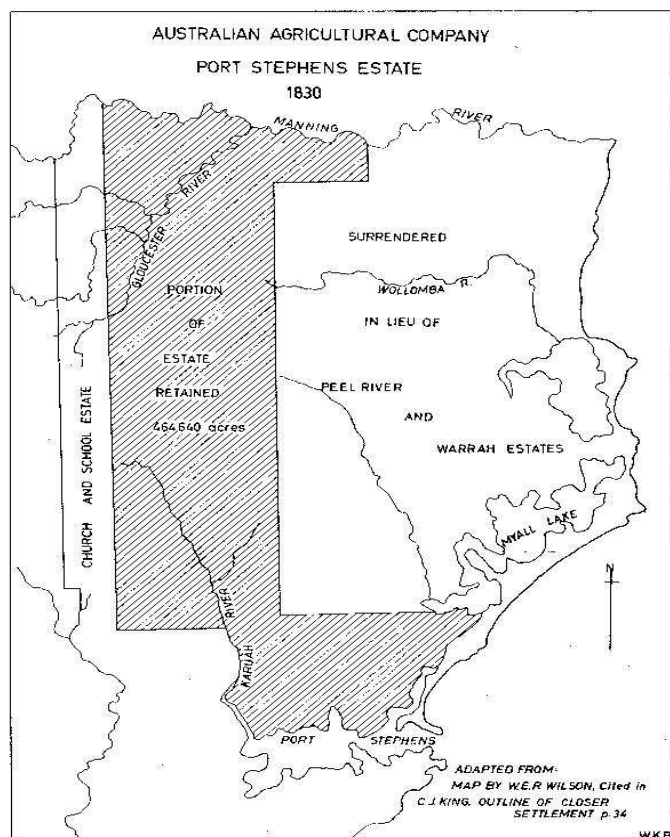
The intention was to raise sheep, but the climate proved unsuitable, and the AACo soon swapped the eastern part of their grant for a roughly equal area on the Tablelands, which was more suitable. This left them with a 20km wide strip running north from Allworth to the Manning, and in the middle of this strip nestled the magnificent Stroud-Gloucester Valley.

From the initial settlement at Port Stephens, the AACo had moved rapidly north, laying out a village at Stroud, which became their headquarters for the time being, while outstations were also established further north, including one at the present site of Gloucester town.

Historical Note

The map on the right shows the original AACo grant, with the retained portion cross-hatched. The southern half of this area was sold off progressively to private settlers during the remainder of the nineteenth century, while the northern half remained "frozen" under AACo ownership up to 1903.

The slender north-south strip to the west, labelled "Church and School Estate" records a little-known episode in early Colonial History. When the first 17 Counties were laid out, it was decreed that one seventh of the land should be reserved for the support of Schools and Churches (Anglican of course). This policy survived briefly until 1833, when all of these Estates reverted to the Crown.



... In a Nutshell !

While Stroud remained the principal town in the Valley, and the AACo's headquarters, the future town of Gloucester was surveyed and laid out on a rectangular grid as early as 1854. But the only residential development as yet was in the vicinity of the 'Homestead' at the southern end of the future town, where a small brick church was also built in 1860. After all, with a population which was essentially limited to AACo employees, there was little need for commercial services of any kind.

For a while the AACo drove their flocks down from the Tablelands to be shorn at Washpool, near Stroud, but this practice was discontinued in the mid 1850s. The "Gloucester Run", as it was called, was now devoted almost entirely to beef rearing, and the Company also extended its operations to the west through additional leases of available Crown Land.

As the end of the century approached the music of change was in the air. The Company had moved its headquarters first to Sydney, and then to Tamworth. Virtually all of its holdings to the south of present-day Craven had now been sold off, leaving the Gloucester Run as a relatively minor operation, remote from the Company's expanding interests in other places.

There was growing support for building a North Coast railway line, which would track from Maitland through Dungog, then Gloucester, and on to Taree and beyond. There was also agitation to open up more fertile farmland for closer settlement, and here the AACo came under attack for locking up the Gloucester Run in what was seen as sub-optimal land use.



The Gloucester Bucketts by Sir Arthur Streeton (1894)

Then, in 1903 . . .

An enterprising Stroud Auctioneer named J A McKenzie facilitated the formation of a Syndicate of prominent local and Sydney-based citizens, which was incorporated as the Gloucester Estate Ltd. In 1903 they purchased the whole of The Gloucester Run, which comprised just over 200,000 acres, running from the present southern boundary of Gloucester Shire north to the Manning River.

The GE company moved fast, sending about 120 farming blocks to auction in November 1903. These were spread across the Upper Avon catchment, and, to provide an immediate local service centre, the newly surveyed Village of Stratford was put to auction on the same day, mostly in half-acre blocks. The land sold rapidly, and further auctions followed, so that by 1907 a large part of the Gloucester Run had been subdivided and sold.

Life was hard for these settlers in the first decade of the new century. Despite the relatively short distance to Newcastle, the roads were still primitive, and transport costs high. The early dwellings were often slab-walled, with shingle roofs, or iron if one was lucky. Most farms were diversified, growing almost all of their own food, with family income supplemented by occasional beef sales, or employment in other occupations.

One industry which developed rapidly was timber getting and milling. The GE company, in its wisdom, had reserved an east-west swathe of land across the southern boundary of the Shire for timber, and by 1913 this was being exploited by mills at Craven and numerous other locations. A State Forestry Commission was established in 1916, providing stronger regulatory control, and sustainable management of the newly declared State Forest system.



. . . Boomtown !

While Gloucester township had been surveyed fifty years earlier, development had been minimal since there was no rural population to demand services. True, there had been a gradual accretion of basic services, including a hotel, public school, blacksmith, police station, and general store. The service area population had also been boosted by the Scottish settlement at Barrington around 1860, and the opening of the Copeland gold field in the 1870s.

With the GE subdivisions this changed almost overnight, and a bustling service centre expanded rapidly. Symptomatic of the rapidity of change was the foundation of the Gloucester Advocate in July 1905, less than two years after the first Avon auction. More or less simultaneously the first solicitor arrived in town the Gloucester Estate opened a sawmill to supply building materials, and a butter factory was established. The arrival of the railway in 1913 provided a further stimulus, as butter and milled timber could now be sent cheaply to market.

Subdivisions and auctions continued progressively to the north and north-east of the town, so that by the time the GE was wound up in 1923 the whole of the Gloucester Run had been sold off. In the main the purchasers were smallholders, though there were a few larger blocks, which in turn were further subdivided in the late 1920s. Gloucester Shire was established in 1906, and by the Census of 1921 it boasted a population of about 3,400.

*Once alien here my fathers built their house,
Claimed, drained, and gave the land the shapes of use,
And for their urgent labour grudged no more
Than shuffled pennies from the hoarded store
Of well-rubbed words that had left their overtones
In the ripe England of the mounded downs.*

John Hewitt was writing the story of his ancestors during the 16C Ulster Plantations, but the conjured images fit easily into our Stroud Gloucester Valley as it was just over a century ago.

Coasting

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Gloucester's history from the 1930s through to the 1970s is that there was nothing particularly remarkable about it. That may sound dismissive, but it is not intended to be so. What I am trying to say is that, during this period, Gloucester was, arguably, less differentiated from the broader NSW social economy, than it was at any time before or since.

The railway had come in 1913, and in subsequent decades, with motor transport becoming commonplace, the road system was gradually improved. Up until the mid-fifties the main coastal road to the north (the Pacific Highway) passed through Gloucester, keeping the town firmly on the map. Advances in radio and telecommunications also served to integrate the district into the wider world.

The major event of the period, of course, was WWII, which can now be seen as marking both a social and an economic divide. In retrospect, a positive outcome was that the involved economies were mobilised, so that all available manpower resources, and most particularly that of women, were inducted into production. In Australia this fractured the complacent patriarchal regime of early marriage and dependant wifhood, and, being now fully exposed to external influences, even Gloucester was affected to some extent.

In the ensuing years of (relative) peace, new technology, and surplus manufacturing capacity, were rapidly redirected into production of a range of consumer goods previously unimagined. It was, to borrow the title from the C P Snow's novel, also set in the 1950s, "A Time of Hope".

Beef, dairying, and timber milling continued to dominate the local economy, though a shift in balance towards retailing and other personal and social services was taking place. Gloucester High School opened in 1961, bringing full secondary schooling to those previously unable to afford a boarding school education. A District Rural School had been in operation prior to this, but the curriculum was limited.

Cinemas mushroomed, bringing Hollywood's specialty of vacuous entertainment to all. Although still remembered, the 1929 recession was now a generation past, and the future promised economic stability and prosperity for all. Trade Union membership peaked in 1961 at 61% of the workforce. The median age at first marriage dropped, and birth-rates soared. It was, perhaps, more than anything, a time of innocence as well as of hope.

Recent Years

For the Gloucester community the early 1980's can be seen as a significant turning point, with several major changes poised to unfold over the remainder of the century. Among these were the impending decline in the timber industry; dairy restructuring; the shadow of fossil fuel exploration; and compensating surges in tourism and life-style retirement.

As Robin Budge succinctly put it:

“ We were always going to run out of readily accessible timber. While there had been some losses through clearing and ringbarking up to 1913, it was the coming of the railway that opened up our vast hardwood and scrubwood forests to exploitation. For over 80 years Gloucester was a town of sawmills. The individual mills came and went as their owners went broke, sold out or got old. But the sawmilling activity of the town, with its timber cutters and hauliers, was a constant. ”³

The environmental value of the Barrington Tops had been widely recognized since the 1920s, but it took until the late 1980's for the NSW Government to secure their preservation as a World Heritage National Park. Which was still just in time for the emerging tourist industry.

The local dairying industry established following the serial subdivisions of the Gloucester Run had been characterised by a large number of small scale, labour intensive, producers, and this was still partly so. The NSW dairy industry was by then highly regulated, reflecting the State Government's penchant for market interference. The inevitable deregulation came in 2000, resulting in a further reduction in the number of dairy farms, and closure of the local factory.

Desultory exploration of the Valley's long-known coal reserves was undertaken from the mid 1970s on, resulting in the opening of a “Boutique” open-cut mine at Stratford in 1996. With successive expansions, this rapidly lost any claim to such a fanciful descriptor, spreading north and east to neutralise some nine square kilometres of agricultural land. As of writing, mining operations have been suspended at the Stratford site due to market fluctuations.

Returning to the early nineties, social changes, and in particular increasing affluence, resulted in an upswing in visitor and tourist activity in Gloucester, which induced an expansion in the provision of accommodation, and in ancillary tourist services and attractions.

Simultaneously, and probably inter-related, there was an increase in the number of retirees, or near retirees, who found in Gloucester an attractive location, bought or built a home, and settled in to enjoy new lease on life.

Then in 2008 a new threat emerged, in the form of a proposal by AGL to transform the Valley into a 330 well CSG (Coal Seam Gas) field. Despite the danger of contaminating a fertile valley, disrupting a stable agricultural sector, and dampening tourist and retiree activity,

³ “ These Hills These Valleys “ (p. 84).

coupled with the inanity of trying to extract CSG from Gloucester's fractured geology, the project, as of writing, is still under consideration, with the eager support of the NSW government, who have been assured that it will mean cheap secure gas supplies for the state.



Reproduced by permission of Gloucester Shire Council

Resilient Furphies

The Aging Population

The Disappearing Young

Job Creation

Growth

"Rationality is man's basic virtue, the source of all his other virtues. Man's basic vice, the source of all his evils, is the act of unfocusing his mind, the suspension of his consciousness, which is not blindness, but the refusal to see; not ignorance, but the refusal to know."

Ayn Rand

The Aging Population

A recurring theme in contemporary discussions of the Gloucester economy is the “problem” of an aging population. This local perception has, unfortunately, been reinforced by outside commentators who should have known better. Thus, in an Economic Development Strategy report for Gloucester Shire Council (the “Buchan Report”), the consultants referred to a need to increase the regional population, observing that:

“ . . . a larger population is needed to counter the impacts of an ageing population on the regional economy. A larger population will drive the demand for retail and local services. ”

without explaining exactly why an aging population profile would have (presumably) negative economic consequences, or why an increase in the aged population would not of itself contribute to an increase in the demand for retail and other local services.

A well-known fact is that in most developed countries population age structures have been shifting towards an increased proportion in the older age groups. The reasons are obvious – increased longevity combined with a declining fertility rate. This trend may well present a challenge at the national level, where compensating adjustments in the allocation of goods and services are required. However, in a community such as Gloucester, which represents a miniscule part of the Australian economy, and into which it is fully integrated insofar as social services are concerned, no such problem arises.

The naturally aging structure of the resident Gloucester population has been augmented in the last two decades by the influx of retirees, seeking the ease of a semi-rural lifestyle, while still being within easy reach of friends and family in Sydney and Newcastle. As an example, an analysis of estimated net migration into Gloucester during the 2006–2011 inter-censal period (Table I) shows a net gain of about 150 persons who were in their fifties and sixties at the beginning of the period, and consequently aged 55–74 at the time of the 2011 Census.⁴

Note that this is a net gain. Without this boost from retirees, it is likely that Gloucester would have experienced a slight net loss of population in this age group, as some aging local residents opted to move elsewhere.

In fact, far from being a burden of some kind, incoming retirees, many of whom are self funded, will generate an initial demand for housing, an ongoing demand for retail services similar to that of an employed person, and a proportionately greater demand for health care and other social services. **In short, retirees are a valuable economic asset to a community, not a liability.**

⁴ The Cohort Analysis model, on which Table 1 is based, takes the count of males or females in a five-year age group at a given Census, subtracts the expected number of deaths over the next five years, and then compares the result with the corresponding age group at the next Census. A positive value indicates a net gain in that age group, while a negative value indicates a net loss. Note that, due to variations in death rates, these estimates are less reliable for the older age groups than for the young.

Table 1

2006 Age Group	Survival Rates		Pop. in 2006		Pop. in 2011		2011 Age Group		Net Migration 2006 - 2011		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Age Group	Male	Female	Total	
Unborn					125	110	0 - 4				
0 - 4	0.9937	0.9942	110	116	133	128	5 - 9	23.7	12.7	36.4	
5 - 9	0.9995	0.9994	139	144	151	134	10 - 14	12.1	-9.9	2.2	
10 - 14	0.9988	0.9994	185	179	155	131	15 - 19	-29.8	-47.9	-77.7	
15 - 19	0.9916	0.9988	151	127	83	75	20 - 24	-66.7	-51.8	-118.6	
20 - 24	0.9960	0.9986	76	66	70	87	25 - 29	-5.7	21.1	15.4	
25 - 29	0.9955	0.9985	73	82	88	91	30 - 34	15.3	9.1	24.5	
30 - 34	0.9948	0.9980	84	103	113	127	35 - 39	29.4	24.2	53.6	
35 - 39	0.9931	0.9969	130	153	155	152	40 - 44	25.9	-0.5	25.4	
40 - 44	0.9899	0.9951	166	168	166	158	45 - 49	1.7	-9.2	-7.5	
45 - 49	0.9851	0.9925	176	183	187	174	50 - 54	13.6	-7.6	6.0	
50 - 54	0.9769	0.9889	170	165	187	172	55 - 59	20.9	8.8	29.8	
55 - 59	0.9625	0.9825	198	204	217	238	60 - 64	26.4	37.6	64.0	
60 - 64	0.9390	0.9714	188	196	213	190	65 - 69	36.5	-0.4	36.1	
65 - 69	0.9009	0.9556	155	138	144	149	70 - 74	4.4	17.1	21.5	
70 - 74	0.8385	0.9264	124	142	96	140	75 - 79	-8.0	8.4	0.5	
75 - 79	0.7408	0.8715	116	129	89	107	80 - 84	3.1	-5.4	-2.4	
80 - 84	0.5988	0.7709	61	65	44	54	85 - 89	7.5	3.9	11.4	
85 - 89	0.4250	0.6106	34	46	15	30	90 +	0.5	1.9	2.5	
90 +	0.2795	0.4105	16	42							
Totals			2352	2448	2431	2447		111	12	123	

Gloucester Shire: Estimated Net Migration 2006 - 2011

The Disappearing Young

Perhaps even more frequently heard than complaints about the dire consequences of increasing longevity are laments about the exodus of young people in their late teens.

But it is a simple fact that most rural towns in NSW experience a similar outflow of young people. They leave for a variety of reasons: for further education; to gain experience of the wider world; to seek romance; or perhaps even (whisper it!) to enjoy a break from the very parents and grandparents who bemoan their going.

Table I also quantifies this movement for the younger age groups. However, unlike the case of the older age groups discussed above, there is likely to be very little offsetting inward movement in the young age groups. Thus, the outward net migration estimates as shown should closely reflect the actual out-migration of young Gloucester residents.

So, How Many Leave ?

A superficial reading of Table 1 shows that here were 364 teenagers in Gloucester in 2006 aged 10–14, all of whom would have still been attending school. By 2011, when the group was aged 15–19, only 286 remained, while about 78 had left. Of the next age group, those who were aged 15–19 in 2006, and 20–24 come 2011, only 158 of the initial group of 278 remained in the Shire, indicating a loss of about 120. While this shows a net loss of 200 young people during the period 2006 – 2011, it does not provide a true estimate of the propensity for youth out migration, as the two groups have different base populations.

A more accurate value can be obtained by tracking the single cohort which was aged 10–14 in 2001 through to the 2011 Census, when they were aged 20–24. A similar analysis to that in Table 1 shows that an original group of 372 was reduced by 103 between 2001 and 2006, and then by a further 119 between 2006 and 2011, giving a total loss of 222, or exactly 60%. This then is the most recent figure available, but calculations for earlier decades yield comparable values in the 50% range.

On the Balance

Population dynamics is in constant flux, and it is the overall picture which needs to be kept in mind. Thus the decline in Australian fertility rates is reflected locally in the size of the 0–4 year age cohort at successive censuses: declining from 352 in 1991 to 239 in 2001, but appearing to recover slightly to 261 in 2011. However, this small “recovery” could easily be due to random variation. Again, Table 1 shows a net inflow of 120 persons in the 25–44 year age group (as at 2011), and a further gain of 150 in the 55–74 age range.

The net outcome of all of this demographic activity was that Gloucester Shire’s official resident population increased from 4,800 in 2006 to 4880 in 2011. We will have to wait for the next census count to be released late in 2017 to find out what has been happening over the past four years.

Job “Creation”

This is a favourite topic with rural politicians when visiting the smaller towns in their electorate, any mention of which is sure to elicit wise nods of approval from conservative community elders. Since creation has to do with bringing into being something which did not exist before, the creation of a job can only mean finding paid employment for someone who was not previously so engaged, but not at the cost of depriving someone else of their job.

Unfortunately, this is seldom the case. When it comes to the crunch, the rhetoric of job creation usually reduces to either relocating a business from somewhere else to the community in question, or else attracting someone away from a job elsewhere to fill a new local job. The former will benefit the host community, and may be socially desirable if, for example, the move contributes to decentralisation. The latter may have harmful consequences for a business or community elsewhere, and will benefit the local economy only if the new activity integrates easily into the existing fabric, and proves sustainable in the longer term.

Resource extraction companies provide the perfect counter-example. They draw skilled labour partly from the local community but mainly from elsewhere; operate on such a scale as to distort the local housing market and disrupt community cohesion; and are likely to disappear overnight leaving large holes in the ground, and an imploded community fabric.

But returning to the question of job creation, which, as noted above, involves moving an unemployed person into a new paid activity, with reasonable prospects of sustainability, our technologically sophisticated economy here encounters a novel barrier. This, as succinctly described by Bell (2000, p. 257) is that:

*“Serious consideration needs to be given to the little debated possibility that the level of commitment, intellect and knowledge required to **successfully** participate in the labour-market may be increasingly beyond the capacity of many.”*

He continued:

*“**In this situation, the only solution is to explicitly supply jobs with reasonable wages that match feasible capabilities and talents.**”*

This, of course, is a problem which manifests itself at the national scale, and which can be dealt with only within the overall national economic planning frame. What is required here is explicit acknowledgment of the problem, and the replacement of a plethora of social welfare payments, and jobstart (and stop) schemes, with an integrated programme which diverts a sufficient portion of GNP into the provision of an enhanced range of public goods and services.

Such a programme would be most efficiently delivered at the local scale, through responsible agents such as Local Government, the NPWS, Forests NSW, and the LLS (Local Land Services, formerly the CMA). **There might even be an opportunity here for Gloucester to secure funding for a pilot programme, and so benefit while providing a model for other communities.**

Growth

The word “Growth” may well qualify as the most widely used, over abused, and least clearly defined or understood, word in current English usage. However, whatever it might mean, it appears that economic growth is a jolly good thing, and we always need more of it.

At the national level, economic growth usually refers to an increase in GDP, which is the total value of goods and services produced within (usually) a one year period. The increase is presented as the percentage increase of the current year’s GDP over that of the previous year. A couple of things should be noted. First, the percentage increase in GDP may exactly match the percentage increase in population over the same period. In that case, per capita production has remained constant, so that, in material terms, we are just as well off on average as we were as a year ago. But this, in the minds of most politicians and economic journalists, is not real growth. What turns them on is an increase in per capita production, so that ever more and more goods and services are available for consumption.

The other thing is that the measure of GDP includes only those goods and services which have a market price associated with them. So increases (or declines) in health, leisure, wellbeing, social harmony, and environmental ambience are simply ignored.⁵

When this concept is introduced into the discussion of local or regional economies it is hard to know what attendant baggage may have come with it. It clearly has a “feel good” resonance, so that oratorical urgings of the need to grow our local economy - as if it were a tomato plant - are received with unquestioning approval. While such speakers may have nothing more in mind than an increase in population, there is inevitably a lingering suspicion that those who have retained a frontier mindset are still thinking nostalgically of more digging up and cutting down, or perhaps some form of heavy manufacturing industry. Real jobs for real men !

The word “growth” (on my count) occurs 303 times in the final version of the Buchan Report, which has already been cited above.

No references were found to either environmental preservation or protection, nor to pollution, as one might have expected in a report dealing with Economic Strategy. The sole reference to wellbeing was in relation to an aspect of the tourist market.

⁵ The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), which is responsible for computing our GDP, has recognised this deficiency, but no successful way of overcoming it has been found as yet. Given the apparent success of our scientists in unravelling the complexities of the physical world, it is sad to reflect that economists have made such petty progress in developing a holistic model of our societal economy.

Future Directions

Broadscope Tourism

Lifestyle Retirement

Specialised Farming

Aged Care

Industry

Concluding Remarks

"Create a plan for the economy and jobs with sustainable industries that will generate employment, build community goodwill and cohesion, bring new people into the movement, and set a positive frame and narrative for the future of the Gloucester Region".

Aspirational statement from a forward planning workshop.

Broadscope Tourism

The Tourist Industry is now firmly established, and recognised as a major strand in the Gloucester economy, though we may never know what harm the repellent effects of open cut coal mining, and more recently CSG exploration, may have had on the potential for even further consolidation over the past two decades.

There is a sound base to work from. Gloucester is firmly positioned on many tourist maps; there is a broad range of accommodation choices available; and the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) delivers an efficient and comprehensive range of services to visitors. Local operators provide for outdoor activities such as kayaking, horse riding, bushwalking, and farm and winery visits, and there is scope for further development of eco-tourism.

I use the term Broad Scope Tourism deliberately as what I have in mind is the prospect for a whole of community commitment to Gloucester being recognised as a premier tourist destination. Further development and consolidation of the tourism strand in our economy will flow primarily from incremental enhancements across a broad front, where each new initiative will merge into the existing structure to enrich the visitor experience, and ensure that the diverse tastes of individual members of groups and families will be catered for.

A key element is probably confidence in a mutually achievable specialist industry, where each individual addition both contributes to, and draws support from, the entire spectrum of tourist focused businesses.

Borrowing from the Hay-on-Wye initiative in England, which became famous as a second-hand book market, might there be a possibility for Gloucester to acquire a reputation for offering an extended range of collectables spanning art, craft items, jewellery, coins, clothing, and of course books? There is already a nucleus in place, with two galleries, the Scout Hall, and some low-profile craft workers. Once the Museum's Archive and Research building is completed, this could become another strand, with potential for sale of historical photographs, perhaps in conjunction with a local business.



Lifestyle Retirement

One relatively recent social change which has been noted, but the implications of which have not, perhaps, been fully appreciated, is the emergence of an expectation of a lengthy retirement period following the end of a working life. In the 1970s an average sixty-five year old Australian male could expect to live for a further 13 years, while a female of the same age could look forward to a further 17 years. To-day, their expectancies are getting close to 20 and 22 years, respectively.

The prospect of an extended and enjoyable retirement is further enhanced by the fact that today's sixty-five year olds are, on average, fitter and healthier than those of forty years ago. The response for many individuals and couples has been to perceive an opportunity to up-root and start a new phase of life in a pleasant location, rather than to linger and die in the same home.

A few decades back coastal towns were the traditional destination of choice for most retirees. But they were also attractors for drifters from younger generations, and subject to seasonal influxes from holidaymakers, groups whose interests and expectations were at odds with those of permanent residents. Gloucester, with its temperate climate, scenic setting, small town atmosphere, and ready access to Newcastle and Sydney, was an ideal choice for many.



The Shire Council has made provision for increased housing demand through the release of several large-lot rural subdivisions, the homesite type which appears to be the preferred choice for the majority of newcomers. While some concerns have been expressed that such subdivisions lock up agricultural land, the average requirement of about 1ha per dwelling means that an additional population of 600 could be accommodated in the equivalent of one typical 300ha farm.

Clearly, potential loss of agricultural land does not provide a strong argument for restricting rural subdivision – more particularly when compared with the demands of open cut coal mining and CSG extraction.

Specialised Farming

Since the new century burst on us, fifteen years ago, it has become increasingly evident that there is a role in the Gloucester economy for farms of relatively small area, which are engaged in some form of intensive production. While this could range from general horticulture to more specialised produce such as grapes, mushrooms, honey, or cut-flowers, there would normally be scope for a seasonally balanced diversified mix of some kind.

The display of local produce at the monthly Farmers' Market is indicative of the wide range of crops which can be grown successfully under Gloucester's favourable climatic regime. However, the majority of vendors present are operating only on a part-time basis, combining their business with other work or with retirement. In order to make a substantive contribution to the local economy more full-time operators with a commercial orientation would be required.

The Gloucester Project (TGP) has been advocating this as a sub-regional development policy since 2008, and some of the issues involved were canvassed in a Discussion Paper (Louys and McCalden) published in 2010. In that document the authors laid particular emphasis on the need for an efficient marketing system to be developed in parallel with expansion in production. Here, proximity to the Newcastle and Sydney markets could confer a competitive advantage.

A major barrier to the development of small-scale commercial farming is the current GSC LEP provision which prohibits subdivision of essentially all rural lands into lots of less than 100ha. As the Shire's own Agricultural Strategy document (February 2015, p.12) observed trenchantly:

“This was a government policy that supposedly kept rural land in large enough sizes to maintain viable agriculture. However, this does not work for extensive beef production and dairy farming because much larger areas are required for economic viability. On the other hand, some land in Zone RU1 could be viable at much smaller lot sizes if used for horticulture of other intensive agricultural enterprises where a smaller area of productive land is adequate. The policy has proven to not be effective and needs to be replaced with a mechanism to allow subdivision based on land capability.”

Here, then, is an opportunity for a policy change which could facilitate and encourage expansion of the intensive farming sector. In addition to boosting base population numbers, there would also be flow-on demand for seasonal labour, and for specialised farm support services. Included here, and as noted above, would be an opportunity for one or more businesses to engage in the collection of produce, grading, value adding, and delivery to market outlets.

The first step is to change the relevant subdivision controls.



Aged Care

The increasing proportion of elderly people in the population, both long-term residents and more recent lifestyle retirees, points to a need to provide specialised health care facilities for people of reduced mobility and independence. This not only helps to retain these people in the community, but may also prevent the loss of close family members. Since such services are particularly labour intensive, the scale and range of employment opportunities are also enhanced.

Gloucester has, in fact, been already well provided for in this regard, since the hospital has held licences for aged care beds for many years. Such “bed” licences are part of the Federal Government’s response to aged care needs. They are allocated to approved applicants, and are subsidised at a level commensurate with the cost of providing the service.

A proposal is currently under way for Anglican Care, a welfare agency associated with the Anglican Church, to provide a new purpose-built nursing home, with the transfer of sixty aged care licences from Gloucester Hospital. This facility is scheduled to be in operation by 2018, with the prospect of a retirement village being added later.

Coincidentally the Roman Catholic Church’s associated welfare agency, CatholicCare, has opened an office in Gloucester, with the intention of offering a range of services such as counselling, and youth and disability support services. These will complement the broad scope of services already being delivered by the Gloucester Neighbourhood Centre, and in concert will help to position Gloucester as a recognized retirement area.



Site of the Planned Anglican Care Nursing Home

Industry

Light Industrial Estates are ubiquitous now in towns of Gloucester's size, and even smaller. They provide for business activities ranging from small scale non-polluting manufacturing through warehousing, transport depots, car and machinery repairs, local community services such as the RFS and the SES, and landscape and garden supplies, to churches, mortuaries and sex service premises.

The NSW Department of Planning identifies General Industrial (IN1), Light Industrial (IN2), and Heavy Industrial (IN3) among the range of permissible land zonings or uses. For some reason the Gloucester LEP (Local Environment Plan) employs a General Industrial zoning for land which, in practice, is limited to, and suitable only for, light industrial uses.

This should be clarified in the next revision of the LEP.

Light Industrial Land

Council has made ample provision in its LEP for current and future demand for this category of land use. All of the land in this zoning is to the south of the town, and on the east side of the Bucketts Way, and the general disposition is such as to have minimal impact on adjoining residential areas. Pre 1980's development was concentrated along Clement and Britten Streets, in an area which also contains the Council Works Depot and the Cattle Saleyard.

The present focus is on a planned estate accessed via Tate St off Cemetery Rd. This development provided about 80 lots in a range of sizes, of which about three-quarters have been developed.

Future provision

Two areas have been designated for future light industrial use. The first, of about 10 ha, is located on the south side of Cemetery Rd, and to the east of Tate St. The proposed plan of subdivision shows 38 lots, with a typical area of 0.25 ha and a range from 1350m² to 4,700m².

The second, on the NE corner of Bucketts Way and Jacks Rd, which covers 15 ha, already contains a sawmill and an earthmoving depot. In fact, the site has long been associated with the timber industry, dating back to its use by Carson's Northern Timber Co in the 1970s. In addition to its heritage value, the site is also harbours a community environmental asset in the form of a large dam (of about 0.7ha in extent) which was once associated with the timber mill, and is now a thriving waterfowl habitat.

This site demands sensitive development, with permitted industrial uses limited to those not likely to produce polluted surface run-off. In fact, it has been noted that the topography of the block offers an ideal opportunity to develop a genuine Industrial Park – as opposed to those often described fancifully as such. (See photo opposite).



“Carson’s Dam”

Perceived Barriers

Despite the prominent role ascribed to industry in discussions about “job creation”, the ready availability of light industrial land in Gloucester is, according to some critics, offset by onerous development controls, excessive contribution requirements.

The primary target for complaints about the latter is MidCoast Water, a regional Authority which took over management of Gloucester’s water and sewage systems a few years ago. There are reports of exorbitant demands being made for up-front contributions for future service development arising from proposals to establish new businesses on vacant industrial blocks, which were already serviced by water and sewer.

Criticisms of Council arise more frequently from requirements for on-site parking and provision for truck movements, and from general site development standards, including landscaping. While the former are viewed as being excessive and inflexible, the issue in relation to the latter is one of timing. It is pointed out that an individual who is endeavouring to start a new business is usually constrained by capital, and that the first priority is the equipment necessary for efficient operation. Most are sympathetic to Council’s aspirational standards, but suggest that these could be achieved over a period of some years, while still subject to a binding agreement.

Heavy Industry ?

Few Gloucester residents are aware that the Shire also hosts land zoned for Heavy Industrial uses. This 95ha site is located just one kilometre south of Stratford Village, adjacent to the Stratford open cut coal processing complex. It is the legacy of a former Council, and staff members of that time, who developed the concept with the active encouragement of certain State Government Agencies.

A Gloucester Shire Council brochure of the time enthused that:

“Stratford Industrial Park is a high quality, attractively designed industry park in a rural setting . . .

which was deemed suitable for a range of potential industries, including aluminium extrusion, brick manufacture, bulk chemical manufacture, and heavy engineering. This was certainly consistent with the Department of Planning’s stated objectives for Heavy Industrial (IN3) Zones, which are *“To provide suitable areas for those industries that need to be separated from other land uses”,* and *“To minimise any adverse effect of heavy industry on other land uses”*. Specifically mentioned as being permitted with consent (the standard phrase) are Hazardous and Offensive industries and storage establishments

As of writing, the concept remains on the drawing board, but there are reasonable grounds for hoping that it will be removed from the next version of the Gloucester LEP.

Drifta Kitchens - A Case Study

Gloucester’s location in proximity to Newcastle and Sydney offers advantages both for input supply, and market distribution, for light industry manufacturers. This, in combination with the availability of light industrial land, motivated Luke Sutton to relocate his two-man business here in 2004, with a mind to expansion.

Drifta Kitchens has since grown to employ a current workforce of over 40, and plans for further factory extensions are underway. The company manufactures and distributes an innovative range of camping accessories, including trailer-mounted kitchens, 4WD drawers, camper van kitchens, and custom van and boat fit outs. The company also has a strong policy and record in apprentice training, in association with TAFE.

If there is at all a sense in which it is meaningful to discuss “Job Creation” in the private sector, it is entrepreneurs such as Luke Sutton who “create” jobs in a community, not fly by night resource extractors, and certainly not local politicians ventilating at election time.



Concluding Remarks

In the preceding pages, I have attempted to present a coherent outline of our district's relatively recent settlement history, the early expansion and consolidation of agriculture and the timber industry, the evolution of Gloucester as the local service centre for an area extending somewhat beyond the Shire boundary, and the more recent impacts of changes in Australia's broader society and economy insofar as they have affected us.

None of the broad front community building strategies outlined in the previous sections are completely original. In fact, most have found mention in the Buchan Report, or in other Council Planning Strategy Reports, though in terms which seemed to ascribe to them only a minor role.

I hope that, in reviewing and presenting them in this form, and in the current context of debate, I will have made some contribution to advancing a rational and productive discussion of the ways in which the present members of the Gloucester Community might strive to secure a secure and sustainable future for themselves, their descendants who may continue to live here, and for folk as yet unknown who may choose to make their homes here in future years.

There is no silver bullet. Charting a path for our community, or any similar rural community, through a largely unpredictable future, requires the recognition and acceptance of a shared set of goals; a common understanding of the process of technological and social change; and a united readiness to learn, adapt, and give priority to longer term benefits as opposed to often illusory short term gains.

The common Cormorant or Shag
Lays eggs inside a paper bag.
The reason, you will see, no doubt,
It is to keep the lightening out.

But what these unobservant birds
Have never noticed is that herds
Of wandering bears may come with
buns,
And steal the bags to hold the crumbs.

Anon: Adapted from "Verse and Worse".

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Back cover: **“Cosmos”**.

Acrylic, Oil, and Collage on Paper: (Patricia McCalden, 2013) .

