



1 September - 27 October 2001



GLADSTONE REGIONAL
art gallery
museum

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Online: www.gladstonerc.qld.gov.au/gallerymuseum
Open: Monday to Saturday 10am-5pm
Public Holidays as advertised

Waves of Settlement Port Curtis 1964 - 1982 Tidal Wave: Slum to Boom City



Demolition of the meat works 1964
Gladstone City Library \ collection

As far as many were concerned, 1964 did not dawn well in Gladstone - not well at all. In December 1963 the meat works closed down and those who could find similar work elsewhere left town, taking their families, never to return. Of those who remained (7,000 people in Gladstone, and 3,500 in Calliope) very few seem to have known what was in store for the town.

It was a town not untypical of many Australian towns at the time - few streets were surfaced, footpaths were unpaved, the water supply was chancy, sanitary arrangements primitive, schools and medical services inadequate. But Gladstone had the additional problem of unemployment - any job was the go, and never mind what you were trained for, skilled in or wanted to do.

Some people, however, did know that the prospect was totally different and the town was on its way to being a unique industrial centre in Queensland, a serious rival to Newcastle, Port Kembla and Geelong.

The catalyst of this change was Queensland Alumina (QAL), with its plans to build a giant plant to refine bauxite and to process alumina, main ingredient in aluminium. The metal of the post-war consumer world had rapidly become part of our daily lives as drink cans, fly screens, window and door frames, insulation, kitchenware, detailing on cars, body work for boats and caravans - and the eponymous, My god, what did we do without it?' Despite this the plastic age was making serious inroads in the kitchen

During the construction phase, 1964 - 1967, the peak workforce reached some 2,800 skilled and semi-skilled people, drawn from all over Australia and overseas. Many came as single men, but many also brought their families.

The social dislocation for residents and newcomers alike was unbelievable and solving such problems was not initially high on the agenda.



Chesney caravan being positioned in the Boles Street
Caravan Park
Neil Chesney



Yaralla Hostel, single men's quarters for the Queensland Alumina Ltd. workforce, Barney Point 1965
Gladstone Regional Art Gallery & Museum collection

'For single men there was a huge barracks at Barney Point, but families lived in tents, caravans, makeshift lean-tos, under houses, in sheds - even in the cars they had arrived in. There was no such thing as an empty house in town and spec building flourished, with not too many questions asked about the skills or qualifications or methods of tradesmen.

Since the new industry required enormous amounts of power and water and these were attended to fairly promptly.

The first phase of the Gladstone Power Station was commissioned in 1967 (eventually producing half the State's power supply).

Stage 2 of the Awoonga Dam, giving it a capacity of 45.5 million litres per day, was complete by 1970 without costing ratepayers a single cent but without dispelling citizens concerns about water quality. By 1977 the dam had been raised yet again and in 1981 plans for the Awoonga High Dam were in place.

With power and water assured, other industry was attracted to the area - including a cement clinker plant and the Boyne Island Smelter (in the Calliope Shire). There was also considerable upgrading of existing port facilities to handle huge tonnages of coal, wheat and other commodities, and the building of the South Trees Wharf (completed in 1966).



1977 postcard
Gladstone City Library collection

If employment had been provided - and plenty of men had very well-paid jobs - in the town itself, all was not well. Before long a Ratepayers Action Group was formed to encourage Council make better progress with the upgrading of much-needed infrastructure.

While the Ratepayers Action Group worked on the physical needs of the town, the social needs were looked into by a group called Australia Frontier, which came in at the invitation of the Gladstone Apex Club. Under its guidance, the town conducted a self-survey which revealed shortcomings in government attention to education, health and social welfare. After the formation of the Gladstone Social Development Board, a social worker was finally employed at the end of 1972 (in which year Gladstone had the highest birth and lowest death rates, in Queensland).



Doug Anderson, Carolyn Harrison, Mark Harrison
November 1971 Gladstone Regional Art Gallery & Museum collection

By 1981 the pressure for public amenities was so great - and the negotiations with the State Government for desperately needed funding had come to such an impasse - that the Council threatened to stop all development. A large public meeting of workers in July demanded better quality of life, in the shape of adequate schools and medical facilities, housing public transport and roads - and voted to boycott all future big projects until facilities caught up with population growth (then a staggering 25 000). In the neighbouring local government area, Calliope, there had been similar three hundred percent expansion (to approximately 10 000), especially down on Boyne Island and at Tannum

Sands, which had metamorphosed from quiet fishing and holiday villages to thriving communities, well connected to Gladstone by the high-level John Oxley bridge. Calliope Shire, with greater opportunity for planning than Gladstone, was rapidly becoming an attractive alternative to the coastal city.

By 1982 the period of great expansion was over, though more industry was to come, and the Port Curtis area was the most productive industrial area of Queensland - the population had survived the great tsunami and could settle down to a changed life style and environment. The city that waited was no longer waiting it was booming.



Gladstone Rotary Club Year of the child 1980
Gladstone Regional Art Gallery & Museum collection



Waves of Settlement is an initiative of the Gladstone Regional Art Gallery & Museum in conjunction with Genealogical Society, Gladstone Maritime history Society, Port Curtis Historical Society, Calliope Heritage Group, Gladstone City Library, Calliope Shire Council and the Boyne Valley Historical Society. This project is financially assisted by the Queensland Government through the Queensland Community Assistance Program of Centenary of Federation Queensland.