

Keeping the Doors

Open:

OPEN

HISTORY

MUSEUM

Braidwood Museum
and Heritage Centre

Past Present
Braidwood



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Past

Present

Future

At the Braidwood & District

Historical Society/ Braidwood Museum

Sustaining Community Heritage zine series

Series editors

Professor Sarah Baker

Dr Zelmarie Cantillon

The Sustaining Community Heritage zine series emerges from an Australian Research Council-funded project, 'Co-creating a sustainable future for the community heritage sector'. This project explores the organisational sustainability of Australia's volunteer-managed galleries, libraries, archives, museums and historical societies which serve important functions in shaping public history through the collection, preservation and display of local, everyday and marginalised heritages. However, the sector faces a sustainability crisis. Mounting pressures pose a threat to the long-term futures of volunteer-run heritage institutions, putting at risk the diversity and accessibility of the nation's historical record. In this project, we collaborate with representatives from community heritage institutions across Australia to co-develop strategies for recognising value, measuring organisational sustainability and creating benchmarks for sustainable practice.

The zines in this series capture the work of the project as it unfolds, enabling volunteers in community heritage organisations to communicate their experiences and knowledge creatively and accessibly. We approach the zines as a way to facilitate a networked, co-designed understanding of organisational sustainability from a range of institutional contexts. The zines in the series identify challenges, but they also seek to build on existing resources, capabilities and ambitions already in place for the pursuit of viable futures.

For project updates and other issues of this zine series, see:

<https://communityheritagetoolkit.com/>

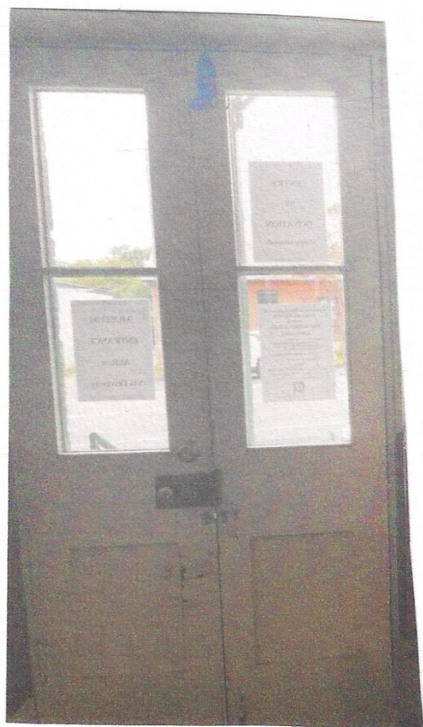
Keeping the Doors Open:

Past, Present, Future

At the Braidwood & District

Historical Society/

Braidwood Museum



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Ethics

This project has received full ethical clearance from Griffith University's Human Ethics Committee (GU ref no: 2025/199).

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CONTENTS

Editorial	
<i>Hart Tucker, Sarah Baker, Zelmarie Cantillon</i>	vii-ix
Survival	
<i>John Stahel</i>	1-4
Community coming together	
<i>John Stahel, Hart Tucker</i>	5
No life here	
<i>John Stahel, Hart Tucker</i>	6
Organisational structure	
<i>Peter Smith, Hart Tucker</i>	7
Nathan's role	
<i>Nathan Pharaoh, Hart Tucker</i>	8
Uphill battles	
<i>Nathan Pharaoh</i>	9
Peter and John	
<i>Nathan Pharaoh, Rod McClure, Hart Tucker</i>	10
Committee and Volunteers	
<i>Peter Smith, Rod McClure, Nathan Pharaoh, Hart Tucker</i>	11
Identity	
<i>John Stahel</i>	12-13
Bushfire impacts	
<i>Kerrie Beers, Rod McClure, Jill Clarke, Peter Smith, Hart Tucker</i>	14-16
Changing world in changing times	
<i>Nathan Pharaoh</i>	17-18

Challenges	
<i>Cathy Cooper, Peter Smith, Nathan Pharaoh, Jill Clarke, Rod McClure, Hart Tucker</i>	19-20
Hope for the future	
<i>John Stahel</i>	21-22
Resilience	
<i>Rod McClure, Peter Smith, Hart Tucker</i>	23
No kids, no future	
<i>Nathan Pharaoh</i>	24
Priorities for the future	
<i>Nathan Pharaoh, Rod McClure, John Stahel, Peter Smith, Hart Tucker</i>	25-26
Clean glass cases	
<i>John Stahel</i>	27
Keep it daggy	
<i>Nathan Pharaoh, John Stahel</i>	28
Braidweird	
<i>Nathan Pharaoh</i>	29
Think big	
<i>John Stahel</i>	30
Community engagement	
<i>Nathan Pharaoh, Hart Tucker</i>	31
Why is it important?	
<i>Nathan Pharaoh, Rod McClure, John Stahel, Hart Tucker</i>	32
What I hope most	
<i>Nathan Pharaoh</i>	33
Acknowledgement	34

About Braidwood & District Historical Society and Braidwood Museum

The **Braidwood & District Historical Society** was founded in 1969 to encourage the study and appreciation of the history of Braidwood, NSW and its surrounding district. Since 1970, the society has owned and operated the **Braidwood Museum**, which houses a growing collection of objects, photographs, and archives.

Both the historical society and museum are run and managed by a small group of volunteers, dedicated to preserving and promoting the cultural legacy of the Braidwood district - past, present, and future.

In the summer of 2019-20, Braidwood was severely impacted by the Black Summer bushfires. The town was cut off, visitor numbers collapsed, and the museum temporarily closed. The fires had a significant financial and emotional impact on the organisation and its volunteers.

In the aftermath, the historical society received bushfire recovery funding from the government. These funds were intended to establish a "heritage centre" incorporating accommodation, artisan studios, a blacksmith workshop, and upgraded museum facilities - a project that would help make the museum financially self-sustaining, a focal point for the community, and a drawcard for tourists visiting the town. However, only a portion of the project was completed with the funds, leaving the organisation in a difficult position to achieve the full vision of the heritage centre.

Nevertheless, the volunteers remain committed to the museum's future and optimistic that the museum will continue to grow and thrive as a living part of Braidwood's story.

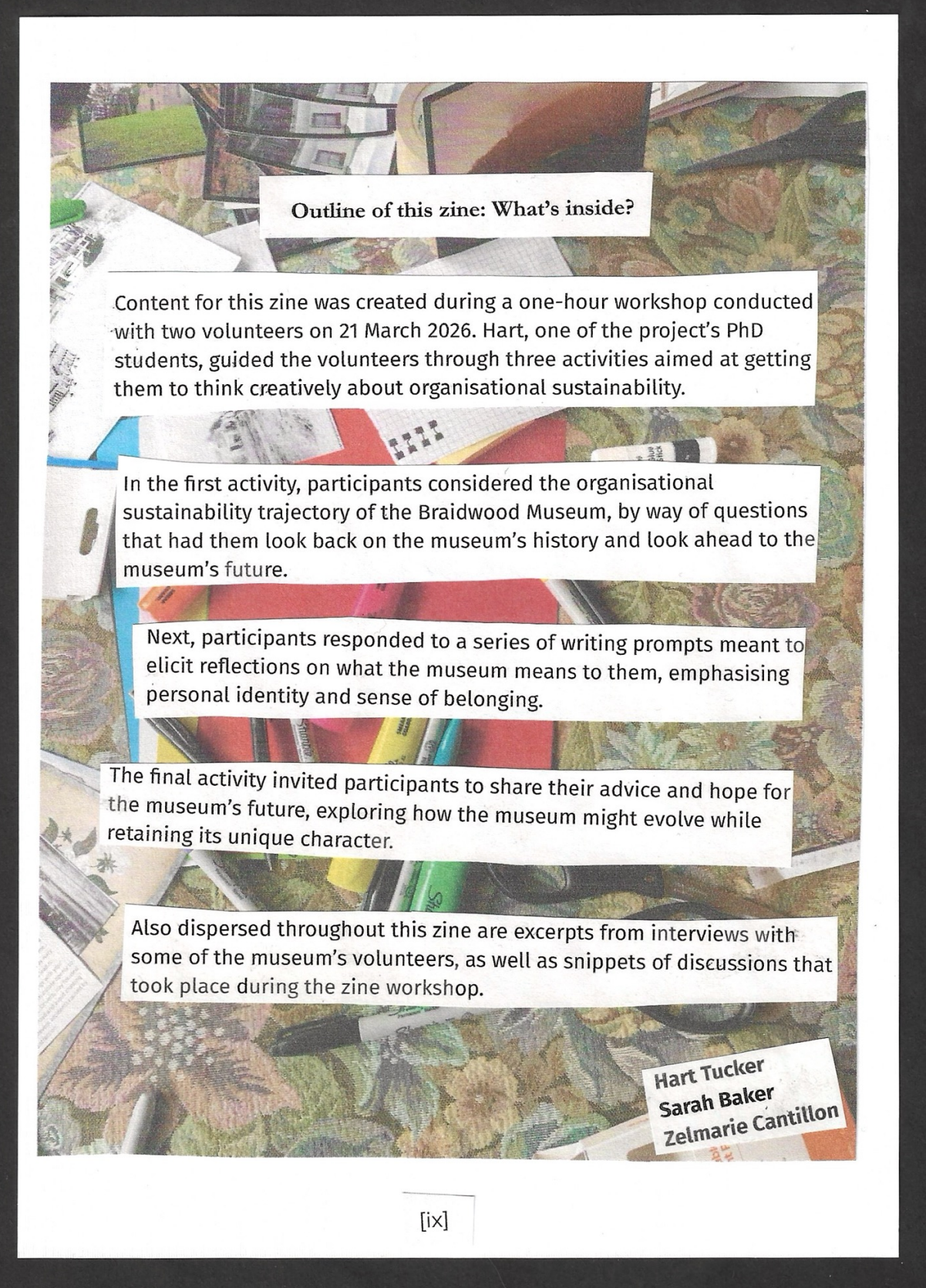
The title of this zine was inspired by a recurring image throughout the interviews and zine workshop – the museum’s doors, being either open or closed. Vice-president John describes the museum at the time he joined the historical society around ten years ago: “There was no life here. It was only open twice a week for three hours. And nobody dropped in. People just thought of it as being always closed. There’s so many people who would say ‘Yeah I’ve been meaning to go in there, but it’s never open.’”

And so, the museum’s survival came down to the question: “How do you keep the doors open?”

During the summer of 2019-20, the doors of the Braidwood Museum were shut by the Black Summer bushfires, as Australia experienced one of the most intense and catastrophic fire seasons on record. “Day to day operations of the museum stopped,” explains volunteer Kerrie. But what could have meant the permanent closing of the doors instead became a catalyst for new life at the museum. As another volunteer Rod puts it, “Out of tragedy came hope.” The committee’s successful application for bushfire recovery funding meant they could hire a manager, Nathan, to ensure the museum opens five days a week, 10am to 5pm; this increase in opening hours has resulted in “a vast improvement” in visitor numbers, as well as more donations and museum shop purchases. And as the doors stay open and more people visit, the momentum builds. As John says, “Once people are here, once life is here, once people see other people here, it snowballs.”

The “open doors” of the Braidwood Museum can have a more figurative interpretation as well. Nathan and the volunteers have made a point to keep “openness” at the heart of the museum: openness to new demographics of volunteers and visitors, especially younger ones; openness to presenting more diverse depictions of heritage; openness to re-imagining the role of a heritage organisation in modern times; and openness to new ideas more broadly.

“Keeping the doors open,” in both the literal and figurative sense, has made the Braidwood Museum a vibrant hub of the community and will continue to be the key to its long-term sustainability.



Outline of this zine: What's inside?

Content for this zine was created during a one-hour workshop conducted with two volunteers on 21 March 2026. Hart, one of the project's PhD students, guided the volunteers through three activities aimed at getting them to think creatively about organisational sustainability.

In the first activity, participants considered the organisational sustainability trajectory of the Braidwood Museum, by way of questions that had them look back on the museum's history and look ahead to the museum's future.

Next, participants responded to a series of writing prompts meant to elicit reflections on what the museum means to them, emphasising personal identity and sense of belonging.

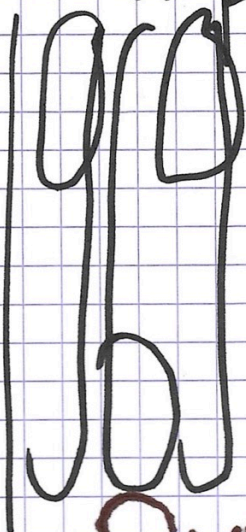
The final activity invited participants to share their advice and hope for the museum's future, exploring how the museum might evolve while retaining its unique character.

Also dispersed throughout this zine are excerpts from interviews with some of the museum's volunteers, as well as snippets of discussions that took place during the zine workshop.

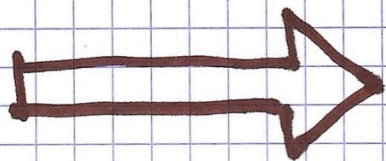
Hart Tucker
Sarah Baker
Zelmarie Cantillon



Hope . dream .



SURVIVAL

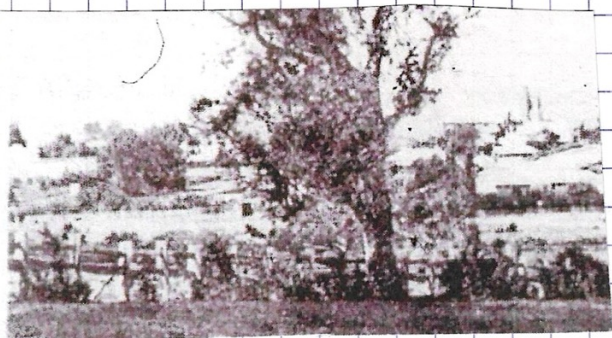


Alone



Survival

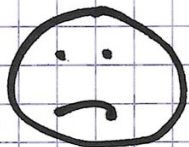




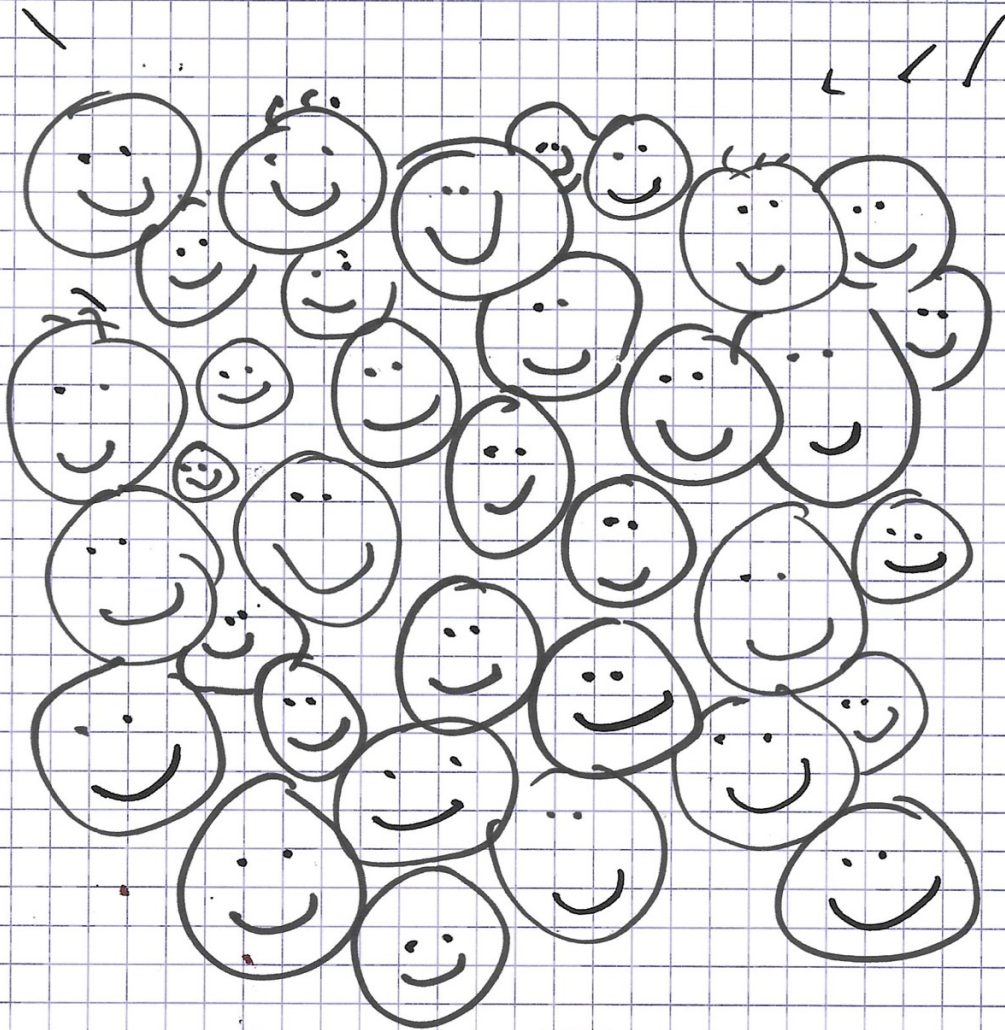
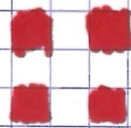
... and the greatest
mystery is that we
live each day as
if we live forever.



Survival.



but then



JOHN: So we started quite happy. This would be 1969 [the year the Braidwood & District Historical Society was founded].

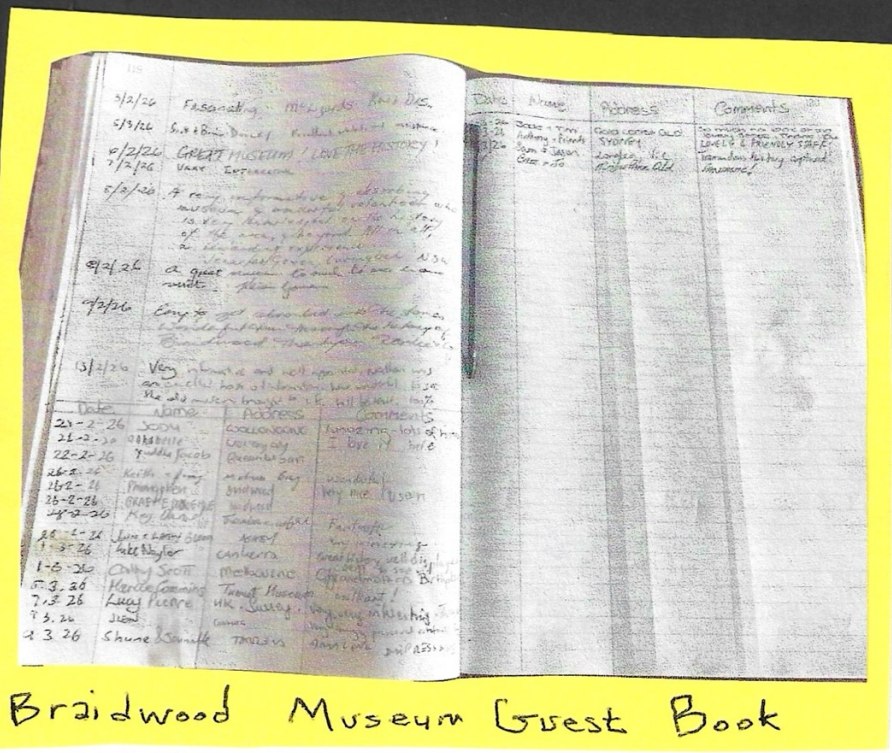
Then eventually people leave, and you're alone, and you think,

"Is it going to **die**?"

But then, community comes together and saves the day.

HART: Do you think that's where you see the museum now, that the community has come together?

JOHN: Yes, that's happened. Just in the last three months. And part of the secret is that just the museum alone is really hard, but if you make something bigger, and the museum's a part of it, then people drop in and they get the stories, and they say, "Oh wow, I've never been here." So the secret is getting life into the place, and once people are here, once life is here, once people see other people here, it snowballs.



Braidwood Museum Guest Book

JOHN: There was no life here. It was just the museum as you've seen it, and the back was just all grass, weeds, and there was a few old rusty – this shed here was filled with rusty farm machinery and steam engines and bits and pieces. Blacksmithing things and what have you. It was only open once or twice a week for three hours. And nobody – listen, nobody dropped in. You'd be lucky if you got ten visitors in a day, sometimes less. Those visitors weren't from Braidwood, usually, they were from Queensland or caravanning people coming through town or whatever. And the other volunteers were two quite elderly women, both in their 90s. And they had been involved in the society for a long while, but understandably – and they'd done a fantastic job. Understandably, in their 90s, they were getting pretty tired.... I said, "Oh, I can help with the museum."



I've always had an interest in history, but I have no background in running a museum. And so, in those days, I was kind of the museum manager based on the fact that I live next door. If somebody came, I could open the doors and show them through. And then, gradually, those older people moved on. I started to realise that the archives in particular were quite special, and there are items in the collection that are quite special. It was just a bit more than just another country museum. And so, that started to make me think, what happens if this place – if there's no succession plan, how do you keep the doors open?



HART: So, did you think about that, as it was just you? Did you have any idea what would happen to it if you didn't –

JOHN: Basically, the doors would – instead of opening for three hours a day for two days a week, sometimes one day a week, it wouldn't open at all. And most of the people in the town wouldn't even notice that it had closed. People just thought of it as being always closed. There's so many people who would say, "Oh, yeah, the museum. Where is it, again?" "Oh, it's on the hill." They're going, "Oh, yeah. That's right. Museum building. Yeah, I've been meaning to go in there, but it's never open."

And it wasn't. So, the outcome would have been another shut-up shop, really, and the collection would have just deteriorated over time. The weeds would have grown up, which they did, and it wouldn't have had a future.... So, together, Peter and I, as a team, started to talk about – how do we make the museum sustainable?



PETER: I'm the President of the Braidwood Historical Society, and the Historical Society owns and operates the museum, as well as running normal Historical Society activities.

HART: Do those have separate functions, the Historical Society and the museum, or do you think they're synonymous now?



PETER: I think it could be better managed with a separation, but, having said that, I didn't realise when I stepped into this role that the most important function of the Historical Society was running a museum. And I do see those things as quite different. I actually got surprised at how involved and how much management there was in running a museum. Prior to this I'd been the President of another historical society, a collective organisation, and it's quite different from running a museum.

I stepped into this role in September 2015, and before that I'd never been to the museum.

HART: Wow! So without ever even going to the museum, they said, "We want you as the President."

PETER: There's a reason for that, it is because of the difficulty of running an organisation solely on volunteers. And over a period of time, you may have a period where you have a very strong volunteer group, and then it wanes because very often volunteers are older people, and that's exactly what happened here. So, the organisation had been going since 1969 until when I became the President. And there were older people that were basically wanting to move on, through age, basically, and they asked me, would I consider taking the role on.

I realised that the only way for the museum to work would be to have some sort of professional management, or somebody that was paid, that was going to be there regularly, or all the time, and then have that backed up with volunteers, because I could see that after a short time the thing would fall apart again and we'd end up closing the doors. That was a turning point.



HART: So, first off, what is your position with the Braidwood Museum?

NATHAN: So, my position here at the Braidwood Museum is curator and program manager. I'm the first paid employee for the Historical Society.... Basically I'm here to get the hype, get the museum going, get it open, I'm doing front of house, I'm doing promotion. Program management, where we're trying to create new opportunities and activities. But I might clean the toilet, or I might clean the exhibition space, or set up new exhibitions. So, it's really wide-ranging. In addition to trying to get the hotel and heritage centre up and running.

HART: A lot of people have mentioned that you're working and volunteering at the same time.

NATHAN: I'm paid for part-time, while taking long service leave from the National Museum at half pay, and treating it like a full-time position.

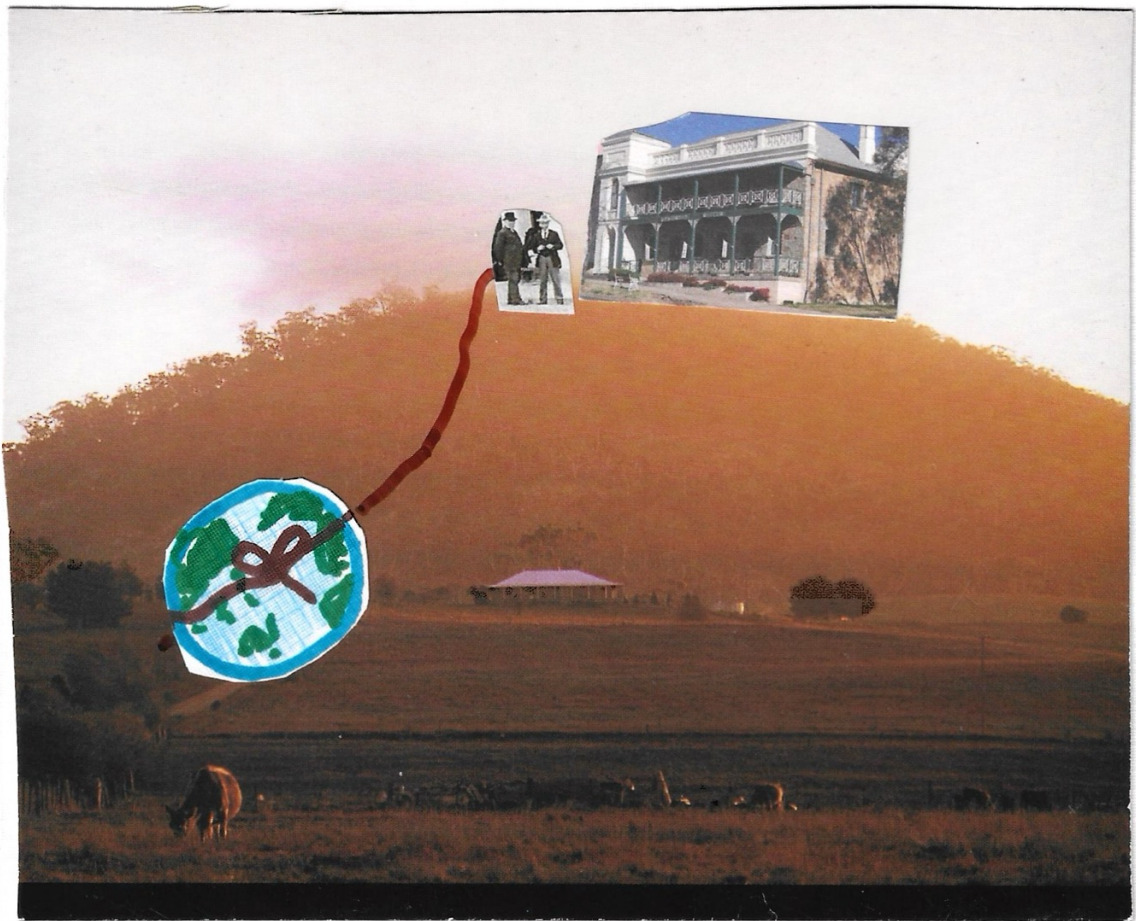
HART: So, that other half of the time you're essentially volunteering your time to the museum.

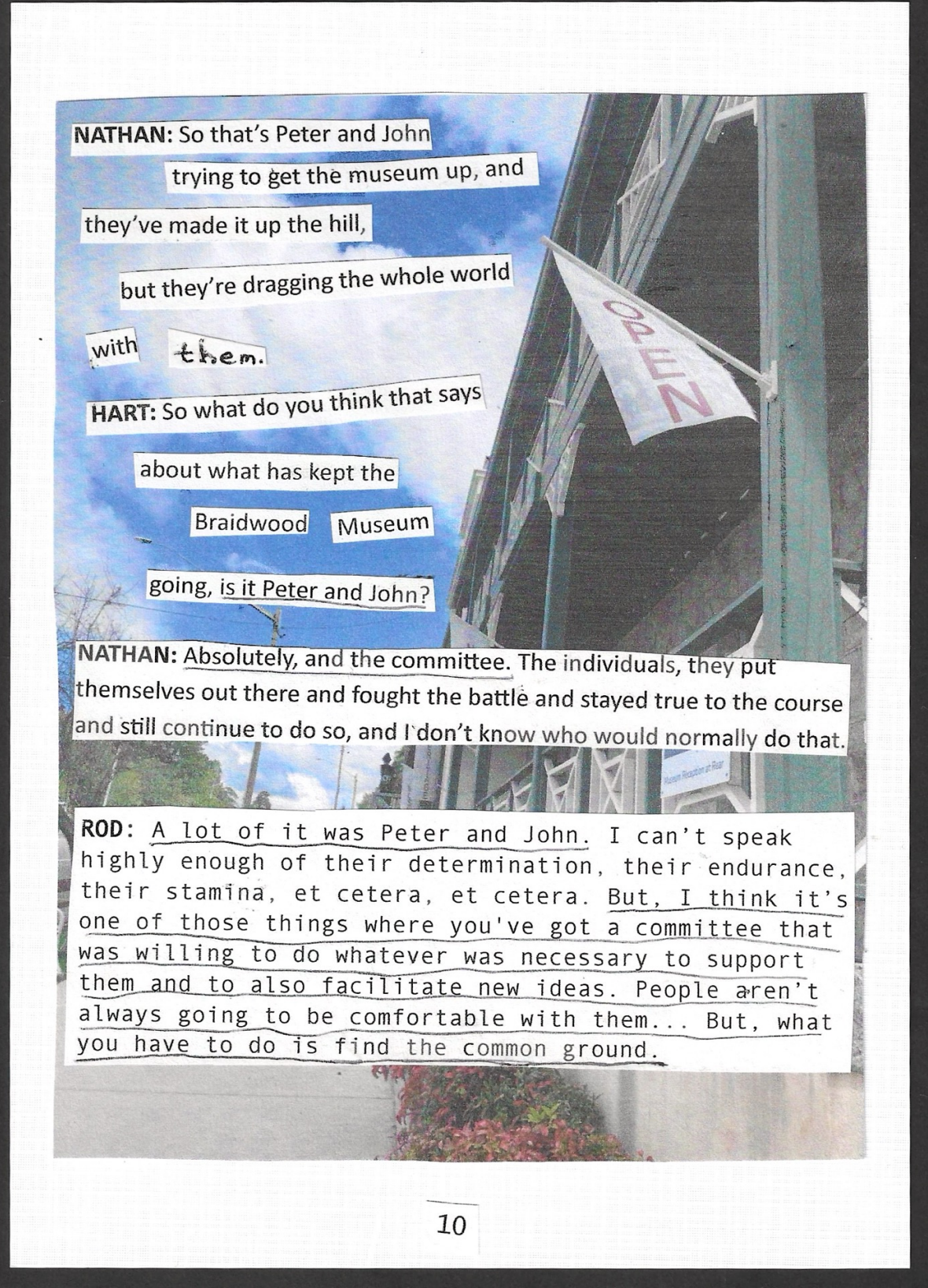
NATHAN: Yep.



Braidwood UPHILL Museum

Battles





NATHAN: So that's Peter and John
trying to get the museum up, and
they've made it up the hill,
but they're dragging the whole world
with them.

HART: So what do you think that says
about what has kept the
Braidwood Museum
going, is it Peter and John?

NATHAN: Absolutely, and the committee. The individuals, they put themselves out there and fought the battle and stayed true to the course and still continue to do so, and I don't know who would normally do that.

ROD: A lot of it was Peter and John. I can't speak highly enough of their determination, their endurance, their stamina, et cetera, et cetera. But, I think it's one of those things where you've got a committee that was willing to do whatever was necessary to support them and to also facilitate new ideas. People aren't always going to be comfortable with them... But, what you have to do is find the common ground.

PETER: I would say we have a really, really good volunteer group, a very strong committee. On the committee, we've got **myself** as the President, with a business background. ... **John Stahel** is the Vice President, who comes from television ... Very creative ... Committed. ... In fact, the main part of putting the Heritage Centre together was from his ideas. We have a librarian who specialised in family history studies. We have the retired principal of the high school [**Rod**]. We have a retired history teacher from the high school [**Jill**]. And **Kerry**, who has run a few small businesses and things, but just is so – works hard, so dedicated. And **Cathy**... she comes out of the public service, has had a lot of high-level jobs in there, and she is just so good on the details. So it's a pretty good committee, when you look at it.

ROD: We have a hell of a lot of fun and, at the same time, we get a job done. But, my experience also is that it doesn't take a lot to cause things to change. Often that happens because people confuse ownership with – what's the word for it? Status, non change. The two things become somehow locked together. I've seen organisations in this town literally implode, beginning with political parties through to quilting. And it was happening because the people who had founded it felt that they owned it to the point where you can't change it. And that is the biggest thing that I think you need to be aware of.

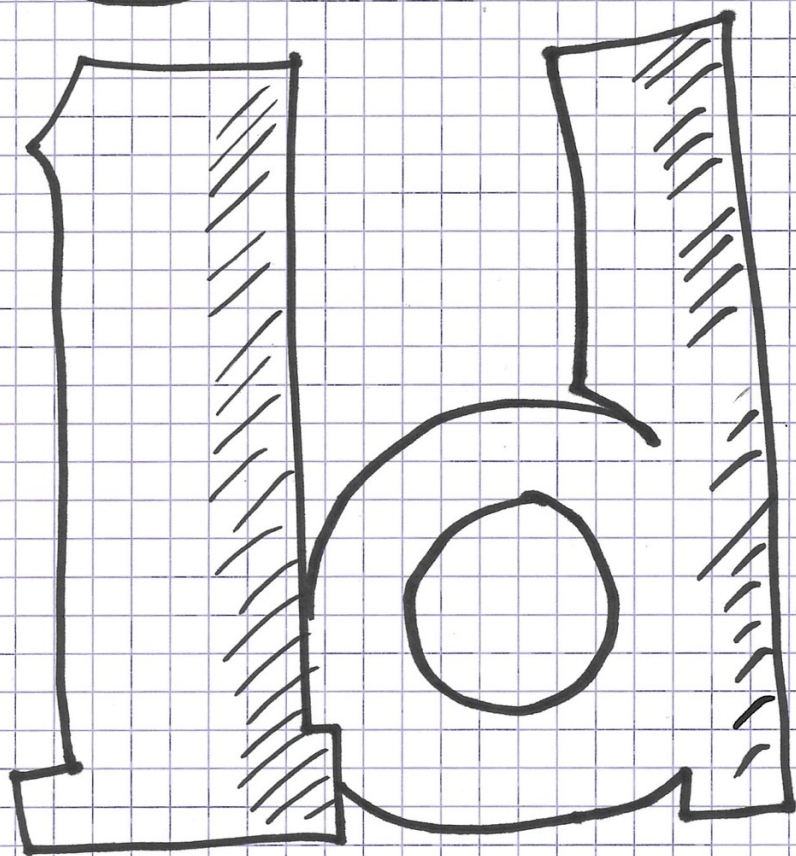
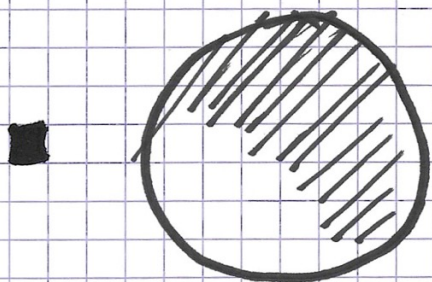
NATHAN: As the manager for the organisation, I haven't actively recruited publicly for volunteers – but we've kind of been hand selecting people that we know would be a good fit for the museum, and can support us playing to strengths in various disciplines. And so, eventually, we'd like to open it out to a broader more diverse volunteer cohort, however with that comes management, and so we need to put in the management structure. This is something that the committee has been working on.

HART: Definitely. I guess that's the interesting thing about volunteers is, you think always, like, more volunteers, more help. But it can also use more resources as well, because you have to train them, and you have to find things for them to do – and make them feel fulfilled as volunteers.

NATHAN: Exactly.

HART: So, it can be a resource, and also use resources at the same time.

NATHAN: A hundred per cent, yeah. It's about setting the expectations for volunteers too, so that they do feel fulfilment, with knowing what the boundaries are.



JOHN: The most rewarding thing [about being part of Braidwood Museum] ... so there's two things that come to mind. The first is friendship. Peter, whom I've worked with on this whole project, he and I are now very close friends. We started off the project not knowing each other at all. And that's been special. But another rewarding thing, being involved this long, is that it's part of my identity change.

So I lived in Sydney, I was an urban creature, and people knew me as the guy who worked in television, the guy who worked at SBS, who was so and so's father, the guy who was such and such's partner. My identity now is none of those things, I'm the museum guy. If someone wants to know something about the museum, people say "Ask John." It's part of who I am, and that's really nice. It's nice to have a nice identity, and it's a nice thing to be tied to.

The other stuff I do here, well I play golf, I go to trivia nights, I get a coffee each morning, they're not things I go "Oh that makes me who I am." But my connection to the museum is something bigger and broader.

And I do actually, genuinely think that museums are important. I remember an interview I did a year or two ago, and I said at the end "Museums are important, museums change lives. It certainly changed mine." But it is so true, it absolutely changed my life, in a good way.

And before I knew nothing about Braidwood's history or story. But you learn so much about the history of the town, and it becomes your history.

How did the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires impact the Braidwood Museum?

KERRIE: Day to day operations of the museum stopped due to no visitors as Braidwood was cut off from the coast, much through traffic to the town consists of Canberran's travelling to the coast; & the surrounding fires made it too dangerous for anyone else to consider a casual visit.

At this time there was only myself & two other volunteers working at the museum. I had not been a volunteer long before evacuating to Sydney in December.

Due to being closed no collection item donations were made during this time, nor did the museum make any income to cover expenses.

The Museum & Historical Society received a Bushfire Recovery Grant from the government with a further second round granted to us. We expected the monetary amount of the grants, which were quite substantial, to build us an exceptional heritage centre with accommodation, black smith shop & artisans' studios, new office area for the museum, a lift to the second floor of the museum, all to ensure the sustainability of the Museum & Historical Society, and build tourism for the town, but the money was mishandled by Public Works. In the end only a portion of the expected work was done leaving the museum in an extremely difficult position to find the needed funds to complete the work.

ROD: Yeah. Look, there were several things, to be honest. The first one was that people were basically in a state of shock after it.

There wasn't a great deal of visiting of the museum for some time. People took time to recover. But when the opportunity arose to get the bushfire grants, which were intended to help the town to recover, then there was an upturn in interest.

In many ways, we haven't looked back. Out of a tragedy came hope that we could create a museum that would be self-sufficient and a focal point in the community and a drawing card for the community.

The echoes of that fire will continue on for a long time, I think. I think probably the committee as a whole tries to be really optimistic and that can be very hard sometimes. But, there generally is a desire for optimism and, as I said, the realisation, albeit of only part of the plan, for the Heritage Centre of the museum, has given a real shot in the arm to people.

One of the things that I would say is that this town is at its absolute best when people are in need or there's a crisis. It's just like every sort of hatchet that's been out gets put away in the cupboard and people pull together and that's pretty much what's happened.

JILL: Yeah, I think firstly all of the executives and a lot of the volunteers were involved in the bushfire. So we all had the bushfires at our doors. So emotionally, financially. Also, it stopped people coming to the district, and I think because of that emotional thing that we had to deal with, I think that's something that we all had to push our enthusiasm and it dampened it for sure. Absolutely. And we were doing other things. Not only were we volunteering here, we volunteered in our own little districts or helped with the firefighting or whatever it was, cooking, providing assistance for people who were affected by it.

HART: So how has the organisation responded and recovered after the bushfire?

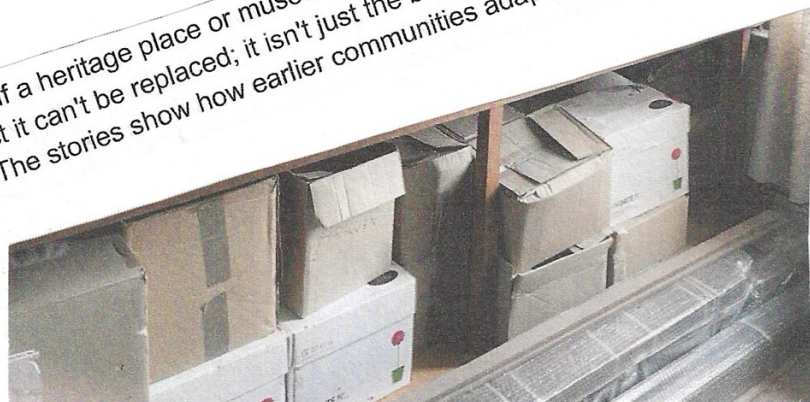
JILL: I think that the idea that we could sustain ourselves and carry on was really important. If we didn't have that idea, then it would make it difficult. We would still be in probably only one day a week, and not be as buoyant as we should be. So the bushfire and what happened afterwards and some of the funding, even though the funding was wasted or much of it, we still saw the light at the end of the tunnel. ... So we're going to go ahead. We're going to be positive and do things.



PETER: When you get a bushfire you lose heritage because you lose old huts, and you also lose simple things like slip rails. ... We had an old generator shed on our place that had an old World War II generator in it that still worked and all that sort of thing. Gone. ... There's a set of stockyards that were built in the 1950s by two women. Gone. And they just get forgotten.

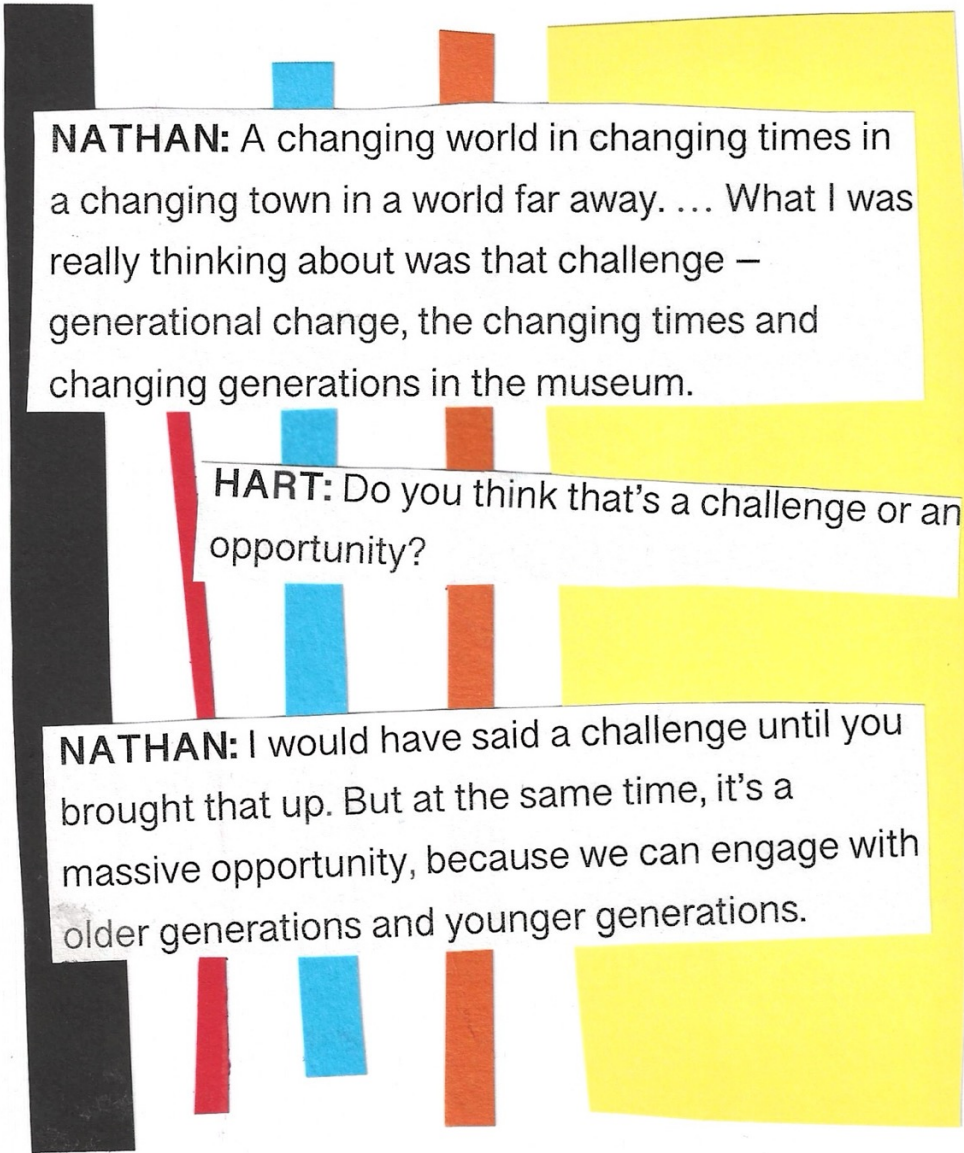


KERRIE: If a heritage place or museum collection is destroyed by fire, flood, or neglect it can't be replaced; it isn't just the building gone but also the stories. The stories show how earlier communities adapted or struggled.



N.D
Pharad

TALES
of
Intrigue
A Narrative
of Navigating
A changing
world in
changing times
in a changing
town in a
world far away
Antipodean
Development



NATHAN: A changing world in changing times in a changing town in a world far away. ... What I was really thinking about was that challenge – generational change, the changing times and changing generations in the museum.

HART: Do you think that's a challenge or an opportunity?

NATHAN: I would have said a challenge until you brought that up. But at the same time, it's a massive opportunity, because we can engage with older generations and younger generations.

HART: What are the challenges that are facing the museum regarding its long-term future?

CATHY: Getting enough volunteers, because we've only got a small number now. But now that Nathan's here, he's promoting the museum and the historical society a lot more, so it's getting it out there and we're doing a lot more activities, so getting a lot more people involved. So we're hoping that will expand our volunteer base to help out in the museum. ... They can be young, old. ... We're open to what they want to do. There's so many jobs to do.

PETER: The key to sustainability is definitely maintaining volunteers, or some sort of management structure. That's what I identified from the very beginning. ... You see, volunteers only volunteer if they want to, if it's fun. So, it's not like having an employee, where they might want to get satisfaction and whatever, but they work, they get paid. So you've got to make it a rewarding environment. I would say, my role as the President is, I'm always very careful that our people are doing what they want to do, and enjoying what they do.

NATHAN: Personally, I think the key challenge is that the museum needs to strive to remain relevant in the modern context.

JILL: I think that the challenge is to make sure that our local government is on the same page as we are, and to make things, like that red tape that we have to deal with – to sustain us, we have to make sure that they're not putting the brakes on. That's what I think. ... Just when we do things, encourage and make sure that it's a quick turnaround. This is what we're waiting and waiting and waiting for. All the time for the last six years we've been waiting, and I think it drains people, enthusiasm, just waiting. I don't know how the boys have actually dealt with it really, but I wouldn't have the patience.

ROD: Funding would have to be the most significant challenge. Our current grant writers are very good, and they've been responsible for getting a number of grants over a period of time. That's meant that things like the apple crusher, for example, can be restored. We were able to restore the Gellibrand Dodge truck. ... I think that funding is one sort of leg to it. A second leg to it is keeping the museum prominent within the minds of the people in the community.

NATHAN IN THE RESTORED TRUCK →



NATHAN: Now that we have the heritage centre with a bigger facility, we are struggling financially, because we now have to meet greater infrastructure and facility costs, mixed with greater insurance and public liability costs. So, our costs have gone up, so we need to come up with a way to financially self-sustain that.

HART: So, I guess the accommodation is expensive now, but hopefully will begin to pay for itself, once people start coming.

NATHAN: That's exactly right. Yeah. And even since I've started, they got grant money to hire someone part-time for six months. So, that's partially funded, which allows someone to be here full-time. But in my time since I've been here open five days a week, our electricity costs have raised to more than what they've been in the past. So, this is a financial pressure.

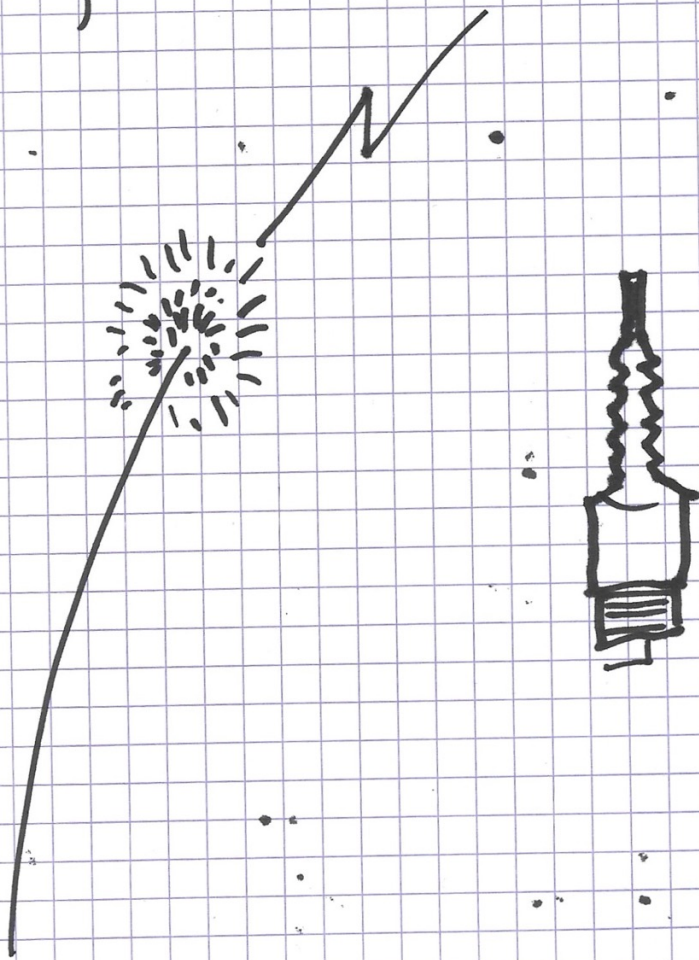
HART: It's a hard balance then isn't it, because you want more people coming into the museum, so you need to be open more, but then it's more expensive.

NATHAN: Totally. And so, we're getting more donation money, which helps to offset that. And we're getting more sales of books and other things that we're providing here in our shop – but it still hasn't come close to balancing, and it still does not yet support a full-time or even part-time wage.



← **NEW ACCOMMODATION**

Hope for the future



HART: What is this hope for the future?

JOHN: Sparking creativity. This is supposed to be a spark plug.

HART: Is your hope that you are sparking the creativity of the visitors that come into the museum, the town more generally, or the volunteers?

JOHN: Both ways. I think it's the people who are involved, using their creativity to think of things to do and ways to tell the stories. And for the people that come in, I'd like to think that the museum is substantive, in the sense that, well, there are two kinds of stories. Ones that engage and make you think. And ones that distract. I would like to think that this museum has a future that is about engaging, particularly with its own community. First and foremost.

And the greatest selling point for Braidwood, the greatest part of our brand, is that we are authentic. We're not an old folk village, we're actually a living, thriving, modern, contemporary town, that happens to have an interesting history.

HART: What do you think are the things that the organisation is currently doing to ensure that you will have a future, and you won't have to cease operations.

ROD: Well, I think the first thing came out of tragedy, which was the Black Summer fires - and the foresight of Peter Smith and John Stahel, in particular, to apply for the grants with the help of the then Board, and get the money coming in. I think Nathan has made a huge difference in the very short time he's been here. He has done things that volunteers don't necessarily have the time to do. I think that will help keep the whole complex viable. I think if we can manage to get the blacksmiths and accommodation for artists and so on, that will support the place. ... So, basically, I think the viability in the long run will come down to: Can we sustain the Heritage Centre? ... Can we sustain a manager like Nathan and afford to pay him?

PETER: Well, the thing to do to ensure we have a future is to have a manager, which we've put in place, and have an income stream to support the manager. So, basically, we have that, almost. In other words, this [accommodation] will bring us an income of a couple of thousand dollars a week, and that'll be enough, with the other activities that we are now able to do, which is town tours. We do a town tour; we average about one a month at the moment, but I think that can be promoted to do one a week. That's another \$100 a week. The visitors to the museum. We're going to increase the cemetery tours. So, what I'm really saying is, we're putting together an income stream that will be able to support the manager. ... Over a period of time that'll be a different role, but it's a paid position, so we'll always have somebody in that role - and the manager is like the CEO; he answers to the board. The committee is the board and the chairman is the President. So, with that structure, we would - and with the income stream - we should be able to have ongoing management.

If we were to go back to being totally dependant on volunteers, our resilience would be lower. Once we establish our income steam through the accommodation and secure permanent employment for a manager, our resilience will be higher.

As I believe the latter to be fairly certain, I will rate our resilience as 8 out of 10.

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NO



No
Future

NATHAN: We're trying to, to use the skateboard term, spread the stoke, and just try to get people hyped, so that they do appreciate the museum. Because if they don't know about it and they walk past and see this old thing, it doesn't really mean much. But when you explain it and start to connect it to where they live, maybe they will appreciate it. So that's my focus for the future, I've been purposefully not posting too many photos of old people and posting photos of kids here instead. First video I posted was my kid skateboarding into the museum. That's the future. No kids, no future.

ROD: The most important future-proofing that we have to look at is there needs to be a new generation being brought on board who have the same passion and the same love for the town, its history, its environment, et cetera. That succession planning is, jeez, it's hard. It's really, really hard.

JOHN: Small museums in small country towns tend to be run by a lot of old people. And that is not what we wanted. That was never going to generate the sort of funds we needed. Whereas, you make it young, inviting.

PETER: But I can see that we do need to move with the times, and also, there's got to be a new generation coming here as well. As you said, our committee looks pretty stable, but we need to encourage the next generation to get involved. And I think we recognise it. There's several things to back up what I'm saying. One is that, on the committee we have two teachers, the retired principal and the retired history teacher, who were both involved with the school, and encouraging things, participating with the school. But Nathan is even a step further with his ideas, and he may have mentioned to you his idea of people doing the workshops here, and getting qualifications in certain things.

ROD: One of the things that shocked people a little bit, I think, was so far the record for somebody living in the town and never having been to the museum is 54 years.

HART: Really?

ROD: Yeah. Nathan often says, "Is this your first visit?" "Oh, yeah." "How long have you been in the town?" "Oh, about 30 years or whatever, I'm just coming down."

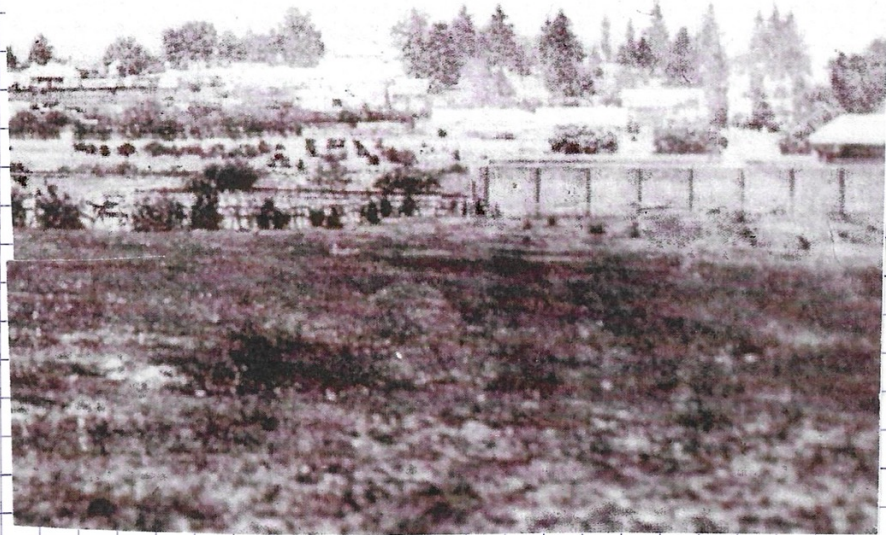
HART: Yeah, so actually getting locals to come in and give it a shot?

ROD: And give it a shot, yeah. Because of the way in which Nathan has managed to get information about the town, we're seeing a lot more people coming here because they're more aware of it. The Visitors Centre has taken new interest. There's posters up around the town and, as I said, the social media pages have made an enormous difference, and the website.

NATHAN: For me, the objective would be to make this museum and heritage facility self-sustaining, financially, and also give it the structure long-term to see its success in the future. So, succession planning, and getting new life and new blood is going to be a big component of that, as we have an aging population.

HART: What do you think are the top priorities for the next five years, to maintain sustainable operations?

NATHAN: First and foremost, it's securing our economic viability. So, it's all about getting the visitor numbers, getting the revenue streams, booking out the accommodation, that's the key. Personally, I'd like to focus on the collection and the stories, but the driver for that is my natural curiosity. But the reality is that we need to get strategic and focussed, and we need to get the revenue streams in order and do the hard work, that will then allow us to have the fun times. That's kind of it.



Clean glass
cases aren't
the story.

NATHAN: The strengths are the independence, that we're not a council or government run organisation, which allows us flexibility to think differently. ... The collection itself is strong, and that's for a couple of reasons. That's because of the rich history of the location of Braidwood itself, but also the people who were involved early on, had the foresight to purchase the building, to activate the history that we have, to get community input to do things, like help build the sheds that we store our collection in. And so, that's a real strength, that they've been able to tap in continuously to the community, and the rich amount of contributors that have a wide background, but in particular have experience in cultural heritage. So, researchers, and passionate people – that makes it a really strong organisation in that regard.

JOHN: What do you hope doesn't change about the museum? On the one hand, I am happy to embrace any changes. This is revolutionary compared to what the museum used to be. On the other hand, I think there's a beauty, because it's done by volunteers rather than council, it means the museum side of the business remains a big daggy and amateurish, and the signs are a bit daggy, and I think that's part of its charm. **So, keep it daggy.**



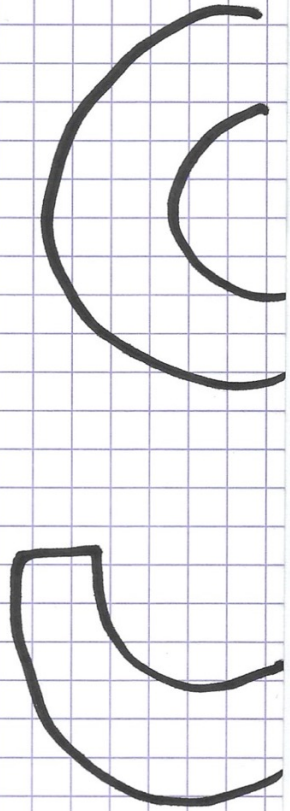
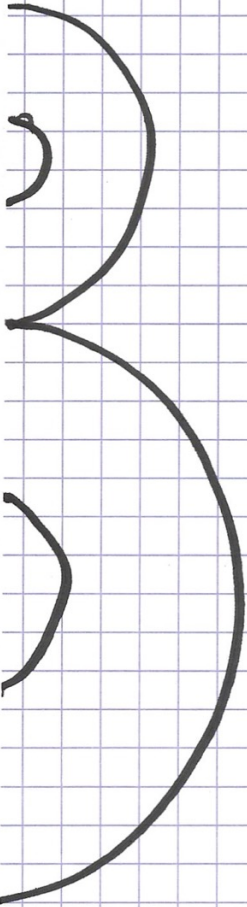
STAY True
Stay GREEPY
Stay Independent



Keep
Braidweird
Braidweird
Museum

Advice

think



NATHAN: The heritage centre is a newer concept for the organisation, whereas in the past it was really about preserving the history for the local community. I think they've always appreciated the rich history that we have here in Braidwood – but the concept of giving it a broader community benefit with skillsets, and training, and job opportunities, that's probably a newer concept.

HART: What are the average visitor numbers like today?

NATHAN: Currently, I would say on average, we're probably getting about 20 people a day. So that's a vast improvement on last year's figures, when they were open limited hours based on volunteer resources.

HART: What do you think has made that change, is it being open more hours, or a shift in marketing and engagement?

NATHAN: I think both, yeah. So, the fact that we are now open five days, and I've committed to be consistent Thursday to Monday, 10.00am to 5.00pm – as opposed to the old 10.00am to 2.00pm Saturdays, if people show up. That's a big shift. And then certainly the marketing done, like we never had an Instagram platform before, we now have that. We've got Facebook. We've updated our Google status, and we've also linked in with council and Tourism New South Wales to have a presence – just expanding the awareness that this place exists.

Currently we're getting a lot of, based on the promotions that we've been doing in the community, a lot of people that have lived in the community for a long time, who have never been here because of the restriction in the hours. But a lot of people are bringing their friends and family here. Based on some of the media work that we have done, we are getting a more diverse audience, and the age demographic has certainly started to lower. We've been promoting a more youth focused approach, which is seeing younger people come in – and even local younger kids. But there's often the case where people lived here for 50 years and never come in, and they're now starting to explore, and be a part of this change.

Despite these challenges, why do you think it is important that community heritage organisations like the Braidwood Museum remain sustainable into the future?

NATHAN: More broadly, philosophically, I believe in people's education and knowing about their past, and keeping that relevant to bringing broader social change for the better. And better understanding and tolerance, that's a key personal driver that I have. ... I think this institution has a solid place in supporting its community. And again, things like giving opportunities to our young people.

HART: It's been so interesting being here, as you have this idea of heritage and history as looking back. But that's very much not the case here – it's looking back and it's looking forward.

NATHAN: Yeah. And that's probably somewhat of a vision by some key people in the committee, and definitely myself. Part of my offering to come here was to almost rebrand the museum. And the rebranding currently is 'Past, Present Braidwood.' So, it's acknowledging that we have a current role to play in the community, and that's a living thing. And for me, I'm so passionate about heritage skills, but not because I want to study wheel making to make a cart so I can be towed by my horse, but so I can understand processes that may benefit us in the future. Especially as we have improvements in technology and materials and resources going forward, we've surely missed the combined ingenuity of thousands and thousands of engineers and craftspeople from the past, whether that's from First Nations knowledge of land or insects, or innovations in machinery and that sort of thing.

JOHN: Because it's linked to culture of all kinds. All cultures are linked by the obvious things like food, religion, music, architecture, art. And those things all make up our shared experience. And it's that shared experience which is important to then convey, and to then be able to show other shared cultures as well, that this culture is just as rich and just as important as this culture. And we all - we all have sacred sites. My sacred sites are that stone wall and those corrugated iron sheds. And people can look at First Nations sacred sites and go, "Well, it's just a rock. Lots of rocks. Why is this rock important?" But it's because it's imbued with stories and cultures and sharing and connection, connection to your culture in some way. And the better we understand all of those connections, the better off we all are.

ROD: Because it is the story of humankind in a nutshell. I go back to Cicero's quote, "Not to know what happened before one was born is to remain forever a child."

What I hope most
for the future
of the Braidwood
Museum. . .

Is to educate
our visitors
so they can be
better informed
* realise they can
Make the world
a better kinder
Place !!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the volunteers of the Braidwood Museum who engaged with this research.

Your willingness to share your experiences and offer your views on the sector's organisational sustainability is central to creating a zine series that captures viable futures for community heritage organisations.

