

Good morning everybody on this fine Bowen day. As mentioned in the introduction I am the shire librarian. I only intended to stay in Bowen for 3 or 4 years and then move on, but as fate would have it I fell in love with the place and at the 11 year point of my current employment, I cant imagine living anywhere else.....I believe this is a common affliction!

I must confess when I was first approached by the Mural society to give a talk on ***“the importance of the town’s murals, the history reflected in them and the part the library service plays in the promotion of those murals”***,

I was momentarily non-plussed as to how to approach the task.

However, it didn’t take much reflection to reveal facets of meaning that I and possibly others in the local community take for granted, simply because we live here and see the murals as part of the everyday background of our lives

But first a little background on the Shire library and its services.

Although we are comparatively small compared to say Mackay city, we are nonetheless very busy. As of the 12th September 5,837 people held library membership in the Shire. In the last financial year there were over 74,000 visits to the library and

106,000 items were issued. There are 22,000 items in stock at Bowen, and 6,000 in our Collinsville branch. In addition to books, we also offer broadband internet, word processing, videos, DVDs, music CDs, talking books, large print, and computer CD-ROMS, and shortly MP3 CDs.

Libraries have certainly changed haven't they?!!!!

Our members can now browse the library catalogue at home via the internet and reserve items. No longer do isolated property owners need to physically come into the library to browse.

Our library service also offers pedometer kits, in conjunction with the Bowen Healthier Shire partnership, which can be used to measure the number of steps taken in a day as a means of improving physical fitness. We will also be offering in cooperation with the local police and Building Safer communities Action team, an engraver loan kit, so that personal property can be marked and easily identified for return, if stolen.

These schemes and cooperative ventures are part of what is ***called community capacity building***. Community capacity building is a fancy sounding term that refers to bringing together skills, knowledge, and ability of community members but can also

include such things as access to community resources, leadership, infrastructure, time and commitment. What is important to realize is the heart of capacity building is people. Bowen Shire council supports community capacity building, so it was only natural that the library service would become involved in the promotion and support of the Mural society.

Doing a little research, as a librarian such as myself is habit bound to do, I discovered the following definition of a mural in the World book encyclopedia.

“A Mural is a picture or design on a wall or ceiling. Murals usually relate to the architecture they decorate and can alter a viewer's perception of space by creating illusionary openings in walls and ceilings. They can also make space appear more confining. Most murals are public art, meant to be seen and understood by a broad audience.”

Indeed. The mural is one of the oldest art forms. Prehistoric people decorated caves with murals of animals. Ancient Egyptians painted murals with flat, linear images. Greeks and Romans decorated walls with pictures of gardens, buildings, gods, and heroes. Within an easy 15 minutes drive of Bowen ancient murals created by the original inhabitants of this area dating back to approximately

5,000 years can be viewed. So, in a sense, the current murals are following an ancient mural precedent set in the district.

Since the European settlement of Australia and in particular North Queensland, a rich vein of history of the Bowen area has been mined and artistically interpreted and expressed in the beautiful murals we enjoy in the town today. Typically they mirror the pioneering spirit of our forefathers including our women, the war effort in both world wars and farming and community organisations. Through all these representations a common thread winds. It is one of the human spirit, and the very Australian traits of the battler and a fair go. Of individuals and families making the most of life, coping with disappointments, and creating achievements and satisfaction through diligence and hard work. This heritage, recognized through the art of mural, gives our present day generation meaning in the sense that we can readily recognise where we came from, acknowledge the contribution of the past in the benefits of today, and draw inspiration in our endeavours for a better future for our families and the Bowen community.

In my earlier definition of a mural I quoted the phrase that “***A Mural is a picture or design on a wall or ceiling.***”...clearly, it is so much more. If the murals of Bowen were to suddenly vanish tomorrow, an integral and valuable part of the Bowen community’s

unique expression of ourselves would be erased. In tourism terms it would be akin to losing several of our beautiful beaches.

Now, the library's involvement with murals started off as a purely physical one in that the first mural titled "Transporting a boiler to the goldfields" was painted on the northern wall. Since that time the library has served as a repository and display for many of the framed artist's concepts of murals put to the Mural society for consideration. As one views these concepts it is very interesting to note the evolution from concept design to finished product. This also gives an insight into the creative artistic design of the artists from conception to completion.

In addition, the Bowen Shire Council on its website has devoted a detailed section to the mural society where most of the murals can be viewed in colour, along with the history and artist involved in each one. It can be accessed at www.bowen.qld.gov.au

A coloured brochure is also available from the library and people asking for more information are always appreciative of this resource, and it also serves to advertise the murals when they are taken back to families and friends.

Council recognises the value of the mural works in the town and the tourism that it generates. I have personally spoken to many people both young and old, who have commented that they have made a special trip to Bowen just to view the murals. And of course every one of those tourists needs to eat, be entertained and possibly stay overnight. These are all income and employment generating opportunities for the Shire. Yes, we have beautiful beaches and friendly people, but the presence of the murals value adds so much to anybody contemplating a trip to our town.

During the tourist season, the library staff set their morning teatime by the gathering of eager participants in the mural walk tour which commences outside the library. The tour starts with a viewing of the artist's concepts hanging in the library. Many a time we have fielded questions from people enquiring about these works of art. And once having participated in the tour come back to the library to delve deeper into the local history.. Henry , Helen, Ron and other volunteers give up their time to educate and inform tourists and it is quite obvious that it is a labour of love for them!

Finally I would like to end with another quote from a gentleman called Henrik Ibsen...it goes like this

"A community is like a ship, everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm."

Clearly the Mural society is sailing in the right direction, and I believe the library service has its hand in support on the helm as well. In this way of working together, we can all increase the capacity of our unique communities for the common good.

Thank you!