

# Dunwich Hall is 100



The Men's Mess Hall for the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum was opened on 29<sup>th</sup> October 1913

# The Opening

- Hon. J. G. Appel (Home Secretary) (Nationalist member for Albert with party of 130 people on *The Otter*)
- *It is a large commodious brick structure capable of accommodating 300 persons at meals, and the white tiles lining the interior of the walls give it an eminently clean and attractive appearance. Here luncheon was served (Brisbane Courier p7))*
- Mr Lennon (ALP Member for Herbert)
- *. In all parts of the world the aged and infirm were cared for, but he did not think that anywhere else was provision so well made for those people as in Queensland. (Applause.)*

# The Hall

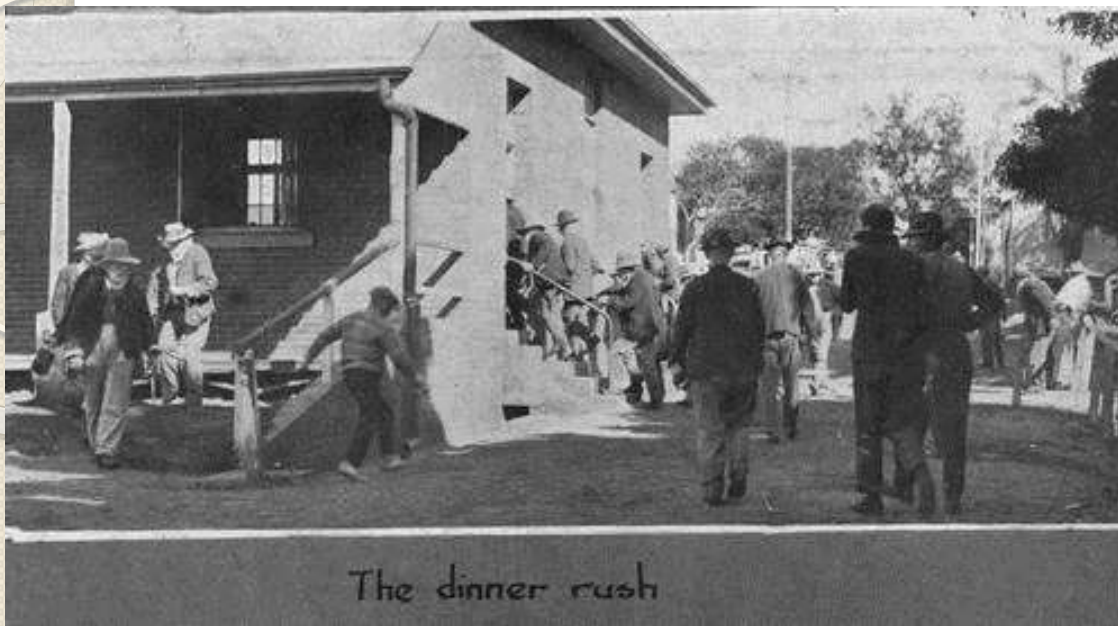
- St Mark's Anglican Church and Dunwich Public Hall are on Queensland Heritage Register as *surviving intact examples of the type of buildings that were once part of the only nineteenth century Benevolent Asylum in Queensland.*
- The brick hall funded by Queensland government via Dept of Public Works tender won by Graham and Speering.
- Building was very fast - tenders received 7<sup>th</sup> March 1913 and completed for opening on 24th October 1913
- Seated 400 “*single men*” and linked to jetty and kitchen by horse-drawn tramway



- Waiting for meal 1938



# The Dinner Rush



The dinner rush



# The food

- *The food for the women's ward is carted over in a dray from the cookhouse (Letter to Courier 1935)*
- *In dry, windy weather there is the dust and filth blowing on it (the food) and in wet weather not only the rain but also the drippings from the carriers' hats to flavour the food. The whole thing is disgusting. (Letter to Courier 1929)*
- *We want to get back our pudding, and cake and more sugar for the tea. (Letter to the Worker 1903)*

# Dunwich 1895







Dunwich 1937



# The Asylum 1913 Plan

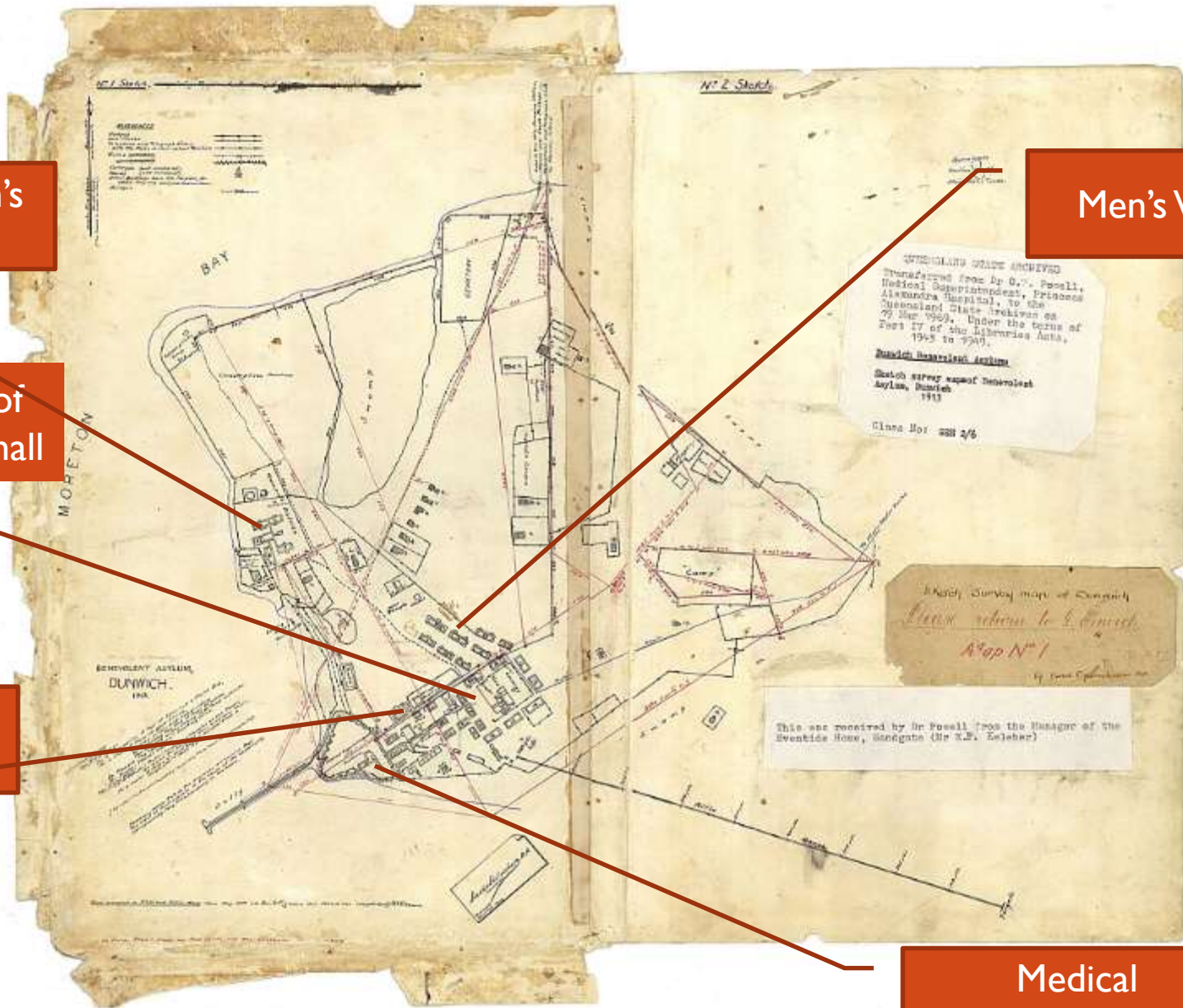
Women's  
wards

Site of  
mess hall

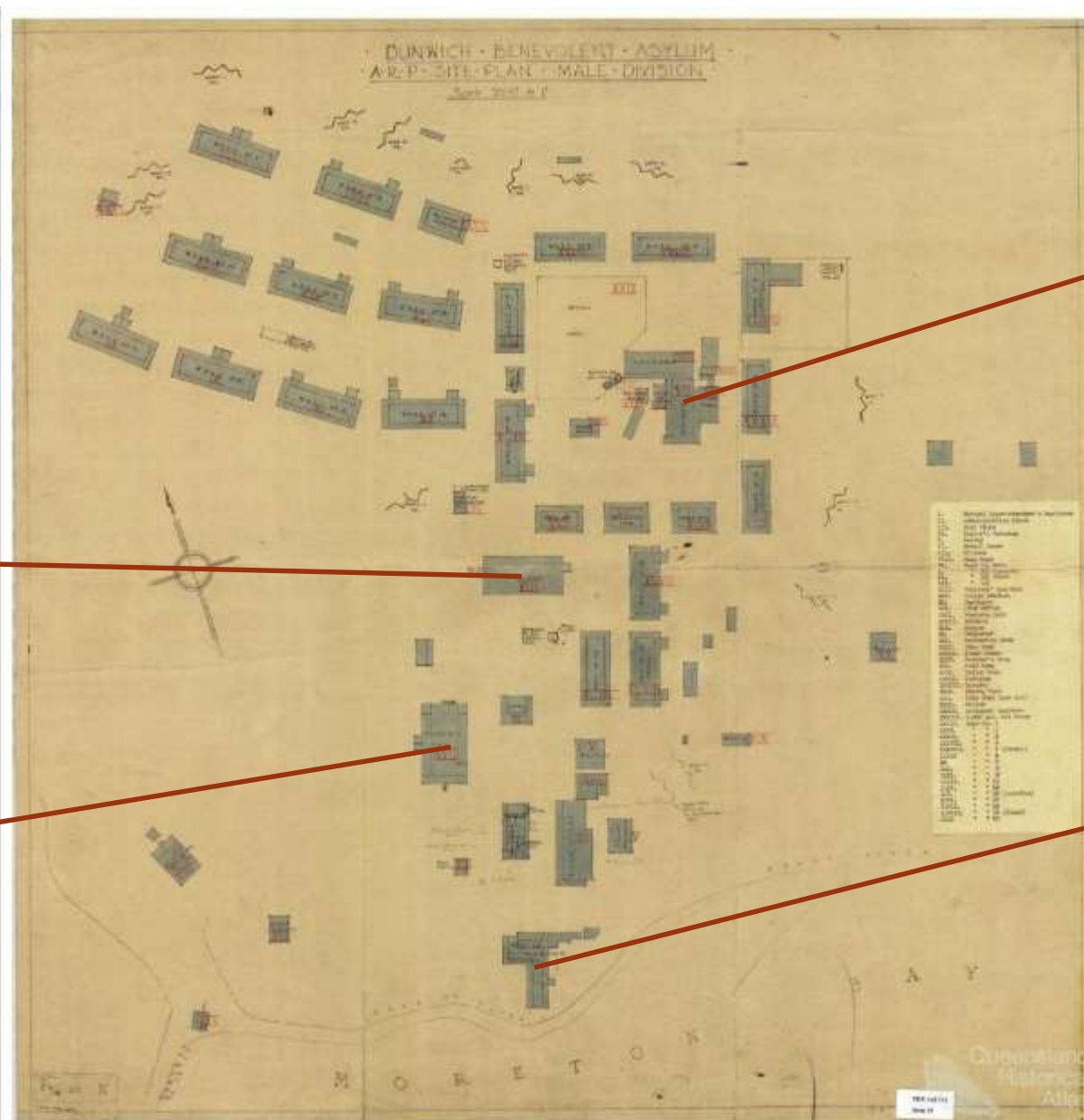
Victoria  
Hall

Men's Wards

Medical  
Superintendent



# Dunwich Benevolent Asylum Site Plan Male Division 1942



Men's  
Mess  
Hall

Kitchen

Victoria  
Hall

Medical  
Superintendent



# Overlay of asylum to present day Dunwich



Courtesy Ben Gall

# The Dunwich Benevolent Asylum 1865 -1946

- Benevolent asylums in all colonies in C19th to house poor, destitute and indigent. In NSW and Victoria established as religious charities.
- Qld Benevolent Asylum Act of 1861 funded hospitals to have 'asylum wards' & in 1865 Qld Government proposed asylum at new general hospital site
- 'Temporary' relocation to Dunwich Quarantine Station in 1866 under 'public pressure'
- Started with 80-90 inmates, confused funding and a drunk as Director
- Dunwich also became a lazaret for "white" patients and place of commitment under Inebriates Institutions Act 1896. Both moved to Peel Island in 1907 & 1910 respectively



# Inside a men's ward 1937



## Very Brief history

- The asylum admitted and readmitted 21,000 people over its eighty years
- At its peak in 1903 the asylum "relieved" almost 1600 people in a year, averaging 1,000 inmates a week
- 6 times as many men as women as inmates
- Mean age of inmates (1880s-1920s) was 64.7 years
- By 1930s, asylum included a police station and lock up, visitor centre, public hall, ancillary service buildings, ward buildings, tent accommodation and recreational facilities. Only electrified in 1926 (own generators)

# Christmas Day at Dunwich Asylum 1906



## Some of the inmates

- You would be surprised at the mixture of folks we have here. There are doctors, lawyers, chemists, tradesmen, schoolmasters, ex-policemen, miners, shearers, squatters, journalists, composers, scene painters, swaggies, sundowners, billabongers, men who have worn the broad arrow
- Then there are the inebriates, men and women too, who have been sent, here under the Act; but they have different treatment and quarters because they are paid for. (Rockhampton Morning Bulletin 1904)



# Recurring Issues

- Inadequate funding –in current values funding was \$1,900 per person /yr in 1900 and \$2,900 in 1932
- Inmates paid part of Commonwealth old age pension to Asylum
- Operated on idea that able-bodied inmates were meant to perform work and staff the asylum but apart from some of the inebriates few could manage a full day's labour
- 'Rackets' – eg wardsmen (inmates) charging inmates for morning tea
- Grog – smuggled in and 'rum' from methylated spirits
- Conflicts between superintendents and government
- Union and staff issues

# Aboriginal people and the Asylum - C19th

- Excluded from Asylum buildings and grounds - *the Myora women to be kept clear of Dunwich altogether.*
- In 1898, Protector of Aborigines, advised Medical Superintendent to *remove 4 -5 'girls' to domestic service off the Island,*
- This was because of “*some trouble between male inmates of the asylum and female Aboriginals from the Myora station*” (Brisbane Courier June 1898)

# Aboriginal people and the Asylum – C20th

- Maintenance of Asylum needed '*cheap permanent labour*'
- By 1920s up to 30 men in the outside gang, dairy and piggery – fought for wages not rations
- Around 15 women as cooks, nursing assistants and domestics including houses of senior staff
- Some trade and skilled jobs (eg power station, carpentry)
- Aboriginal people escaped the worst features of the Protection Act. Most not under the Protection Act so could travel without permission, use postal service and vote.

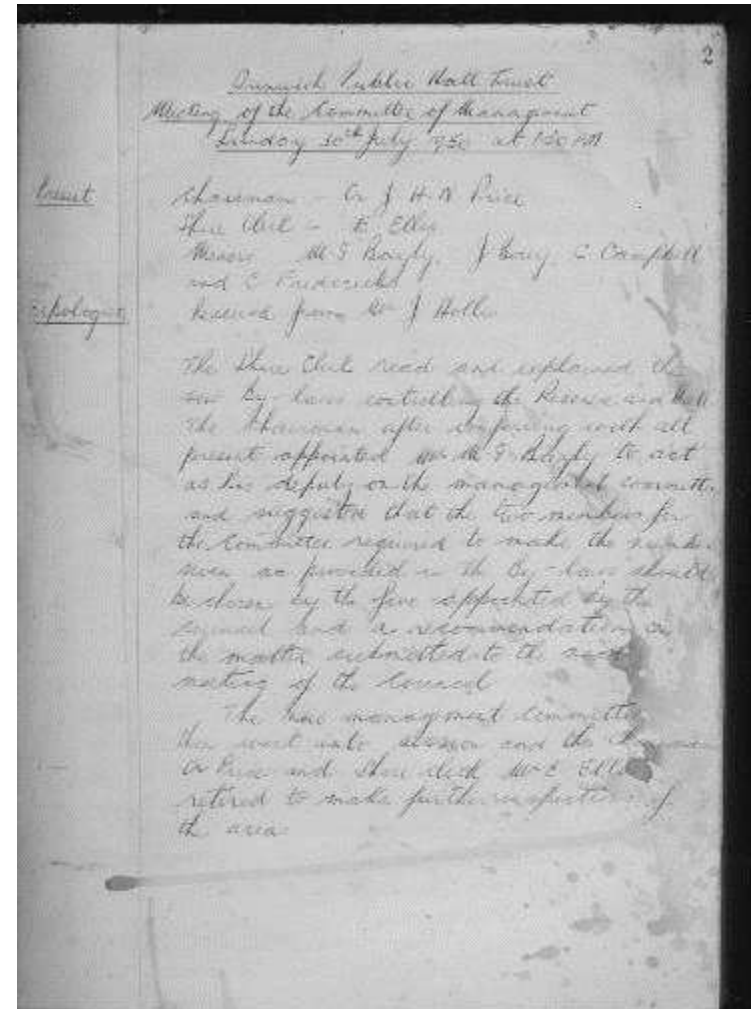
## Was it a Moreton Bay Shangri-la (Turnbull 1932)?

- *Where in Australia is there to be found such a charmingly situated institution for the aged?* (Sunday Mail 1935)
- *the most convenient dumping ground for social flotsam and jetsam,*
- *For the inmates, and to a lesser extent the staff as well, the rhythms of life beat out to the coming of the boat twice a week and sago pudding on Sundays. The hearse would pass by to the cemetery, the lights in the wards would be turned off each evening.* (Goodall)



# Post 1946

- Urgent' move to Eventide at Sandgate -announced Monday moving by Friday in same week
- Buildings (officially) disposed off Island mainly to Aboriginal Reserves- Victoria Hall still at Cherbourg
- Hall initially run by Public Hall Trust until assumed by Redland Council



1968 Baby and Flower Show



Fancy Dress Ball (1950s?)



# Dance class early 1960s?





# Nippers Presentation Night







**Water Protest 2008**

# Quandamooka Native Title Determination 4<sup>th</sup> July 2011



Standing room only at Dunwich Hall. Photo: Paul Dunn