

NARROWCASTERS

THE SHEFFIELD MURALS

Excerpts from the NARROWCASTERS audio tour

HISTORY OF SHEFFIELD

The Kentish Plains were first used as grazing land by the Field brothers who had a cattle run on West Kentish Road. Another family by the name of von Bibra were already here before land lots were auctioned by the government. The first settlers arrived in 1860.

The early settlers had a really hard slog. There were no roads, nothing, and nothing and no money spent by anybody. And for the first two decades the settlers of Kentish had an incredibly hard time. The stories of women walking through to Deloraine to get needles and threads and fellas carrying bags of flour on their back into Kentish...

Then in the 1880s, suddenly, minerals were found all across the back country. And Latrobe surged – that's just down the road - became the third largest town in Tasmania and Sheffield went into overdrive. In the 1880s there were gold prospectors and mining companies and everything formed in the back country.

BEGINNING THE MURALS

In the early 1980s urbanisation began to take its toll on this rural community. Shops in the town became vacant and there were no takers. You couldn't give them away. The new highway to Devonport meant that no one was just passing through anymore – only tourists on their way to Cradle Mountain...

The artist we approached at the time did his first painting on a paint-now-pay-later basis. There is a rich history here. The way we managed to get through without having too many complaints about it was to draw on that history.

CRADLE MOUNTAIN BEAUTY (MURAL)

Cradle Mountain is as famous for its moody, unpredictable weather as it is for its beauty. We can see it in all its temperamental glory in this grand vista spread out in front of us – sunshine and clear skies on the left ... dark, menacing clouds on the right. Teresa Bentley, the local high school art teacher, particularly relates to this mural.

I wish I could paint Cradle Mountain Beauty as beautifully as John Lendis has. It's just alive. It has that I suppose the wonderful wilderness of Tasmania where you want to be in it but it's setting out to kill you at any instant. It's ominous, it's threatening, powerful, you can't help but want to be there, and yet you're terrified in the next breath.

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SMITHY AT WORK (MURAL)

This mural pays tribute to Tom King. Tom King moved to Sheffield as a young man, where he became the local blacksmith. Despite having only a pitiful three weeks of formal schooling, he went on to become an influential man in town, as Teresa Bentley explains.

He was a self-educated man, he taught himself lots of skills and he was one of the first aldermen elected to the Kentish Council - that was in 1908. In the mural he is actually sitting with his nephew Ralph Young. Ralph was struck by polio when he was young, and Tom King actually designed a pair of calipers to put on his legs so he could walk. He was probably one of the first people in the world to actually design calipers for someone with polio.

THE POST OFFICE TREE (MURAL)

Australia Post delivered mail as far as Daisy Dell, and for those who lived beyond, they dropped off letters in a hollow tree stump. This became a meeting point, where locals would gather, gossip a little, exchange the odd yarn, and of course sit down to read their mail. The artist uses some of the architectural elements of the building and blends them into her picture – like some of the downpipes become trees.

You didn't have much choice, you sort of had to include windows a – whatever got in your way. You had to move over and create it as part of the mural. And I think that's part of the fun of it. Not having a perfect wall. I do like painting on brick because its got that movement and character at and where there are obstacles and windows and chimneys and all sorts of things, that's part of the creativity of it.

MOUNT ROLAND (MURAL)

Mount Roland is a beacon. A mainstay. A rock. It's an integral part of the fabric that makes up this Kentish community, and it means a lot of things to a lot of different people.

It sits there; it's a backdrop to every area of the town. Its moods are incredible. It will turn from red - it will be like Ayers Rock - it can be covered in snow, it can be soft, it can be right in your face and clear cut against the skyline, it can be faded and misty, it can be covered in low cloud and not showing at all. It brings a mood over the town.

The impact is tremendous, especially when you're coming up from Devonport and you get out to the little town of Barrington there is this fantastic mountain road in front of you, telling you all sorts of stuff.

In one sense it is like a work of art. You can stand in front of it in and has an enormous effect. It has this tremendous effect on people.

Mount Roland is a magnetic icon. It has majestic beauty, and it's awe-inspiring and it gets right to your soul.

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MISSED OPPORTUNITY (MURAL)

JOHN DYER

This mural we're standing in front of was painted in 1990. It's called 'The Missed Opportunity'.

This the story of my store and the story that happened back in 1926. The connection is that Mr G. J. Coles had his store across the river in a town called Wilmot, and in 1926 Mr G. J. Coles came along to my great-grandparents Jessie and Nelly Slater, and he tried to persuade them to buy into and invest some money into a new shop that his sons were setting up in Melbourne called Coles Variety Store.

On the left here is my grandmother, who was about 16 or 17 years of age at that particular time. Mr G. J. Coles is sitting on the bentwood stool here, and behind the counter is my great-grandparents and Jessie and Nelly Slater. Over here on the right is my great uncle Frank Slater.

My grandparents could not be persuaded to invest some money. They tell me that they had recently lost money on some deal or something like that, and so we as a family missed out on being original shareholders in the Coles-Myer Corporation.

We got the old hob-nail Blundstone boots on the front here. We've got the Old Flying Fox change dispenser going through the back of the store up there. And a very old sign up in the corner which old people of the community can remember of a bulldog called Top Dog menswear. It was a mean-looking bull dog which people's still come in and see if it's still hanging up over the top of the door.

If you peek through the front door, you will see not very much has changed since 1926. The flying fox is still there - only now alongside the clothes on the shelves, you will find a sprinkling of souvenirs. Coles, on the other hand, went on to become one of Australia's largest retailers with more than 2,900 stores throughout Australia and New Zealand.

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