

# THE *SARATON* THEATRE



*The Daily Examiner*

**GRAND OLD BUILDING RETURNED TO FORMER GLORY**

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# LIGHTS, CAMERAS

Ahead of its grand reopening on November 23, we look back at

By IAN THOMSON

**T**HROW yourself back to 1926.

Joan Sutherland (the late opera diva Dame Joan) is born. So too is Jack Brabham (later knighted for his motor racing exploits).

South Sydney Rabbitohs defeat University to win the NSW Rugby League premiership, a horse called Spearfelt lands a colossal betting plunge to win one of the most controversial Melbourne Cups on record, and back in the Clarence Valley, Cyllene Laddie, ridden by T Farthing, takes the Grafton Cup.

The cup carnival aside, Grafton was at the centre of attention as Mayor WT Robinson officially raised the curtain on the new Saraton Theatre on July 17.

Alderman Robinson told an excited crowd at the opening that Notaras family members were to be applauded for providing the entertainment centre.

He said the occasion only went to show there were at least some men in the district who appreciated its value and were prepared to put in all they could to make Graf-



School children line up for the opening of the Saraton Theatre in 1926.



I hope it will be an example to many others who were reluctant to spend their money on progressive ventures to make this part of the state more attractive from the point of view of up-to-date institutions

ton a better place in which to live.

"I hope it will be an example to many others who were reluctant to spend their money on progressive ventures to make this part of the



Paint contractor Bruce Bowling puts an extra coat on the facade of the Saraton Theatre ceiling. Work on the heritage building is continuing.

state more attractive from the point of view of up-to-date institutions," the mayor said.

Big screens everywhere were showing enthralling movies featuring the Hollywood stars of the time – including the swashbuckling Douglas Fairbanks, the sultry Greta Garbo, heart-throb Rudolph Valentino and the sweet Mary Pickford.

For a time in the '30s fire damage brought the curtain down on the screening of

movies. Instead, the Saraton was home to dances, concerts and social functions.

The Notaras family bit the bullet in 1940 and had the interior completely remodelled to produce what was described at the time as "an ultra-modern luxury theatre on the lines of the metropolitan picture shows".

The fact World War II had broken out just 10 months before was not lost on Country Party founder and briefly

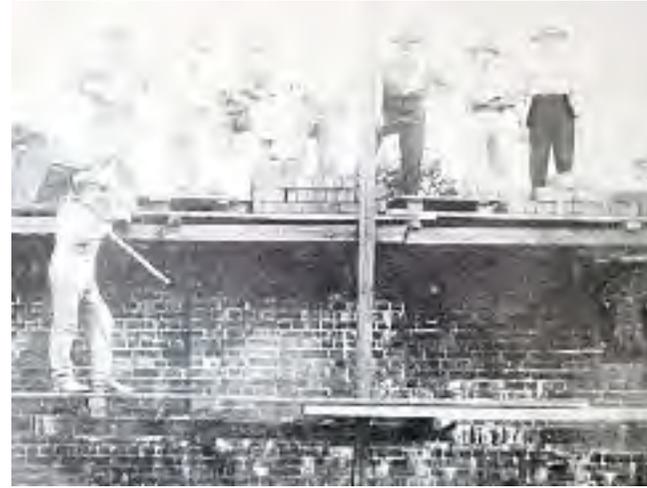


# & PLENTY OF ACTION

the Saraton Theatre's history and the special place it holds in our hearts



The Saraton Theatre in 1939.



Workers stand on the original brickwork of the Saraton Theatre in 1926.



One of the new cinemas under construction at the Saraton Theatre complex.



Builder Robert Wilson works on the newly-laid concrete slab for the additional theatres at the rear of the Saraton site.

Prime Minister, Sir Earle Christmas Grafton Page, who had the job of opening the magnificent new cinema complex.

He emphasised the importance of providing entertainment in times of conflict, saying one of the three princi-

ples of winning wars was to keep up the spirit of the people.

"Men and women are better able to work hard and continuously if they are entertained," he said. "I am sure that in these times we will think clearly, work better,

plan straighter if we mix work with amusement, and therefore I am glad to open this place of entertainment."

Sir Earle Page's comments, made the day before the Battle of Britain began, flew in the face of calls by patriotic conservatives to close

down theatres and cinemas, claiming they did not contribute to the war effort.

Records show Grafton and South Grafton had, at some period, at least seven theatres that were being individually used for the showing of movies.

According to the Heritage Council, only the Saraton Theatre remains as representative and symbolic of a time when attending a picture theatre was the principal passive recreational activity of the general population.

# LABOUR OF LOVE DONE

Bill wanted to get it right “

By IAN THOMSON

Hammering 9800 nails into the tallowwood floors and installing 40 kilometres of electrical wiring was all part of the job for Grafton builder Bill Norton and his team of sub-contractors during the painstaking restoration of the Saraton Theatre.

It was, as they say, a labour of love.

Angelo and Spiro Notaras knew exactly what they wanted.

Norton was given his riding instructions as building supervisor and work began in March 2008.

There's no doubt it was a challenge, but I love a challenge. It was also very rewarding.

– Bill Norton

Two and a half years later, the finished product was unveiled and the champagne corks were popping.

The Saraton, Grafton's grand old matriarch of entertainment at 95 Prince Street, had undergone a \$6 million facelift and was back in show business.

"It was a demanding and challenging job," Norton says.

"The Notaras brothers are sticklers for detail. It was my last job before retiring after 47 years in the game, so I wanted to get it right.

"I think the biggest challenge was restoration work on the main theatre's ceiling. It's eight metres high, so we had to call in cherry-pickers to reach it."

Getting the right materials

to work with wasn't really a problem for him.

His mate of 45 years, Spiro Notaras, looked after that through his timber mill in South Grafton.

"It was a very interesting job," Norton reflects.

"There's no doubt it was a challenge, but I love a challenge. It was also very rewarding because Spiro and Angelo were happy, the Heritage Council architect was happy and Lloyd (Bill's assistant Lloyd See) and I were happy.

"I've been involved in many projects spanning close to half a century, but the Saraton restoration and refurbishment

**TOP JOB: Bill Norton is proud of his work in returning the Saraton to its former glory.**

Picture: ADAM HOURIGAN

is at the top of the list as far as I'm concerned."

Norton said that as far as the public was concerned, there were no negative comments.

"Many people told me they were impressed with the job and many others said they couldn't wait for the Saraton to re-open," he said. "I didn't hear any grumbling. I'm happy and proud to have been associated with the project."



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# ALL IN THE FAMILY

By **KATE MATTHEWS**

**T**HE Notaras' story is one of good fortune gained through perseverance and imagination.

Now a well-known name in the Clarence Valley, their Australian story began when Lambrinos Notaras was a young father of five, living on the island of Kythera in Greece.

When a letter arrived from Sydney in 1895 with the offer of work and accommodation for any young Kytherian man willing to make his way to Australia, by chance it fell into the hands of Lambrinos who then embraced the opportunity.

Leaving his family behind, Lambrinos arrived in Sydney in 1900 and gained experience working in a restaurant. Before making his way to Grafton (in 1903) he made arrangements for two of his sons, Ioannis (Jack) and Anthony (Tony) to join him and together they opened a cafe on Prince Street, known as The

Marble Bar in 1909, which remained a successful enterprise until it finally sold in 1956.

In 1912, Lambrinos returned to his homeland, never to return to Australia and leaving behind his sons to continue running two successful businesses.

The brothers formed a partnership which prospered and in 1925 they made the decision to commission and build a theatre which would quickly become the social hub of the region.

First opening in 1926, the Saraton is a fine legacy for their efforts and vision.

Angelo Notaras, one of Lambrinos' many grandchildren, is all too aware of the privileges he and his family enjoyed thanks to his grandfather's decision to immigrate to Australia.

"We were very lucky people," he said, while recounting his childhood in Grafton and the opportunities he had inherited as a result of his family's hard work and choices.

"We had a most wonderful life.

Amazing. My twin brother Mitchell and I lived a Mark Twain existence growing up on the Clarence River. We had a lot of fun."

Angelo remembers his father and uncle as both hard-working and fair.

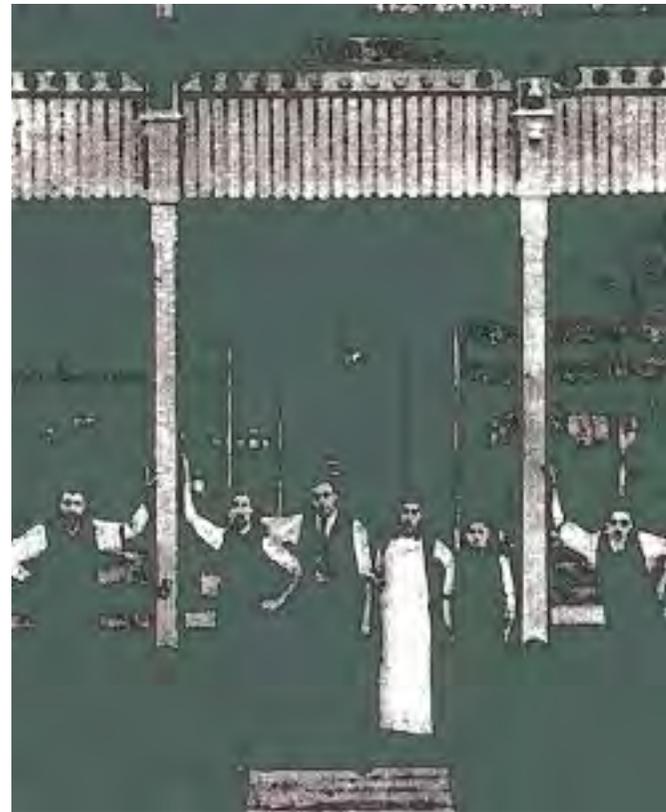
"They always taught us to consider other people's point of view," he said. "They were very civic minded and involved with the community and they were both renowned for fishing; they knew every spot between Iluka and Woolgoolga."

Both men were also well known as extremely good bowlers, each winning state titles.

"As businessmen, they were in partnership for more than 50 years," he said, adding that this family tradition has been continued in his own generation.

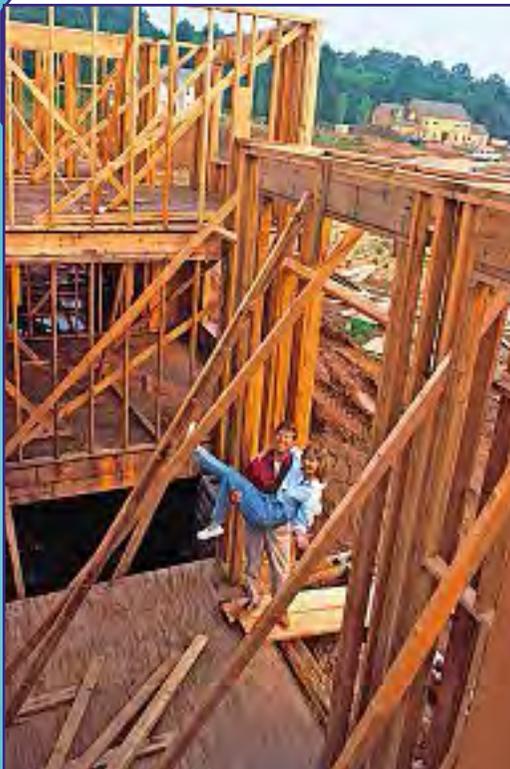
"I have worked with my brother John for more than 50 years, similarly Spiro with his late brother Brinos."

Clearly, three family partnerships stood the test of time.



This was a well-used reproduced photo in many ethnic books circa 1911-12, with Anthony on the far right, Jack centre (tallest) and grandfather Lambrinos on the far left. The photograph was taken in front of the Marble Bar, 87 Prince Street, Grafton.

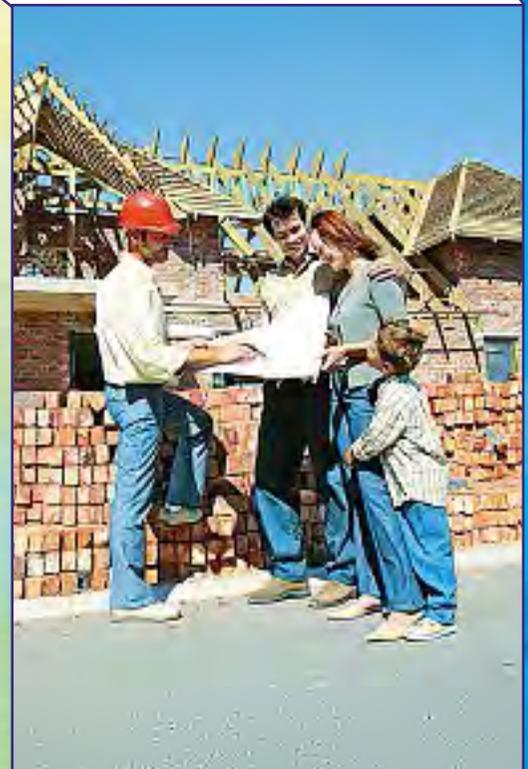
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## DAWN OF A NEW ERA FOR

By **KATE MATTHEWS**

If the walls could talk, as they say, what tales they might tell.

More than just another historic building, the Saraton Theatre has been at the heart of Grafton's social scene for more than 84 years.

Providing the ideal location for people of all ages to meet and be entertained, the much-loved Saraton has given generations of Graftonians count-

less memories, playing host to numerous dances and thousands of movies from across Australia and around the world.

Surviving three fires, the Great Depression, the introduction of television and home video, floods and even a close brush with demolition, the now lovingly restored art deco majestic theatre on Grafton's Prince Street is once again enjoying a new lease on life.

When construction started in 1925,

commissioned by two young Greek-born immigrant brothers Ioannis (Jack) and Anthony (Tony) Notaras, times were very different.

"There were no cranes available so they used the same technology as building the 2500-year-old Parthenon in Athens," Angelo Notaras, son of Anthony and a director of the Notaras business, said.

"Lifting and moving the huge steel beams in those days was a hell of a job," he said, referring to images contained within the family's photo collection.

However, this was just one of the many logistical problems facing the construction workers, who laboured together in primitive conditions under the leadership of local builder Mr Walters and his team, which included the Notaras brothers who contributed their own blood, sweat and tears to the project.

Designed by Lismore architect FJ Board for the Notaras family, the original building was truly a labour of love.

In the year preceding the Saraton's opening in 1926, some of the engineering challenges included both sourcing and transporting materials from as far away as Sydney before finally moving them into position on site.

But despite the many challenges, the Saraton was completed and opened officially by Mayor Ald WT Robinson, on July 17, 1926, and has remained under the ownership of the Notaras family ever since.

On its opening night, a special screening of the Notaras brothers' own 12-minute silent movie *Grafton at Work and Play* was screened, much to the

delight of the audience, who no doubt enjoyed watching themselves on the big screen.

The original lessee and operator was TJ Dorgan Pty Ltd, who organised a film circuit of Far North Coast cinemas, also managing the Regent Theatre at Murwillumbah; Roxy Theatre at Kyogle; Fitzroy Open Air at Coffs Harbour; and the Star Court Theatre, Lismore.

Only seven years later, on August 20, 1932, the Saraton experienced the first of three fires.

Causing damage to the screen, stage and curtains, roof rafters, baffle board and flooring, the fire closed the cinema for the next eight years; however occasional dances, concerts and other social functions were still held in the theatre.

By 1940, the Saraton was renovated and remodelled internally by Queensland theatre architect George Rae, however the cinema was once again damaged by fire on May 10, 1944, destroying the curtain and screen but the cinema was back in operation by June of the same year.

On June 24, 1950, Grafton was flooded and the Saraton was inundated.

Long-time projectionist Allan Jackson recorded the event with a series of photographs, taken as the waters were rising, too fast for the seating to be removed. Consequently, the lower level seating was completely covered by floodwater.

TJ Dorgan continued running the theatre until the early 1960s, when North Coast Theatres and Drive-Ins took over.

The Saraton was closed in the 1970s and it was a number of years before

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# THE SARATON



**ABOVE LEFT:** Construction of Saraton circa 1925. There weren't any cranes available so they used the same technology as building the 2500-year-old Parthenon in Athens. Two large posts acted as an A-frame crane to lift the large 18m (54ft) main balcony girder. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Anthony centre, Jack right and a cousin, Emmanuel, on the left, celebrating Australia Day circa 1912.

Irene Notaras, daughter of Anthony Notaras, undertook extensive renovations before reopening the theatre on December 10, 1982.  
Renamed the Saraton Entertainment

Centre, the vision of the time was to provide the region with "...facilities as good as any to be found in the city," Irene Notaras said in a *Daily Examiner* feature from December 9, 1982.

Yet another fire threatened the future of the theatre in 1989, when on January 13 a fire destroyed the projection box. An employee was charged with the offence and the cinema reopened

around four weeks later. During the '80s and '90s, more and more Australians stayed home to enjoy

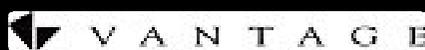
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# SARATON THEATRE

## A CITY ICON

### From Page 7

movies in the comfort of their living rooms and cinemas across the country began to lose favour and gradually close.

More recently, development and demolition proposals have threatened the Saraton Theatre. By 1999, NSW country towns had only 13 picture theatres still operating in recognisable condition out of the 385 that were operating in 1951. The Saraton is now only one of two remaining in private hands. The remainder have been taken over by local councils.

In April of that year, the site of the theatre was proposed for Grafton Shoppingworld's car park.

However, by chance, the historic theatre's plight was recognised by the then chair of the NSW Heritage Council, Hazel Hawke, and an interim conservation order was almost immediately put in place, saving the theatre from being demolished.

Now faced with huge costs to restore the ageing building, the

Notaras brothers, led by Angelo and Spiro Notaras, were forced to reconsider the future of the building.

Deciding to restore the Saraton to its former glory became the imperative and early 2008 work began on recreating the theatre with a great attention to detail.

Now fully equipped with state-of-the-art technology and three cinemas, including a fully restored main theatre complete with dress circle, the Saraton has been open for business since September 2 this year; however the official opening will be held on Tuesday, November 23.

The Saraton Theatre is of State significance as a rare surviving example of a two-level cinema, which is still operating and has been identified as a category one item in the NSW Heritage Office's Movie Theatre Register for NSW 1896-1996, being included within the Royal Australian Institute of Architects' Register of Buildings of 20th Century Significance.



Lambrinos Notaras Café, 87 Prince Street, Grafton. The name was later changed to Marble Bar Café. In the centre is Tony and at left is Jack. The original shop front from 1903 stayed intact until about 1955-60.

## "Congratulations!"

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*"Congratulations to the Notaras family and thank you for your faith and huge financial investment in Grafton and the Clarence Valley."*



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*THE DOUGHERTY FAMILY would like to acknowledge and highly commend, the drive & enthusiasm the Notaras family have shown in recreating the Saraton Theatre to it's former glory.*

*What an enormous community asset to the Clarence Valley.*

*Congratulations*

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# A DELECTABLE EXPERIENCE

New boutique de fleuriste opens shop in renovated Saraton complex

By **BRYONY TRIGGS**

**T**HE name alone makes your mouth water – but step inside Prince Street's newest shop, French Jellies, and all of your senses will be in for a treat.

You'll see fresh floral blooms sourced from Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne; smell a London range of boutique perfumes; and touch stunning stationery made in New York.

Add unique Dutch-made jewellery pieces and gorgeous gifts for children and you have a store unlike anything seen in Grafton before.

The French Jellies concept was conceived by owners and



business partners Bree Hiatt and Celeste Masters.

The women, both in their 30s with young families, each come from their own creative background. Celeste is a florist,

Bree a jewellery and object designer.

"We met as friends and we wanted to do something creative with our backgrounds that was family-friendly," Bree said.

A year ago the pair started throwing ideas around "seriously" and once they found out about the Saraton Theatre shop space, they knew it was the start of all they had

**OOH LA LA: French Jellies owners Bree Hiatt and Celeste Masters at their new Prince Street shop.**

dreamed of.

"We knew that (the Saraton) was the only place for it and French Jellies was born," Bree said. "We've developed a concept around what we felt Grafton would love."

Each item in the store has been hand-picked by Bree and Celeste and everything is stocked in small numbers, such as the five French silk tutus for little girls and the handmade jewellery range.

In addition, French Jellies will be providing a personal design and wedding service, with Bree and Celeste committed to offering "old-fashioned service".

■ French Jellies opens on Friday at 101 Prince Street, Grafton. Phone 6643 3101 or email [shop@frenchjellies.com.au](mailto:shop@frenchjellies.com.au).

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# SUCCESS STORY

## Heritage Office says restoration project worked well

By DAVID BANCROFT

THE NSW Heritage Office will hold up the redevelopment of the Saraton Theatre as an example of a restoration project that worked well.

NSW Planning Heritage Branch director Petula Samios said the Saraton Theatre showed what could be achieved when the Heritage Office, the developers (in this case the Notaras family), local council and the community had a common goal.

She said because of the co-operation, there were few hiccups along the way, but that did not mean things were always easy.

Often the safety requirements of an old building did not meet the standards required under the Building Code of Australia, particularly for fire safety.

Where the required fire safety

standards clashed with heritage needs, matters were referred to the Fire Access Services Advisory Committee to develop alternative solutions.

Heritage officer Gary Estcourt said final Heritage Office approval had only been granted in 2006, and since then there had been only minor modifications.

He said that even deciding on an appropriate colour scheme for the redevelopment of an old building could cause difficulties.

"With the Saraton, Angelo and Spiro (Notaras) had a designer working on the interiors," he said.

"She was great and gave us versions of the colours they were thinking of using.

"It can be difficult."

He said similar issues sometimes arose with lighting, as lighting in old buildings often did not meet modern standards.

"With the Saraton, the owners



did really well in retaining what they could while incorporating brand new modern lights to meet the current building codes," he said.

"The sound system was slightly different.

"They had to be updated to meet modern requirements. The speakers there are working well in that they ended up being inconspicuous while providing the level of quality required for a modern theatre."



One of the newly installed heritage style lights at the Saraton Theatre.

# The Saraton

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Rotary Club of Grafton Midday fundraiser film night program

## STAGE SHARED ON RE-OPENING NIGHT

**T**O celebrate the grand re-opening of the newly refurbished Saraton Theatre, and two new cinemas, the Rotary Club of Grafton Midday and the Rotary Club of Grafton are delighted to present a special preview of the feature film *Fair Game* and a silent movie, *Grafton at Work and Play* (1926) on Tuesday, November 23.

Proceeds from the night will go to assist the Westpac Lifesaver Helicopter and Life Education Australia.

The function will start at 7pm, with tickets (\$20) available now from: Blooms the Chemist, Shoppingworld; Harvey's Jewellers, Prince Street; Discount Pharmacy, Grafton Mall; Home Hardware, Maclean, and; Home Hardware, Yamba.

Both club presidents thank Spiro and Angelo Notaras for



**Spiro and Angelo Notaras sit in the new seats in the main Saraton theatre.**

Photo: ADAM HOURIGAN

the invitation to assist with the re-opening of the Saraton, an outstanding opportunity to celebrate the return of the much-improved theatre to the

city of Grafton and the surrounding districts while raising funds for Life Education Inc and the Westpac Helicopter Service.

### PROGRAM

6.30 pm **Music** by *The Arcadians Ensemble*

7pm **Call to Order** by master of ceremonies, David Morgan

**National Anthem**

performed by Caitlin Leek, South Grafton High School student

**Speaker** A representative from the Heritage Council of NSW

**Speaker** Dr Mitchell Notaras

**Speaker** Angelo Notaras  
**Screening** *Grafton at Work and Play* (1926) 12 mins  
Music performed by String Quartet: William Tell Overture

**Speaker** Spiro Notaras

**Speaker** Mayor Richie Williamson

**Feature Film** *Fair Game*

## HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU, GRAFTON

Silent film reprised for re-opening

**O**N opening night in 1926, the Saraton Theatre screened a 12-minute silent film titled *Grafton at Work and Play* and on November 23, the film will be shown again to the community as part of the official re-opening program.

The original film was commissioned by the Notaras brothers, Jack and Anthony, especially for their special event and as the people of Grafton watched themselves on the big screen, there's no doubt it was a huge hit causing much hilarity among the audience.

Being a unique record of the times, *Grafton at Work and Play* provides a wonderful insight into the city and its people in the early years of last century.

Featuring the Grafton streetscape, the film highlights local schools and businesses as well as the river crossing of a steam train by barge.

## SPY THRILLER BASED ON A TRUE STORY

Aussie actress Naomi Watts plays challenging role of CIA operative

**A**SUSPENSE-FILLED glimpse into the dark corridors of political power, *Fair Game* is a riveting action-thriller based on the autobiography of real-life undercover CIA operative Valerie Plame (Naomi Watts), whose career was destroyed and marriage strained to its limits when her covert identity was exposed by a politically motivated press leak.

As a covert officer in the CIA's Counter-Proliferation Division, Valerie leads an investigation into the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Valerie's husband, diplomat Joe Wilson (Sean Penn), is drawn into the investigation to substantiate an alleged



sale of enriched uranium from Niger. However, when the administration ignores his findings and uses the issue to support the call to war, Joe writes a New York

Times editorial outlining his conclusions and ignites a firestorm of controversy.

"Contains the intensity and suspense of *The Bourne Identity*." – USA Today

"Naomi Watts and Sean Penn are superb." – New York Post

"A film with great talent, finesse and insight." – Huffington Post



The Arcadian Ensemble, who are playing at the grand opening of the Saraton Theatre on Tuesday 23rd November are from left to right Tanja Ackerman (cello), Lachlan Wray (cello), Matt Staehelin (viola), Sarah Westman (violin), Helen Hearnshaw (flute), Deborah Wray (violin).

# PROUD TO BE A ROTARIAN

Two clubs work together to make our community a better place

**G**RAFTON'S two Rotary Clubs undertake a number of activities and events to help fund a variety of programs, often coming together to share workloads while improving outcomes for such projects as:

- Youth Exchange and other youth programs;
- the Rotary bowel cancer screening program;
- the 2010 Rotary District 9640 Conference in Grafton, attracting more than 500 Rotarians to the city, and;
- the RYDA program, aimed at saving young lives by providing road safety information.

## THE ROTARY CLUB OF GRAFTON

The Rotary Club of Grafton was formed in 1932 and some of its major community activities have spanned many of the years since.

Some of the community organisations to which the club has granted funding include the Grafton Rural Fire Brigade, the Westpac Rescue Helicopter, Grafton Primary School photography class, the South Grafton High

School breakfast program and the Thomas Graham appeal.

The annual Rotary golf day takes place in August and always attracts a large field of very talented (and some slightly less talented) golfers. The emphasis is on fun.

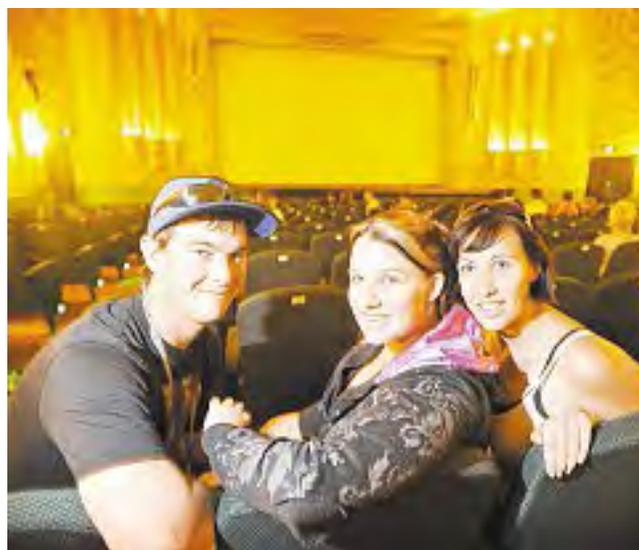
In addition, the club participates in the running of the Sam Dougherty Memorial Golf Day, which also benefits Ronald McDonald House, Cowper Children's Home and North Rocks Royal Institutes for Deaf and Blind Children.

The club has resumed its annual Antiques and Collectables Fair, held at the beginning of the Jacaranda Festival. This year the fair raised more than \$6000.

A very successful trivia night was held earlier in the year and looks set to become a regular event.

Other fundraisers have included a sausage sizzle run in conjunction with a CountryLink open day at the Grafton Railway station; provision of marshalling services for the annual Bridge to Bridge ski race, and; theatre nights, to name a few.

The Rotary Club of Grafton meets on Monday evenings at the South Grafton Ex-Service-



Arron Larkin, Kira Johnstone and Lauren Thomas, of Grafton, get ready to enjoy one of the first movies shown at the redeveloped Saraton Theatre, *Tomorrow When the War Began*.

men's Club.

The two main areas of activity the Rotary Club of Grafton supports are local community programs and youth programs.

These include the School Community Service awards, recognising outstanding contributions made by local high school students and the Clarence Valley Police Officer of the Year awards, recognising police officers who go

above and beyond the call of duty to improve the lives of local residents.

## THE ROTARY CLUB OF GRAFTON MIDDAY INC

The Rotary Club of Grafton Midday meets at 1pm every Wednesday.

Community programs and fundraising projects include:

- Clarence Valley Biggest Loser weight-loss competition;
  - Melbourne Cup lucky dip boxed trifecta with proceeds to Disaster Aid Australia;
  - Infant Cannulation Arm for Grafton Base Hospital staff training;
  - special reclining chairs for the mothers in the maternity section of GBH;
  - Australia Day barbecue;
  - Pedals for Preschools barbecue;
  - Bunnings barbecues;
  - People to People bush dance at the TAFE, a joint fundraiser with the Grafton Basketball Association, and;
  - Frank Glasson Memorial Scholarships for local university students in need.
- Club presidents agree the worthwhile achievements, for the benefit of the local and worldwide community, together with each club's social program make all club members proud to be a Rotarian. Visitors are welcome to attend Rotary Club meetings by contacting a club member or calling Brian Lane on 0427 813 305.



Former Saraton projectionist Allan Jackson outside the Saraton Theatre in 2001. Below, Rod Jackson with Saraton memorabilia.



# THE FACES BEHIND THE SILVER SCREEN

By **DOMINIC ZIETSCH**

**T**HE late Allan Jackson, a former projectionist, usher, courier and repairman of the Saraton Theatre would've been pretty pleased with how the iconic theatre has been restored according to his son, Rod Jackson.

As it comes time for the grand re-opening of the iconic theatre, it's important to look back on some of the personalities who have shaped and driven the theatre over the years.

Allan was one such personality.

According to Rod, Allan's love affair with cinema began in the late 1920s when he began cleaning seats at the Saraton and Garden theatres under the supervision of his father Bill, who also worked there. His pay was being able to see the evening movie.

However, Allan was soon promoted to paid, part-time work, ushering, maintenance, ferrying film reels between the nearby theatres and even

worked as a projectionist.

"He was involved in almost every aspect of the theatre, anything that needed doing, he was there," Rod said.

"All his family were involved in the theatre one way or another, his sisters, everybody from the Jacksons including myself worked there at some stage."

Allan worked at the Saraton during the golden age of cinema, an exciting time when the theatre was the place to be seen on a Saturday night.

"It was a social meeting place; people actually got dressed up to go there," Rod said. "When Dad worked there, suits were worn to the cinema, even when he was a projectionist and an usher, he still wore a suit, sold tickets at the door, collected tickets at the door, you wore a suit regardless of the weather."

However, work at the Saraton was just one part of Allan's life. He also served in World War II and worked as a truck driver for the Zietsch



Bros Cordial Company.

However, Rod said his father's heart was always with the cinema and he himself fondly recalls going in to help his dad at the theatre.

"I sort of followed in his footsteps I suppose, I spent a lot of time with him there, we used to go to the theatre and I used to help him with the projectors – not that you were really supposed to – and sweeping out after matinees," he recalled.

Rod also followed in his father's footsteps as far as collecting memorabilia, with the pair gathering an impressive collection of newspaper clippings, advertising slides and old movie posters, many

of which are reproduced throughout this magazine.

Allan's interest in cinema also extended beyond his work and Rod said he was a keen film buff, loving westerns and war movies, especially those featuring John Wayne.

He also developed a keen interest in film projectors, with Rod fondly recalling his father constructing a 35mm projector out of various parts.

"He was very proud that he got the thing going because he'd used a washing machine motor to run it; getting the right speed was hard, but he still got it working," he said.

Sadly, Allan passed away earlier this year, just months before the theatre was again

screening movies, but Rod thinks he would've been proud of the end result.

"It's sad he didn't see it open again; he was hanging out for it, he used to say he'd love to see the Saraton open again refurbished, not lost," Rod said.

"Even as his memory was not long before he passed away, he was still very keen to see it back to its original glory."

So when the lights dim and that film flickers to life at the opening, take a second to remember people like Allan and the other dedicated employees both former and present who have made the Saraton Theatre what it is today.

# Grafton Sheetmetal

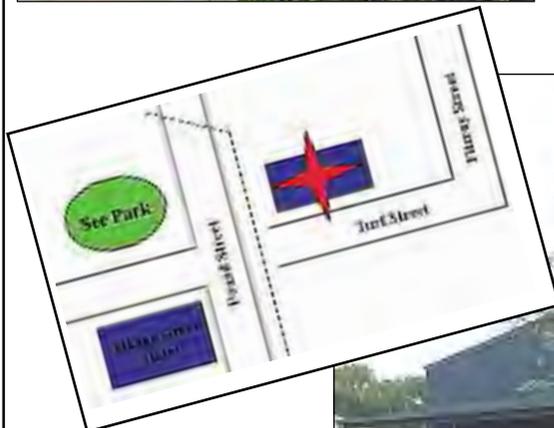
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# FUTURE BRIGHT FOR SARATON

Silver screen stars add glitz and glamour to our everyday lives

By IAN THOMSON

**T**HE future of the Saraton Theatre appears as bright as the long list of stars appearing on its screens.

In just a few days from now, the Federal Government is expected to announce its decision on an application for a \$1 million grant to complete work on the main stage, which is gearing up for live shows ranging from single acts to major productions.

Angelo Notaras said \$500,000 was spent to accommodate the future extension of the stage. That work includes an \$80,000 roll-up/roll-down screen so the theatre can go from live shows to cinema at the touch of a button.

"Other work carried out includes the relocation of all electrical mains, two new

dressing rooms each side of the stage front, the refurbishment of the existing dressing rooms, the installation of 180 speakers, the 3.5 metre extension of the current stage, re-nailing and repairing the old stage floor and much, much more," he said.

"If the grant application is unsuccessful this time we will continue to apply or, if we are well supported by the public, we will raise the funds through the business."

He pointed out Tamworth Council recently spent \$1.6 million on stage equipment for the city's Capitol Theatre, which has just 400 seats. The Saraton can seat more than 1000 people.

Angelo travelled to several large cinemas overseas – including the Venice Opera House, which has undergone



All class. The refurbished Saraton Theatre in all its magnificence.

an \$800 million refurbishment – and realised the Saraton was unique and special.

"Our consortium saw we had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do something really worthwhile for the community,

and to accomplish the dream of our fathers to have an entertainment centre for the Clarence Valley," he said.

"There are only two heritage-listed, privately owned cinemas in NSW. The Saraton

is the largest and oldest. The project has been driven by community usage – not personal gain – and the satisfaction of successfully completing a challenge that was considered economically impossible."

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*Andrew & Jan Fletcher & Staff would like to congratulate Angelo & Spiros Notaras & Notaras Bros Entertainment P/L for the renovation of the historic Saraton Theatre and construction of the two new state-of-the-art smaller cinemas. Well done "boys". We are proud and pleased to have been involved with this project and have enjoyed working with that other "boy", builder Bill Norton.*

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Supervisor Johanne Kubik and front of house operator Brad Carter at the Saraton Theatre.



Saraton Theatre manager Robbie Seymour in the newly redeveloped main cinema at the Saraton Theatre.

# STAFF ARE VITAL TO SUCCESS

## Saraton team faces challenging career at one of world's best facilities

**A** BUSINESS is only as good as its staff, and at the Saraton Theatre, owners Spiro and Angelo Notaras and theatre manager Robbie Seymour could not be happier with the team they are working with.

The theatre currently employs 15 locals, mainly on a

casual basis, who are trained to handle anything the theatre can throw at them.

"We are cooks, projectionists, glass cleaners, theatre cleaners, security guards and money handlers. But we wouldn't change it. No two days are the same," supervisor Johanne Kubik said.

From the Notaras family's point of view, Spiro says they are very happy with the current team.

"When you employ people to take care of something you are passionate about, you put a lot of trust in them. Angelo and I see the staff as good, reliable and friendly," Spiro

said.

Theatre manager, Robbie Seymour has been working with the Saraton for about 10 years and says that he aims to train professional and friendly staff who genuinely care about customer satisfaction.

"We are all working as a

team and we are doing it quite successfully. I am proud to be giving local people who have never worked in the industry before the chance to learn about it and see what it is all about in one of the best facilities in the world," he said.

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# A DIGITAL REVOLUTION

Theatre gains the digital edge by investing in state-of-the-art cinema technology

By **TIM HOWARD**

**T**HE Saraton Theatre is at the leading edge of cinema technology with the projection system it has installed for its three cinemas.

Suppliers Edge Digital Technologies have equipped the complex with three of the latest Christie projectors, capable of screening 3D images.

Edge's business manager Ben Wilson said the Saraton's owners, the Notaras family, had taken a direction considered unusual in regional cinemas.

"Most cinema complexes outside the Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth would install one digital projector and have the rest film," he said.

"The Saraton has opted for the latest and greatest with its all-digital technology."

Mr Wilson said the advent of 3D had also pushed the

digital revolution.

"You can do 3D with film, but you need three projectors and the frame rate is much slower," he said.

As well as superior 3D presentation, digital streamlines the distribution and management side of cinemas.

"When you realise a feature movie involves 13,000 feet (nearly 4000 metres) of film, distribution of movies has become much easier," Mr Wilson said.

Movies now arrive at the cinema on a computer hard drive and are downloaded into the complex's projection system.

A typical feature movie is made up of about 300 gigabytes of data, making online delivery not feasible – yet.

"The data is streamed at 250 megabytes a second," Mr Wilson said.

"Hence the clarity of the vision that you see on the screen."



**Matthew Simmons of ARVUS speaks of the first major innovation in theatre sound in almost three decades now in place at the Saraton.**

## SURROUNDED BY SOUND

By **TIM HOWARD**

**C**UTTING edge loudspeaker technology at the Saraton Theatre ensures its patrons get the most out of their cinema experience.

Theatre owners the Notaras family took a little bit of convincing, but when they signed on New Zealand-based firm Hypacoustic to put in its revolutionary loudspeaker system, they knew they were future proofing their investment.

Kiwi owner and director of the Hypacoustic, Matthew Simmons, said his system was the first major innovation in cinema loudspeakers in 28 years.

The key difference in creating the sound is doing away with the horns that have been the basis of cinema sound since 'talkies' became popular in the 1930s.

"The horns give cinema sound a harsh tone that can cause the audience to become fatigued by the continual assault on their ears," Mr Simmons said.

"Hypacoustic creates a natural sound that is designed to enhance what the audience is seeing on the screen.

"This, in effect, adds to the experience of the person watching the movie, enabling them to become totally engrossed in the movie."

This phenomenon is also good news for cinema owners, as patrons often feel fresh enough to take in a second movie because their



In those big action blockbusters ... the audience is taken right into the heart of the action.

ears have not been battered into submission by the sound system.

In the Saraton audiences have already noted how the sound comes through the floorboards, totally surrounding them.

"With the subwoofers bolted to the floor, the bass can make the whole building seem to tremble," Mr Simmons said.

"In those big action blockbusters with plenty of explosions and pulsating action sequences, the audience is taken right into the heart of the action."

The Saraton is one of the first Australian cinemas to take up the new technology, but it won't be the last.

Hypacoustic has gained a presence in Hollywood, giving the tiny firm the credibility to widen the niche it is creating

in the world of cinema sound.

"We're moving into cinemas in England, Europe and Russia," Mr Simmons said.

"We already have dozens of cinemas completed in Asia, in the next five years expect to see Hypacoustic in over 500 cinemas in India and China"

For a Kiwi from Christchurch who began his interest in sound equipment as a 12-year-old, Mr Simmons has come a long way.

"I got into business as a 12-year-old, repairing speakers after school for people," he said.

"My partner and wife Julie decided we should try to get into cinema sound in 2003 and gave ourselves 10 years to make it.

"We got into some small cinemas in New Zealand, but it was not until we installed Hypacoustic into some cinemas in Hollywood that we got the critical mass we needed."

One of the Saraton's owners, Spiro Notaras, said the family needed convincing to buy into the new system, which breaks with tradition another way by not playing the sound through the cinema screen.

"Once we sat down in the cinema and heard it, we were convinced that this was the system we had to have," he said.

"The other thing is that there is so much more we can do with it. We are able to build in new features with this system. We will always be able to keep improving it."



**Spiro and Angelo Notaras check out the picture from one of the Saraton's state-of-the-art Christie digital projectors.**

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# BIANCA'S BLOSSOMING BUSINESS



## Shop offers a 'different' style

**B**IANCA Burchall has established a little wonderland with her business Blossum & Co.

The bright and airy shop is part of the marvellous new Saraton complex in Prince Street, Grafton.

Blossum & Co opened its doors in February last year after Bianca graduated from university with a degree in business and tourism.

"I've always had an interest in fashion and I've wanted to have my own business as far back as I can remember; I just didn't think it would happen so quickly," she said.

Bianca was born in the Clarence Valley and grew up in Yamba.

She has now settled in Grafton with her partner.

"I knew I was going to settle in Grafton so I wanted to do something I enjoyed," she said.

"I was driving past this shop one day and I noticed it was empty.

"It had a sign in the window saying it was for lease and I thought, why not?"

"It was the perfect spot and I thought I'd be stupid to pass it up."

Bianca's philosophy with her shop was to bring different styles and brands of products

to Grafton

She said she wanted a place where shoppers could buy something "different" in an atmosphere they considered "a nice place to shop".

Blossum & Co sells a range of products including women's fashions, leather goods, quirky jewellery, hand-made pieces, body products, candles and artworks.

Bianca stocks the impressive Glasshouse candle range; a company that focuses on producing fragrances that are "unconventional".

The range consists of luxurious body creams and bars, scented candles and liquid soaps.

"They're a guaranteed winner when it comes to buying gifts for people – everyone loves them," Bianca said.

Blossum & Co is also about to stock a new range of Pratten leather goods.

The range includes luxe leather wallets, coin purses, belts and clutches.

"What I like about this brand is their attention to detail and that they use the highest quality," Bianca said.

"The company is also up-to-date with the latest fashion colours and their products are affordable."

**Bianca Burchall, of Blossum & Co.**

Photo: Adam Hourigan



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## RESTORING A GRAND THEATRE



ONE of the more pleasing aspects of the Saraton Theatre redevelopment for Mark Chard, of Grafton Sheetmetal, was that wherever possible, the Notaras family used local contractors and tradesmen.

Grafton Sheetmetal provided most of the metal fabrication used in the restoration of the grand old theatre and the development of the two smaller theatres.

It was work that, because of the nature of the development, was done in stages.

At times the company had four to five people working on Saraton-related projects and at other times, one or two.

"It was good for us because it ran over a bit of time," Mr Chard said.

The heritage issues that had been so important for some of the tradespeople working on the facility, posed

no problems in the metal fabrication.

Grafton Sheetmetal did all the air-conditioning ducts, all the vents and outlets, supplied all the flashings, ducting to the projection room, electrical covers, access ladders, stainless steel hand rails and a lot of the electrical duct covers.

They also manufactured all the box guttering, pot plant tubs and stainless steel benches.

Mr Chard said the Notaras family asked that the stainless steel hand rails be in keeping with the historic nature of the complex, but there had been no overriding heritage issues.

He said it was a big job but by no means the biggest they had undertaken.

A refit of the Grafton District Services Club's kitchen and bar had also been a big job.



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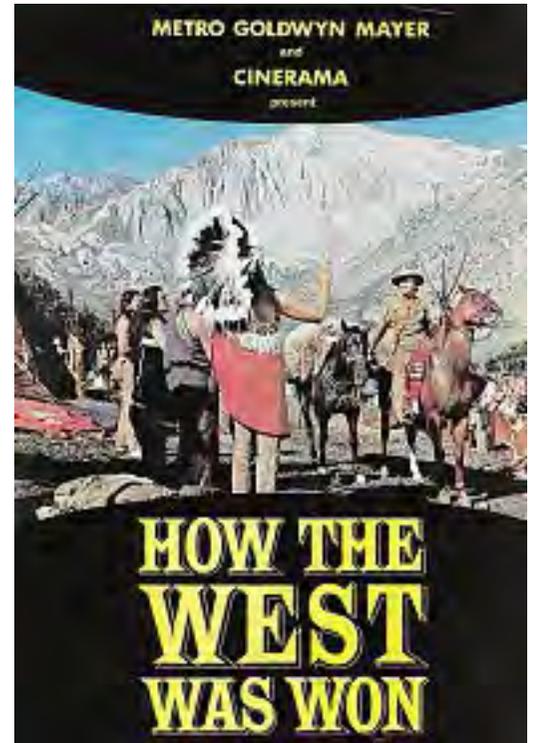
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**The Daily Examiner**  
THE VOICE OF THE CLARENCE VALLEY SINCE 1881

*The opening of the Saraton Theatre is a real milestone for the people in the Clarence Valley.*

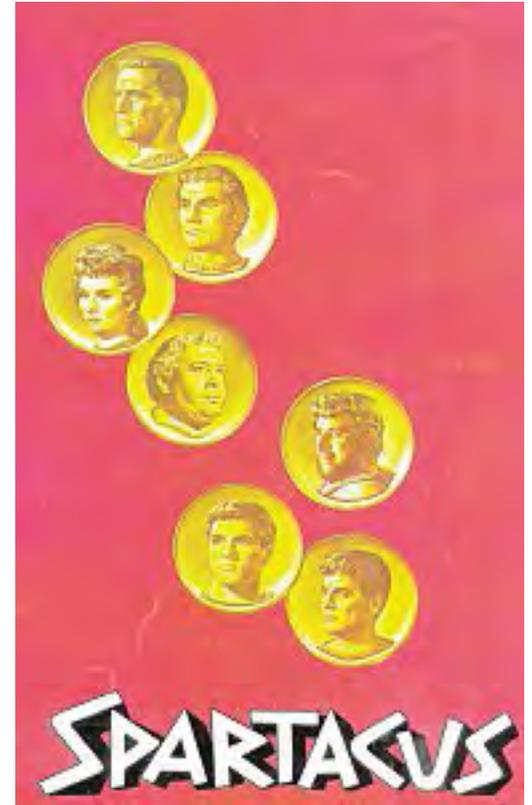
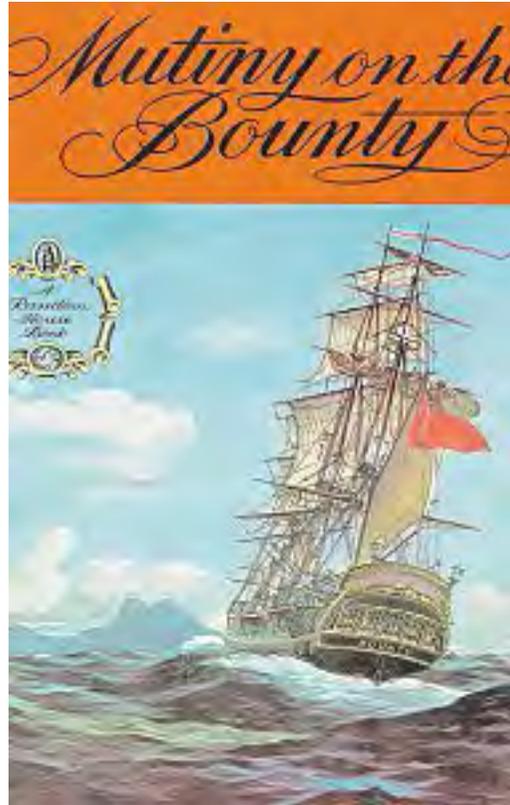
*Steeped in history and restored with all the respect of its founders, the Notaras Family has honoured the Clarence Valley combining old school charm with world class technology.*

*This majestic venue will continue the role that its founders intended, being a major part of the social fabric of the community.*

*We congratulate all those involved in the refurbishment of this local icon and its continued longevity into the future.*

Sincerely,  
*The Daily Examiner*

# TRACK A PATH THROUGH TIME



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