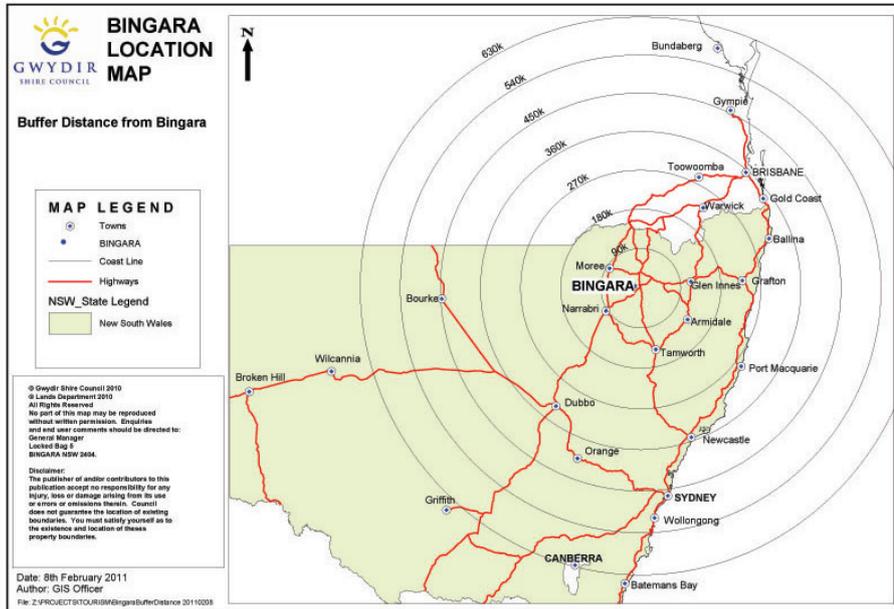


# Greek Roxy Museum completes the Roxy masterpiece



Bingara is located approximately 600kms north of Sydney and 500kms south of Brisbane in the New England Tablelands. It lies centrally in the New England North West region, between the major towns of Tamworth, Armidale, Inverell, Moree and Narrabri. Since 1999, first Bingara Shire Council and subsequently Gwydir Shire Council, have improved and expanded the Roxy 'complex'.

The Roxy Manager during the first decade was Sandy McNaughton. Her superior management skills, vision, attention to detail, and unbridled optimism were instrumental in creating 'the Roxy complex'. In April 2014, the final stage of the Roxy complex was completed.

On the weekend of the 5th and 6th April, the Roxy Greek Museum was opened to extraordinary fanfare and a deeply appreciative audience. "There was certainly a buzz amongst the local community as well as the Greek community across Australia" said John Wearne, Roxy Greek Museum Committee Member, and former mayor of Bingara. "People were absolutely amazed when they saw it. We knew the museum was going to be special, but it has

exceeded our expectations. It is world-class."

The Museum was made possible by a \$94,000 grant from the New South Wales Ministry for Arts, and several equally substantial donations from the Greek Australian Community, and a significant contribution from Gwydir Shire Council. Prominent Greek Australian donors included the Aroney Trust, the Kytherian Association of Australia - <http://www.kytherianassociation.com.au/> - Nick Politis, the Aroney family, Nick Andriotakis, Angelo Notaras, George & Lorraine Poulos, Emmanuel Comino, amongst many others.

The museum was officially opened on Saturday 5th April 2014 by Her Excellency, Professor

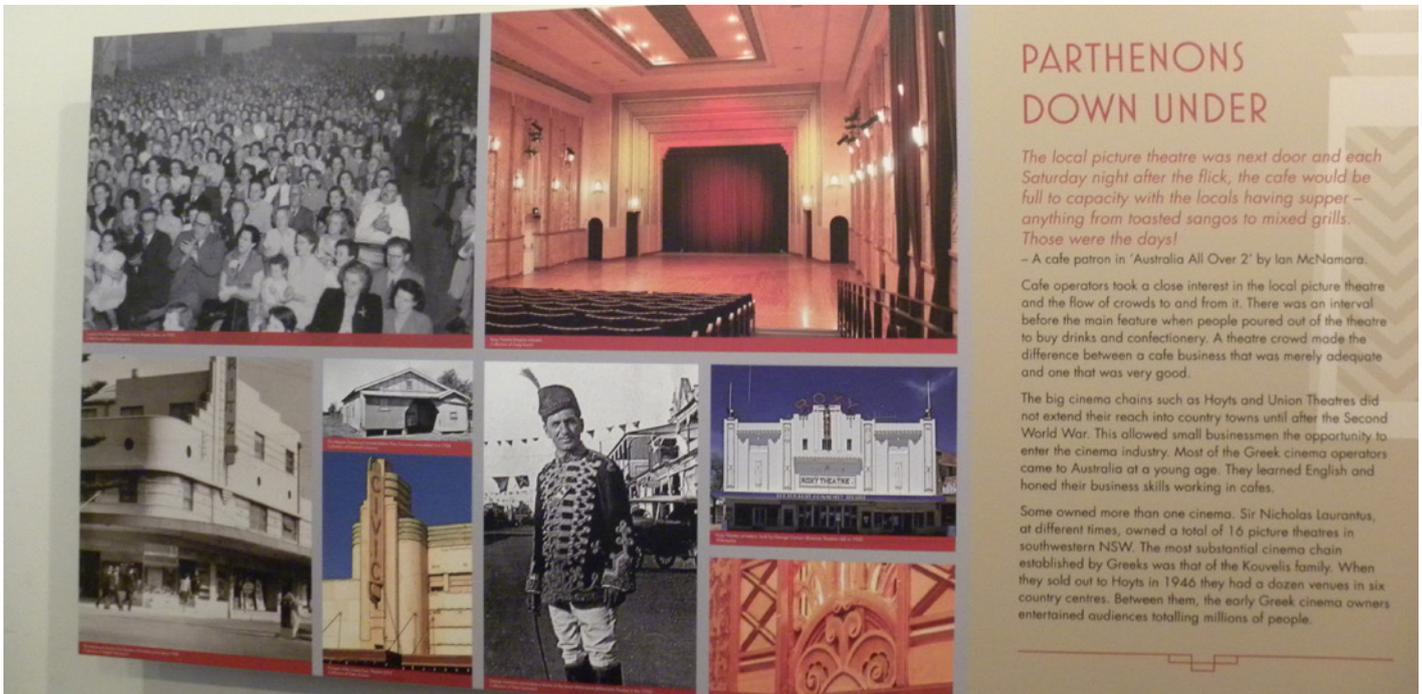
Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of New South Wales, with an opening as grand as the Roxy itself. Distinguished guests who spoke at the launch included, Cr. John Coulton the Mayor of Gwydir Shire Council, Dr Victor Kepreotis, President of the Kytherian



Association of Australia, Mark Coulton, the Federal Member for Parkes, Adam Marshall, State Member for Northern Tablelands the Honourable George Souris, NSW Minister for Tourism and the Arts, and his Excellency Haris Dafaranos, The Ambassador for Greece.

George Souris was "glad I was able come and be part of





## PARTHENONS DOWN UNDER

*The local picture theatre was next door and each Saturday night after the flick, the cafe would be full to capacity with the locals having supper – anything from toasted sangos to mixed grills. Those were the days!*

– A cafe patron in 'Australia All Over 2' by Ian McNamara.

Cafe operators took a close interest in the local picture theatre and the flow of crowds to and from it. There was an interval before the main feature when people poured out of the theatre to buy drinks and confectionery. A theatre crowd made the difference between a cafe business that was merely adequate and one that was very good.

The big cinema chains such as Hoyts and Union Theatres did not extend their reach into country towns until after the Second World War. This allowed small businessmen the opportunity to enter the cinema industry. Most of the Greek cinema operators came to Australia at a young age. They learned English and honed their business skills working in cafes.

Some owned more than one cinema. Sir Nicholas Laurantus, at different times, owned a total of 16 picture theatres in southwestern NSW. The most substantial cinema chain established by Greeks was that of the Kouvelis family. When they sold out to Hoyts in 1946 they had a dozen venues in six country centres. Between them, the early Greek cinema owners entertained audiences totalling millions of people.

this unique celebration. Congratulations and thanks to Gwydir Shire Council, the Roxy Museum Committee, curator Peter Prineas, the generous donors, and all involved. 300 visitors to Bingara is no mean feat, but then neither is the Roxy”.

The Roxy has four patrons. Bingara locals Nancy McGuinness and John Wearne, who were instrumental in persuading Bingara Council to purchase the Roxy Cinema in the late 1990's. Also, Peter Prineas, a grandson of Peter Feros, one of the three founders of the Roxy, and Australian actor and performer John Wood. John was the only one of the four patrons who could not attend because of work commitments. He noted however, that “I've not often been in love with a building, in fact, I think The Roxy is probably the only building I've ever been in love with. I'm sure you Bingarians would understand why. Many of you there today will remember how much I enjoyed my last visit for the opening of the Roxy Cafe. An honorary Greek in the person of Yiannis Xylo was unleashed on an unsuspecting public, drinking more than was good for him and almost breaking his neck in wild, if ageing attempts to take screamers in the form of tossed plates, in what had become for the night, City Square....I hope your Museum opening is a huge and unqualified success. I look forward to one day bringing another show to this most precious of theatres”.

The Master of Ceremonies Peter, Samios, performed his duties impeccably. Greek dancing was performed by Joanna Tsakarides, Penelope Samios, Melina Andrew, Peter Faros, Stan Sklias, and Bill Tsoukalas, from the Kytherian Association dance troupe. Bingarians and other attendees from the NSW north west were stunned by



the dancing display.

As part of the two-day event there were guided tours of the museum, movie screenings in the beautiful Roxy theatre, talks by special guests, and antique car displays. The highlight of the weekend was the Gala Dinner held on the Saturday evening, which was attended by 320 guests. Bringing the glamour of the 1930s back to Bingara, the dinner was an unforgettable evening of Greek feasting and festivity under the stars. The main street was blocked off, and the Gala Ball was held in an open 'platteia' with a Greek 'panayiri' style atmosphere.



Guests danced the night away to the live band Ha Va Le, from Brisbane, under bandmaster Dimitri Prineas.

Ha Va Le is one of the best Greek party bands performing in Australia. No Greek celebration would be complete without the smashing of plates, and the Gala Dinner was no exception.

The festivities continued into Sunday with stalls and the launch of the Greek

Immigration Olive grove which was marked by a tree planting ceremony held on Cunningham Street adjacent to the Roxy Cafe. The olive trees were planted in recognition of Greek migration to Australia. Greek-Australians, local residents and visitors were given the opportunity to pay tribute to a Greek family or friend who has migrated to Australia by purchasing an olive tree.



The 8 trees next to the Roxy Café will sell for \$500 each. A number were purchased on the day. Other trees will be planted along Cunningham Street, and into an Avenue of Olive Trees Memorial Garden, that leads to the ecologically based “Living Classroom” area, nearby. See, <http://www.kythera-family.net/download/Avenue%20of%20Olive%20Trees%20Memorial%20Garden.pdf> These trees will sell for \$100.00 each. Participants are asked to provide a name and a brief description about the family member or friend which will appear on the Roxy Greek

Museum website and a tree will be planted as a tribute. You can order your commemorative olive tree at <http://www.trybooking.com/Booking/BookingEventSummary.aspx?eid=81094>

On Sunday morning, the first tree planted as part of the launch was dedicated to the three Greek-Australians who built the Roxy Theatre in 1936 - Emanuel Aroney, Peter Feros and George Psaltis. Peter Prineas, the grandson of Peter Feros, Peter Aroney, grandson of Emmanuel Aroney, and Arthur Stathakis, godson of George Psaltis, planted the tree in their honour.

The Roxy Museum is dedicated to the history of Greek settlement in rural Australia. It is envisioned the museum will become a place of national significance that conserves and protects the important cultural association between Greek Australians and the places in Australia where they chose to live, work and raise a family. It will pay tribute to the remarkable legacy of the Greek cafe proprietors and cinema operators, ensuring the impact they made on the daily lives of hundreds of thousands of Australian's is not forgotten.

Deep appreciation was conferred upon Peter Prineas who worked tirelessly to ensure that the Museum was curated to a world class standard. The work he did “behind the scenes” was extraordinary. Without his input the Museum would have been of lesser quality, and would have cost far more to install.





Max Eastcott, General Manager, Gwydir Shire Council, Russell Magee, Convergence Associates, Boyce Pizzey, Convergence Associates, Jenni Klempfner, Convergence Associates, Peter Prineas, Museum Curator, The Roxy Greek Museum Committee, Leeah Daley, Deputy General Manager, Gwydir Shire Council, George Poulos, The Roxy Greek Museum Committee

The Museum designers, Convergence Associates of Camberwell, Melbourne, Victoria, also excelled themselves. The principals, Jenni Klempfner, Russell Magee, and Boyce Pizzey, have designed numerous important Museums in Australia and New Zealand including the Museo Italiano, the Newcastle Maritime Museum, the Defense of Darwin Museum, and displays in the National Archives in New Zealand. See, <http://convergence.net.au/projects/>. Jenni Klempfner considers the Roxy “a regional treasure... My background is in architecture, and to come across a building like that - it's a jewel - a building that's been wonderfully loved and nurtured, both in its inception, and in the last fifteen years since the council has owned it.”

A very special commendation goes to Roxy Manager Georgia Standerwick, for the event management skills she displayed in coordinating the Roxy Museum opening, and the grand Ball. She also chaired the Roxy Museum Committee, and oversaw the installation of the Museum. Her father is Greek, and her empathy with and understanding of the Greek 'ethos' shone through all her achievements, and all the events on the weekend. Also to Tim Cox, Assistant Finance Manager, Gwydir Shire

Council, who ensured that the event was well financed, and 'ran to budget'.

Max Eastcott, General Manager at Gwydir Shire Council, and Leeah Daley, Assistant General Manager, should also be acknowledged with deep gratitude. Over more than a decade they have ensured that the 'vision' of the Roxy complex, particularly its Greek facet, has received the unmitigated support of the Gwydir Shire Council. Council Executives with less vision and courage may not have 'followed through' with the Project.

“The Greek Australian community is passionate about the Roxy because it is a living and working memorial to every Greek Australian who has migrated to Australia since 1817,”

said George Poulos, Roxy Greek Museum Committee member, and Secretary of the Kytherian Association of Australia. This is not a static museum. Incorporated within the Roxy complex is an Information Centre, a working Cinema, a working “Greek” café, a (TAFE) hospitality training college, fully equipped with an industrial kitchen, and a conference room. All have been built and restored to the highest standard, and all compliment and are integrated into the Greek Australian Museum.

This is the only site in Australia which incorporates within one very large building so many facets of Greek heritage. Convergence, Gwydir Shire and the Roxy Museum Committee all conceive the 'whole' of the Roxy complex as one integrated Greek Australian Museum. “Eventually it will become a place of pilgrimage for every Greek in Australia, and inevitably - every Greek in the world” said George. “All Greek-Australians should avail themselves of any opportunity to make the pilgrimage to the Roxy 'complex', Bingara”.

By the year 2035 most Greek cafes and cinemas in Australia will have ceased trading or been demolished. Because of the substantial capital outlay on the Roxy 'complex' - now insured for a staggering \$6 million dollars



- this Greek memorial, heritage, pilgrimage and sacred site will assuredly be the last Greek site of such significance left standing.

The Roxy Museum was conceived as a Greek-Australian museum. It should always be considered as such. However, George Poulos believes, that “to the degree that Kytherian’s dominated the ‘shop-keeping phenomenon’ in Australia, and by virtue of the Kytherian input into its inception and restoration, it could also be considered a Kytherian-Australian museum. By virtue of the grandeur of the building, the superiority of the displays, and the monetary value of the Roxy ‘complex’, it is undoubtedly the most significant ‘Kytherian’ Museum in the world.”

For more information you can call the Bingara Visitor Information Centre on (02) 6724 0066 or visit the Roxy website

<http://www.roxybingara.com.au/museum-opening/> and the Roxy Museum main page on [kythera-family.net](http://www.kythera-family.net), <http://www.kythera-family.net/index.php?nav=117-119&cid=191&did=17831&pageflip=1>



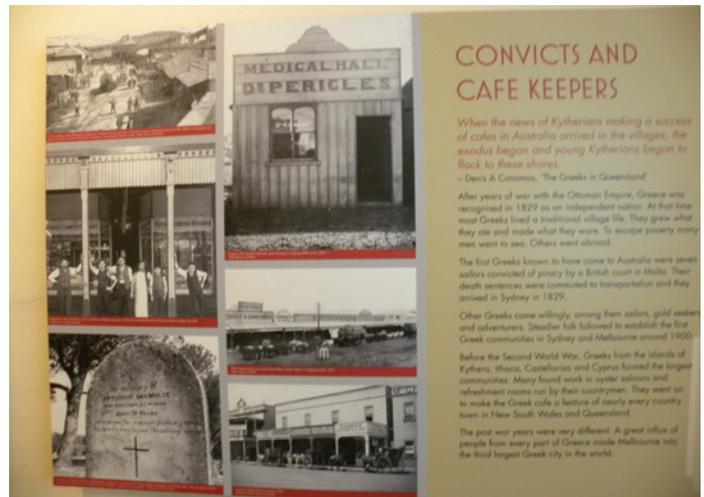
John Wearne (far left) and Peter Prineas show Her Excellency, Professor Marie Bashir, the recently completed Roxy Museum.



Adam Marshall, NSW State Member for Northern Tablelands (far left), Roxy Patron and Bingara local, Nancy McGuinness, and the Honourable George Souris, NSW Minister for Tourism and the Arts, enjoying the festivities.



One of the many panels in the Roxy Museum. “Meals at All Hours”. “Greek cafes were open from 6 am to 11pm, seven days a week except Xmas Day and Good Friday”. The “Peters” sign above is the original sign from the front of the Roxy cafe. The young lady on the left features as part of an audio visual display (one of 3 in the Museum). She is relating the hardships of her life as a cafe “wife”.



One of the many panels in the Roxy Museum – “Convicts and Cafe Keepers”. “When the news of Kytherians making a success of cafes in Australia arrived in the villages, the exodus began, and young Kytherians began to flock to these shores.” – Denis A Conomos, “The Greeks in Queensland”.