

KANDOS AND RYLSSTONE – A CENTURY OF RIVALRY

What is this antagonism between Rylstone and Kandos? Where did it come from? Those are questions I have often asked myself since coming back to the area.

I hear derogatory comments, usually about Kandos; and resentful comments, usually towards Rylstone. I notice a prickly animosity when one or other town has a perceived advantage eg a new facility, a visiting dignitary, a media promotion, a council visit. And I recognise some of the resentment in myself.

I wonder: is this a perfectly natural phenomenon when two towns are established only seven kilometres apart? Do Albury/Wodonga, Foster/Tuncurry and Coolangatta/Tweed Heads feel the same resentments? Is it just a case of “twin town” rivalry?

I have only recently discovered that the concept of twin towns is universally accepted as “twinned by way of friendship” eg Bathurst with Okuma in Japan; Orange with Orange in California. Kandos/Rylstone does not fit that definition of twin towns, nor indeed any other definition except “being in close proximity”. They are neither identical nor fraternal, and especially not in their history.

Rylstone on the banks of a tranquil river grew out of a pastoral industry. Kandos beneath a rugged mountain range grew out of a cement industry. One rural, the other industrial; one old money, the other new; one conservative, Anglo and Protestant; the other labour, migrant and Catholic; one clean, one dusty; one established, the other new-kid-on-the-block. Yes I know, I am generalising but I am sure you recognise a degree of truth.

So does this rivalry arise because Rylstone and Kandos are so different? I turn to history and particularly the *Mudgee Guardian* to find answers.

The local representative of that newspaper, obviously a Rylstone resident, writing the “Rylstone News” in the second decade of the twentieth century, hides his name but not his opinions. He is there to inform his readers but he is also sensitive to their hopes and anxieties and he is not above exciting, provoking and challenging them.

“Rylstone is on the tip-toe of expectation,” he tells readers in March 1912 as government officials and private individuals take an interest in the mineral wealth of the district. “There are great possibilities in store...Rylstone is on the verge of a new era...a better tomorrow...something not yet dreamed of is in store for our district”. For a time there is talk of a State cement industry. Then in May 1913 our representative reports that the NSW Cement Lime and Coal Co Ltd has been registered and floated with a capital of £200,000. An industry is born five miles away.

Certainty builds on expectation. “‘Sleepy Hollow’ after 60 years is to have its resurrection,” he prophesises and it seems his readers agree. A few months later there are plans at Rylstone for a new shire chambers and a hospital; and extensions to Mr Nash’s store and the freezing works.

Apprehension follows. By 1914 it is obvious that Rylstone residents are uneasy about the new industry on their doorstep and the reporter agrees: “the new town in time will seriously compete with old Rylstone...Kandos is going to outdistance old Rylstone”.

Around the time of the first land sale at Kandos (August 1915) he envisages that Rylstone will eventually be a suburb of Kandos – “the odds are a thousand to one that Rylstone will come in as number two.” Nevertheless he sees one advantage. “It will lift the decadent public mind of Rylstone into something like a progressive spirit...it will be a means of infusing a new and more democratic form of ideas and will bury forever the old conservative fads and fancies that have for years throttled the more advanced thoughts of those who have come afresh in our midst...need we look further than the local Shire Council for an example of the impotent ancient ideals”.

Well that packed a punch and I don't doubt he got a bit of flack in return.

By mid 1917 plans were afoot to transfer Kandos from a private village to an urban area within Rylstone Shire while at the same time there was a push in the other direction to establish a local council for Kandos. The *Mudgee Guardian* representative now came into his strongest. “The leading district headquarters is likely to be challenged by the rapid advancement of Kandos township...Rylstone is undoubtedly entitled to lead the district in all things...the old order of free and easy style must pass away...A greater Rylstone is desired but this is only possible by the people waking up to the fact that power is in their hands.” Kandos the usurper, it seems, was likely to push Rylstone off its pedestal and, despite the great benefit the new town brought to the area, its dominance must be resisted.

I am not surprised as I read through the *Mudgee Guardian* that there was real concern felt by Rylstone residents. In almost every issue there is news about the marvellous, rapid, splendid, solid, progressive, go-ahead Kandos where buildings are going up and businesses opening almost weekly; where the progress of the great industry is described in detail and dignitaries visit regularly. Without a doubt, the media tells readers, Kandos is expected to become “one of the greatest industrial centres not only of the State but of Australia.”

Well they could only predict the future, not make it.

The *Mudgee Guardian* realised that a growing town deserved its own media coverage especially if it spent more on advertising, so in 1918 the community read that a Kandos resident had been appointed to represent the paper and write a weekly column “Kandos News”. This soon developed into *The Kandos Star* where Rylstone residents could read about further developments in Kandos. An active Kandos Progress Association organised petitions, lobbied Members of Parliament and met with government, council and company officials to gain infrastructure for Kandos eg postal facilities, railway station, court facilities, band rotunda etc etc etc.

During the 1920s Kandos progress continued and antagonism between the towns increased. In 1924 the Kandos representative asserted, “Kandos is reaping the golden opportunities in its industrial life and the future is rosy-hued.” In 1924 when Kandos citizens were becoming

indignant at council's delay in installing the electric light, the Rylstone representative led with the headline: "That Kandos Growl". In 1928 the Kandos writer reported, "there is a certain amount of jealousy existing between Kandos and Rylstone and this is intensified by comparing the streets and gutters of the two towns...it is time Kandos ratepayers demanded a more equitable state of affairs".

The tide turned I think with the Depression when it is estimated 600 men experienced unemployment at Kandos. For the next six years the cement companies were irregular employers of much reduced workforces. Certainly the Depression affected Rylstone but not nearly to the same extent. It was Kandos that needed a relief committee, relief depot, labour exchange, unemployment relief and work-for-the-dole and it was Rylstone who offered relief to Kandos particularly through the work of the Rylstone CWA. The Depression served to knock a bit of the stuffing out of Kandos and give Rylstone a boost.

Over the following decades of the twentieth century the relationship between the towns seems to have been a see-saw of competition and peaceful co-operation. Increasing numbers of residents established ties in both towns through marriage, work and membership of social, volunteer and sporting groups. Nevertheless gripes and grumbles continued, especially when residents perceived the other town was getting an advantage.

For several years in the late fifties a district pool was the subject of controversy. Both towns formed committees, drew up plans and collected money to build a pool in their town. When it became obvious that a small shire could only maintain one pool it became a tug-of-war, with the cement works and unions pulling Kandos to victory.

There is no doubt Kandos was favoured by a cement industry which over almost a century generously contributed to the infrastructure of the town through donations of materials, money and expertise. There is evidence too that Council at times favoured Rylstone over Kandos, no doubt for that very reason.

I expect that with the Rylstone-Mudgee council merger and the closing of the cement works in recent years, the antagonism between the towns will dissipate and we will forge ahead in the splendour of our natural surroundings and with greater appreciation of our individual uniqueness in terms of character, history and architecture. A nineteenth century town on the banks of a tranquil river and a twentieth century town beneath a stunning mountain range.