Brief History of Dunwich

Dunwich was known as Goompi by the traditional owners, the Quandamooka people, and has population of appox. 1000 people.

Dunwich was named Green Point by the Colonisers. The first settlement was established in 1827 as pilot station and military post. It was supposed to be a good place to discharge cargo from visiting ships that traveled through the South Passage. However cargo was lost in bad weather and local aborigines were hostile, so the post was disbanded in 1831.

Dunwich was renamed after the Suffolk village of Dunwich near the Stradbroke Estate in England, in honour of Viscount Dunwich, the Earl of Stradbroke.

In 1892 a leper colony was established at Dunwich; later this facility was closed and the lepers moved to the Peel Island lazaret. A quarantine station opened in 1850, although this was eventually moved to the more isolated St Helena Island in Moreton Bay. The station was then converted into a nursing home for the elderly and infirmed, one of Queensland's first such facilities. The home was moved to Sandgate in 1946. The main cemetery on the island (Dunwich Cemetery) is found in this small town and contains the graves of over 10,000 people, most of which are unmarked. Other small cemeteries were established for the indigenous community and the leper colony.

Some of the remaining buildings from the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum now form part of the North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum, located in Welsby Street, Dunwich. The Dunwich Convict Causeway also remains, although it has been expanded to accommodate modern boats.

Dunwich has a number of heritage-listed sites, including:

- Dunwich Cemetery
- Convict Causeway
- Dunwich Public Reserve
- St Mark's Anglican Church
- Dunwich Public Hall
Information on Sites

Convict causeway
The first structure most visitors see as they arrive at Dunwich is a jetty and barge landing area that includes a causeway built by convicts in 1827. The causeway was part of the military stores depot (1827-1831). A sandbar at the mouth of the Brisbane River meant it was impossible for large vessels to carry goods into Brisbane, so ships unloaded cargoes at Dunwich and smaller cutters carried the goods over the bar and on to Brisbane. The causeway's southern wall has been covered by subsequent developments so the best place to view it is from the small park just north of the landing area. Listed on the Queensland Heritage Register and the Register of the National Trust of Queensland.

Park with privy pit
This small park was the site of the military stores depot (1827-1831). One stone convict-built structure remains in the park which had been assumed to be privy (toilet) pit, but recent survey work suggests it may be the entrance to a tunnel built under the original store and barracks.

Nearby is a memorial to the Passionist Fathers' Roman Catholic Mission to the Aborigines which operated from 1843-1847. The missionaries took over the depot buildings. In June 1844, two of the earliest recorded baptisms in Queensland took place at Dunwich. Two sons of Irishman Dick Smith and Aboriginal Neli were baptised by Father Joseph Snell, one of the four Passionist missionaries. Listed on the Queensland Heritage Register and the Register of the National Trust of Queensland.

Junner Street Park
This park contains foundations, trees and structures erected during the Benevolent Asylum years (1866-1946).

Foundations and footings: the park contains the foundations of the Benevolent Asylum's main hall, the Victoria Hall (c.1896), and a more modern toilet block that serviced the Hall. Also clearly visible is the foundation of the road that originally ran from the jetty to the men's mess hall. This road had a horse-drawn tram track that allowed goods to be carried to and from the main Asylum buildings.

Camphor laurels and fig trees: these trees are some of the remnants of progressive plantings by the Asylum inmates and staff and their families. At one stage there were other exotic trees in the park, including an English oak tree, an elephant apple, sausage tree, a Norfolk pine, stands of bamboo and one known locally as the snottie gobble tree.

Draughts boards: The oversized concrete draughts boards were built for the inmates of the Benevolent Asylum. The pieces were moved by hooking a steel rod into a loop on the top of each playing piece. Listed on the Register of the National Trust of Queensland.

Dunwich Public Hall
This hall was built in 1913 as the Benevolent Asylum's men's mess hall. It was centrally located in the Asylum along with the kitchen, laundry and stores. Goods from the mainland were taken to the mess hall and other buildings by a horse-drawn trolley system along the roadway still visible in Junner Park. This system was also used to take food in huge pots from the kitchen, about 200 yards away, to the mess hall. As a result, the food was often served cold, much to the annoyance of the inmates.

The hall seated 400 single men and had a servery and scullery at one end and the walls were partially lined with tiles for hygiene purposes. After 1913 the building was extended to include a boiler room that provided hot water to the kitchen wash up troughs. During WWII, the floor in the centre of the hall was removed and an air raid shelter was dug into the floor.

The mess hall was one of the few buildings that remained on the Island after the Asylum closed in 1946 and has since been used as the Dunwich Public Hall. Listed on the Register of the National Trust of Queensland.

Dormitory building now Sibelco training hall
The training centre of sandmining company Sibelco Australia, is half of Ward 13 of the former Benevolent Asylum. The building was restored by the previous company Consolidated Rutile Limited in the 1980s. Before restoration, the building served as a kitchen for the mining company, and later as the base for the Dunwich Pottery/Ceramic Group.
St Marks Church
Built in 1907, St Mark's Anglican Church was another integral structure of the Benevolent Asylum. Before St Mark's was built, church services for inmates were held in Victoria Hall, the main assembly facility. Lady Chelmsford, the wife of the Governor of Queensland at the time, is reported to have donated the money for the construction of the church after she visited the Benevolent Asylum and was shocked to find the inmates had no place of worship. The church was designed by prominent architect Robin Dods and the first chaplain was Reverend W Richner.

After the Benevolent Asylum closed, the church continued to be used by local residents. In 1973, the building was condemned by the Redland Shire Council, however the Stradbroke residents successfully united to raise funds to carry out emergency repair works and save the church from demolition in the 1990s. Listed on the Queensland Heritage Register and the Register of the National Trust of Queensland.

Anzac Park
Numerous war memorials have been erected since World War I to commemorate those who have served in war. Many Island residents served in both World Wars, and some are buried in the Dunwich Cemetery. The Dunwich war memorial was renovated in 2005 and hosts the Island's official Anzac Day ceremony every year.

North Stradbroke Historical Museum
The North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum was officially opened on 22 October 1988 by the Sixth Earl of Stradbroke and Countess Rosie at Point Lookout Hall. It is now housed in a combination of original and replica Benevolent Asylum buildings.

The main Museum building: the front section was built by mineral sandmining company CRL using materials from a dismantled Benevolent Asylum ward and housed two flats for the company's employees. When the mining company no longer needed the building, the Museum committee, then in a cramped annex to the Point Lookout Public Hall, proposed it be moved to Point Lookout. When relocation proved impossible, the Museum moved itself from Point Lookout to the building instead. The back section, designed by architect Chris Hills, was built in 2005-06.

The replica foul ward, housing photos and artefacts from the Benevolent Asylum, was built with the help of a Centenary of Federation Grant in 1998-99. The single skinned building with a fire place was built by Artie Rentoul from the original plan by Andrew Petrie (1872), held in the Qld State Archives. The construction followed the building practices of the era and no nail guns were used, where possible.

The herdsman's hut (on the left) was part of the old Benevolent Asylum dairy, originally located on the corner of Mitchell Crescent and Welsby St. When the Asylum closed, the herdsman's hut served at one stage as a home for a long-time Island family and as a Redland Shire Council depot. It was destined for demolition but volunteers dismantled and re-erected it on the Museum site in 1996.

Dunwich State School
North Stradbroke Island has had seven schools over the years. The Island's first school, the Dunwich Provisional School for Aboriginal Children, opened on 7 January 1889 at an unknown location. Two years later it moved to Bribie Island and in 1893 it moved back to the Island as the Myora Special Provisional School at the Myora/Moongalba Mission.

This left Dunwich without a school, and in 1904 lobbying by staff at the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum resulted in the second Dunwich school being set up for their children. This school was originally built closer to the Benevolent Asylum buildings and was moved to its current site in 1922.

Learning Centre Building
This building was erected during World War II. When the Japanese forces were advancing in the Pacific in 1943, the Qld Government decided to move patients in Brisbane's Diamantina Hospital to the safety of the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum. The Government built this building to house the staff needed for the proposed influx but it was never used for this purpose.

In 1949 the building was moved to the Moreton Bay Research Station where it accommodated scientific researchers and students. A new building for the MBRS was built in 1999 and this building was moved to its present site where it is used as a community learning centre.
Benevolent Asylum cottages
These two cottages provided accommodation for Benevolent Asylum staff. They are now privately owned. Other former Benevolent Asylum buildings can be seen dotted around Dunwich and elsewhere on the Island. Many were bought by Island residents and moved to new sites after the Asylum closed. Listed on the Register of the National Trust of Queensland.

One Mile
One Mile is located one mile from the Dunwich Post office and is where many Island Aboriginal families live. It is an area of great cultural and historic significance in that it is one of the few surviving aboriginal settlements dating from when Aboriginal people were banned from living within the town confines. In the eastern states in the 1970's, Aboriginal people were moved from fringe camps into public housing.

Dunwich Cemetery
Three cemeteries have operated on North Stradbroke Island. The Myora/Moongalba cemetery just north of Dunwich is the burial place of people from the Mission, the Lazaret or Leper's Cemetery south of Dunwich was set up in the late 19th century, and the Dunwich Cemetery still operates in the township itself.

The first of the Dunwich Cemetery's estimated 10,000 burials is believed to date from 1847 when a victim of the shipwrecked Sovereign was interred, which makes it one of the earliest surviving cemeteries in Queensland.

Also among the early burials were the victims of one of Queensland's immigration tragedies: a typhus epidemic in 1850 on the ship Emigrant, which claimed about 27 lives. Dunwich had just been proclaimed the quarantine station for Moreton Bay and the Emigrant was the first ship to arrive at the new station.

The bunya pines are believed to date from the time when visiting mainland Aborigines brought the nuts as gifts to the people of Stradbroke. They are a living reminder of the complex socio political structure of South East Queensland prior to colonisation.

8,470 inmates from the Benevolent Asylum are buried in the Dunwich Cemetery. As most are in unmarked graves, a memorial has been erected to them. Descendants of many Aboriginal families are also buried here. Listed on the Queensland Heritage Register and the Register of the National Trust of Queensland.

Moreton Bay Research Station
Moreton Bay Research Station was established in 1949 as the Dunwich Laboratory, by the Queensland State government with shared use by CSIRO, Qld Dept of Harbours and Marine (Fisheries) and the University of Queensland. The original facilities included a bunk house (now the Dunwich Learning Centre), a two story laboratory, and a large generator engine room which was soon converted to a teaching and kitchen/mess hall.

By the late 1990s the old buildings were decaying and had become inadequate for current teaching and research needs. In 1997, Assoc. Prof. Jack Greenwood (Director) and Dr. Ian Tibbetts (Assistant Director) of the School of Marine Science at The University of Queensland, actively sought funding from the University and industry partners to demolish the old buildings and construct a modern purpose-designed teaching and research facility, to be called the Moreton Bay Research Station and Study Centre (MBRS). The new station was officially opened in 2000.

Polka Point Midden and Consumptives camp
The Polka Point midden is one of the largest on the Island. It contains shells of oysters, whelks, cockles and periwinkles, typical of middens found on the bay side of the island. Listed on the Register of the National Trust of Queensland.

Polka Point was the site of the Benevolent Asylum's consumptives (tuberculosis) camp. The consumptives camp inmates lived in tents that were burnt when the occupant died. A draughts board which is still visible was built near the men's camp for their entertainment.