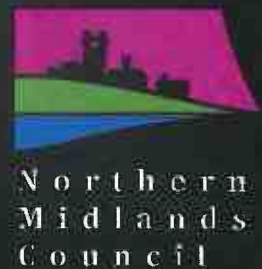
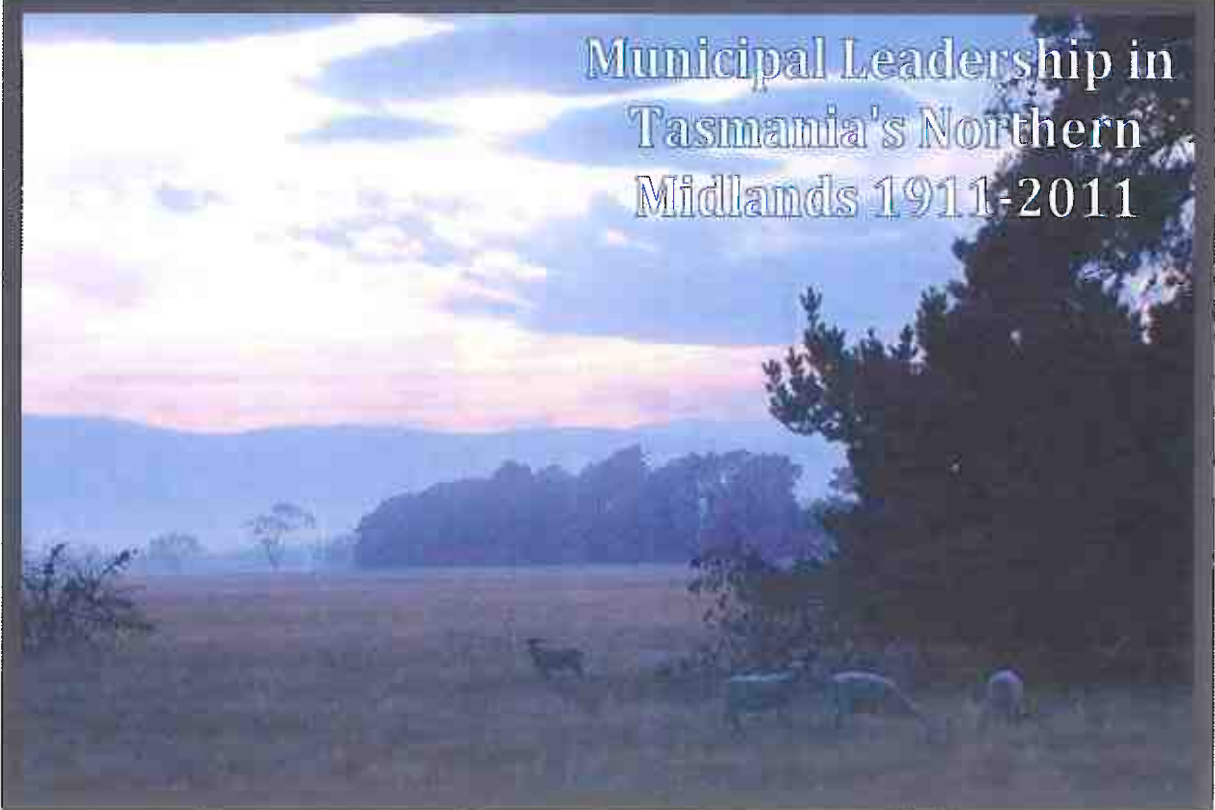


# Ancient landscapes, modern aspirations



Municipal Leadership in  
Tasmania's Northern  
Midlands 1911-2011



# SUMMARY

The greatest asset of the Northern Midlands Municipal Area, according to Mayor Kim Polley, is its people. Their characters are as diverse as their locations. The region's natural heritage, celebrated by artists like John Glover and Michael McWilliams, ranges from the fertile farmlands of the South Esk River system to the ski slopes of craggy Ben Lomond. While Georgian architecture is the most notable feature of the Northern Midlands' built heritage, the municipal area also contains Australia's 12<sup>th</sup> busiest airport and a former showpiece of Tasmania's hydro-electric industrial might, the brick village of Poatina. For about 130 years, the Ross, Campbell Town, Evandale, Fingal and Longford Municipalities divided up this region, but in 1993 it was placed under the united banner of the Northern Midlands Council.



Tasmanian country councils have always aspired to provide a better quality of life for their constituents. Before amalgamation, however, a small ratepayer base hampered their ability to fulfil these aspirations. In some services, they lagged decades behind their city counterparts.

Up to World War II, councils struggled to provide a better road infrastructure to accommodate motor vehicles and electric power for lighting and domestic use. The richest of the councils that later formed the Northern Midlands Council, Longford, aspired to the same hydro-electricity and sewerage services as nearby Launceston, but could not afford them. Nevertheless, Longford's installation of a flawed power plant in 1910 was a considerable achievement.

After World War II, in a period of prosperity, the 'baby boom' increased the demand for sewerage and better living conditions generally. As leisure time increased, people wanted sport and entertainment. Remote mining families aspired to facilities that townspeople took for granted. State government support helped country councils meet some such demands. After the wool boom, as agriculture in general suffered, councils of the northern Midlands turned to heritage tourism in the hope of sustaining services to a declining population.

Although the economic benefits of amalgamation were long apparent, northern Midlands communities fiercely guarded their individuality until 18 years ago. Modernisation, economies of scale, resource sharing and broader vision have advanced the united region. The people of the Northern Midlands Municipal Area, as Kim Polley suggests, 'get in, have a go, hang together and help build social capital'. It has always been that way. Now, while retaining their local character, they build a larger community to far greater advantage.

# Introduction

## The northern Midlands in 1911

A century ago it was a different world socially and technologically. Australians thought of themselves as British. Women could vote but could not stand for parliament. Trade unions were only beginning to assert themselves. Steam produced from coal was the major power source, horses and bullocks were beasts of burden on the streets and in the paddocks. Outside Hobart and Launceston, kerosene and acetylene lamps lit streets and homes. Telephone calls to the mainland were still 25 years away and the ball point pen unheard of.

When the *Local Government Act* (1906) gave Tasmania its first comprehensive system of municipal government, Longford was Tasmania's 'richest' municipality in terms of property value, ahead of its neighbours Evandale, Fingal, Campbell Town and Ross.<sup>1</sup> This reflected the dominance of the wool industry. Yet Midlands graziers no longer controlled the Tasmanian government purse strings. A mining boom had shifted the balance of economic power out of their hands by widening the Tasmanian electorate.<sup>2</sup>



Northern Midlands 1906-93, by municipality<sup>3</sup>

Town	Population 1911
Longford	4,155
Evandale	1,952
Campbell Tn	1,526
Ross	705
<b>Approx total</b>	<b>12,500?</b> <sup>4</sup>

Population of major centres 1911

Land reform was beginning to eat away at big estates. In the interests of a fairer society, the *Closer Settlement Act* (1907) divided some of these into small farms for yeoman farmers.

Moral guardianship was enshrined in law. The *Sunday Observance Act* (1908) allowed councils to fix local Sunday trading hours and prohibit public sports or entertainment on Sundays. The law restricted individual freedom, but guarded the right to a day's rest.

Industries and culture were diverse. Avoca juggled small tourist and mining trades with pastoralism. Ben Lomond, which dominates the skyline of the Fingal Valley, had long attracted artists, tourists and miners. The Fingal Council stocked Lake Youl on Ben Lomond with trout fry, co-operated to build tourist huts on the mountain and asked the State Government to proclaim a Ben Lomond scenic reserve.<sup>5</sup>



Although the northern Midlands constitute the largest area of flat land in Tasmania, they are bounded by mountains. (Left) Rival teams—horses and bullocks—ploughing the Norfolk Plains near Longford, early 1900s. (Right) 'Ben Lomond from Storys Creek' (1903). This Spurling photo represents Tasmania's first winter wilderness photography. Photos by Stephen Spurling III

Courtesy of Paul Ledger (left) and Stephen Hiller (right)

Common ground between councils which would one day merge was obvious. The ubiquity of the South Esk River system was borne out by an outcry over water pollution in 1906. The Evandale, Longford and Campbell Town Councils, plus the Evandale, Perth and Longford Water Trusts all joined a campaign to curb mining tailings from the Ben Lomond-Avoca region polluting their drinking water.<sup>6</sup> Councils showed on this and other occasions that parochialism would be forgotten when mutual interest was served.



Life at Storys Creek early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: (left) a shingle-roofed miner's cottage; (right) a picnic party on Stacks Bluff.

Photos courtesy of the State Library of Tasmania, Launceston

Municipal water and sanitation schemes were rudimentary. 'Wealth from water', however, was not a new concept: plans for irrigation schemes had given Ross a water supply from Tooms Lake and Campbell Town from Lake Leake.<sup>7</sup> No small council could afford sewerage systems like those of Hobart and Launceston.<sup>8</sup>

A resident of the northern Midlands in 1911 belonged to a small community from which he or she rarely departed, the newspaper being a window on the wider world. Many lived a life of manual labour. Townspeople endured a pall of wood smoke, the stench of sewage, horse dung under foot, the prospect of water-borne illness...and enjoyed quiet Sundays. Things would improve!

# Cranking up and switching on

## Tackling technological revolution 1911-39

The *Local Government Act* (1906) remained substantially in place until the amalgamations of 1993. Parochialism and a lack of regional co-operation prevented reform during the period 1906 to 1939.<sup>9</sup> Yet efficiencies were needed as the technological and social landscape altered dramatically. Between 1860 and 1890 governments Australia-wide had spent half their capital on railways, compared to only 10 to 15% on roads.<sup>10</sup>



FW James with his Vindec Special motorbike, first Tasmanian Automobile Club hill climb, Gleadows Hill, Evandale. The presence of registration plates dates this photo as 1909 at the earliest.

Photo by Stephen Spurling III  
Courtesy of the late Ted Spurling

The 'motoring menace' changed that early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. 'Speeding' replaced 'furious riding' as the principal road offence. In 1911, fresh from convicting a motorist of driving through Longford without a tail light, Councillor TR Arthur led the Longford Council's decision to refuse the Tasmanian Automobile Club (TAC) permission to conduct its flexibility trials in that municipality:

His experience of motor car drivers and riders of bicycles was that they demanded everything, and were prepared to concede nothing to the ratepayers whose means of locomotion was the horse and cart. He himself had narrowly escaped being smashed up on a number of occasions.<sup>11</sup>

The TAC's first reliability trials had been staged in the Longford Municipality on the 'Flying Mile' near Pateena in 1905. Motorists deplored Arthur's attitude and their 'persecution' by the Ross Council, whose magistrates fined breachers of the 16 kph town speed limit—despite no road signs existing to delineate the town boundary.<sup>12</sup>

Councils had another reason to fear the automobile. Maintenance of road infrastructure became their main burden during the 1920s and 1930s. Many small councils could not afford road plant, yet they refused to hand this responsibility to the State Government, fearing it would be the 'thin edge of the wedge'.<sup>13</sup>

Neither rail nor road resisted the 1929 flood which devastated northern and Midlands municipalities. Buildings at Longford were reduced to piles of brick and timber, 400 people being evacuated and 140 homes damaged there.<sup>14</sup> The convict-built Perth

Bridge across the South Esk River was swept away. Central Ross resembled an 'inland sea', with High, Bridge and Portugal Streets all submerged.<sup>15</sup>



(Left) The viaduct and South Esk Railway Bridge at Longford during the 1929 flood.  
(Centre) The Perth Road Bridge resisting the South Esk River shortly before it was swept away. (Right) Flood waters tear the railway line off the Avoca Railway Bridge.

Photos by HJ King, Lawson and B Sheppard respectively

Courtesy of Maggie Humphrey (left photo) and the State Library of Tasmania, Launceston

As a result of the floods, the State Government took over responsibility for State roads, leaving municipalities to maintain their internal roads.<sup>16</sup> Despite this, in 1938 an unusually large proportion of the Longford Council's administrative expenses was charged to its road rate accounts, reducing the Council's general efficiency.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Great War and the Great Depression**

World War I (1914-18) introduced a new form of social justice to land selection: reward for the returned soldier. For councils, closer settlement had the potential to increase agricultural production, provide employment and justify new infrastructure projects, such as the Longford Council's Cressy light railway proposal.<sup>18</sup> Most councils appointed their own local committees to advise the Closer Settlement Board about properties suitable for acquisition. Unfortunately, due to a failure to vet applicants, the first attempt at soldier settlement was not a success, many first-time farmers going bust and abandoning their properties in difficult economic times.

What to do with land abandoned by soldier settlers? A third *Closer Settlement Act* (1929) was passed to buy it back and sell it to small farmers. Closer settlement developments, such as the Maitland Estate near Longford, provided unemployment relief during the Great Depression.<sup>19</sup> Councils also administered the State Government's 'Work for the Dole' program at this time.

Times were slowly changing. Social justice jostled with moral guardianship. Should sport be allowed on Sundays? In 1931 Warden George Carins and his fellow Longford councillors allowed the Railway Workers Committee to stage their annual picnic on the Municipal Grounds on a Sunday with the assurance that no sports would be held there—the sports took place on adjacent private land instead. Afterwards, feeling cleared of moral responsibility for the sports, councillors rebuffed the protests of local church ministers.<sup>20</sup> After all, Sunday was the only day of the week on which the whole of the railway staff could attend a picnic.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in 1935 Fingal Warden Fred Williams and councillors disagreed over the holding of Sunday night picture shows at Storys Creek, on the only evening available to the miners.<sup>22</sup>

Ben Lomond had delivered another economic bounty besides tourism. The establishment of the Aberfoyle tin and tungsten mine represented the culmination of more than four decades of mining around the Ben Lomond plateau. Company and council worked together to organise a town survey (Rossarden) in 1933.<sup>23</sup> In 1938 both the Storys Creek and Aberfoyle mines negotiated with the Fingal Council over

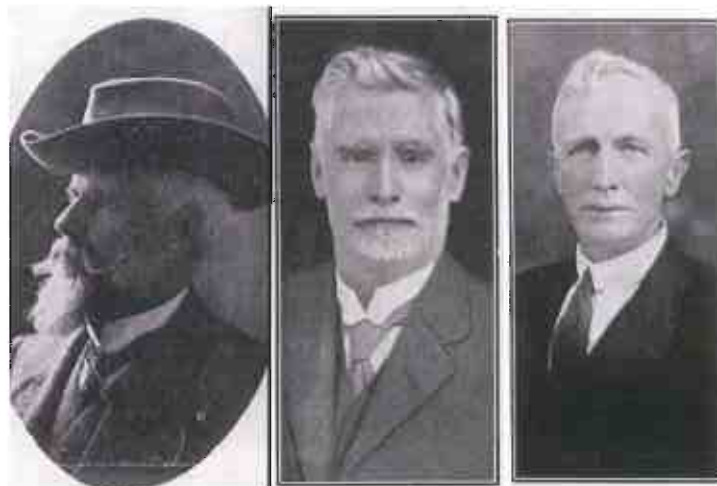
road construction.<sup>24</sup> Operating from 1926 to 1982 and peaking during the Korean War, the Aberfoyle mine would be one of Tasmania's principal mineral producers.



(Left) Longford Warden (1929–35, 1939–49) George Carins, served as a councillor 1926–53.<sup>25</sup> (Right) Aberfoyle mine superintendent William Hitchcock (left in photo) and his wife Kate Hitchcock (right in photo), community leaders at what became known as Rossarden 1931–42.

William Hitchcock was a former warden of Kentish.

Photos courtesy of State Library of Tasmania, Launceston (left) and the late Jock Smith (right)



As well as boasting the Southern Hemisphere's oldest agricultural show (Campbell Town) and Tasmania's oldest racing club (Longford), northern Midlands municipalities have a tradition of outstanding service by councillors and council staff, sometimes extending several generations. Names like Carins (Longford) and von Bibra (Ross) have occurred time and time again in municipal records. Taylor was synonymous with the Campbell Town Council almost throughout its existence, John Taylor (left) serving both council and road trust, while his brother David Taylor, a founding councillor, had put in 45 continuous years at his death in 1911.<sup>26</sup> (Centre) AE Jones, Campbell Town Warden 1905–12, 1924–34, contributed more than 30 years on council, as did (right) Charles Salter, Fingal Warden 1932–33.<sup>27</sup>

### Half way to heaven

In 1909 the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper's motoring columnist 'Skid' already looked to the skies for new technological adventures. But where was one to stable one's personal aeroplane? Unless the size was vastly reduced, the aeroplane, it seemed, would need 'huge stores and sheds and large alighting grounds on the outskirts of our cities, to which and from which...the traveller will be compelled to travel by other means of conveyance'.<sup>28</sup>



(Left) In March 1931 an air pageant attended by 14,000 people celebrated the opening of Western Junction Aerodrome (later Launceston Airport). (Right) Captain AD McKinnon, Evandale Warden 1932–34.<sup>29</sup>

Left photo by HJ King, right photo from the *Weekly Courier* newspaper  
 Courtesy of Maggie Humphrey (left) and the State Library of Tasmania, Launceston (right)

It was the 'to which and from which' which concerned the Evandale Council when Western Junction Aerodrome opened in 1930. With the Perth Road Bridge washed out in the 1929 flood, Aerodrome Road which connected Launceston with the airways via Breadalbane took heavy punishment, prompting Evandale Warden AD McKinnon to call for State funding.<sup>30</sup> Despite the airport being sited away from the Evandale township in case of accident, the Council feared the facility might draw enemy fire to the town during World War II. The only visiting bombers, however, were Allied ones promoting the war effort, and the creation of a Western Junction rail and air hub would more than compensate the Evandale Municipality for its safety concerns.<sup>31</sup>

### **Burrowing pests**

In the Midlands, the traditional three 'r's' of local government—roads, rates and rubbish—had a fourth, rabbits. In the days before the introduction of the myxomatosis disease in 1952, rabbit destruction by trappers and poisoning were regular themes of Evandale, Ross and Campbell Town Council meetings.<sup>32</sup> There were, apparently, other nuisances besides rabbits, straying cattle and the codlin moth:

A letter was received from a Fingal councillor concerning porcupines [echidnas] and it was decided to reply that in the Campbell Town Municipality porcupines were not a nuisance and the Campbell Town Council was not in favour of having them placed on the unprotected list.<sup>33</sup>

Some farmers blamed echidnas for providing holes which rabbits used to defeat wire-netting fences. Echidnas did not follow rabbits onto the 'wanted' list.

### **Making water work**

Another big change between the World Wars was the establishment of the Hydro-Electric Commission as Tasmania's State electricity generator. This was a relief for councils like Longford which had struggled to maintain a small town power scheme of their own. Longford's electric light, generated by a Crossley suction gas engine, was switched on in 1910, but the system proved so troublesome that in 1920 the



original plan for power generation by a turbine at Newry was finally carried out.<sup>34</sup> Longford battled this unsatisfactory scheme until joining the State Electricity Grid in 1927.<sup>35</sup> Perth, Cressy, Bishopsbourne, Evandale, Campbell Town and Ross replaced their kerosene lamps when they received their first electric power from the grid.<sup>36</sup>

Evandale's switching on ceremony was celebrated with a ball in the brilliantly lit public hall.<sup>37</sup> Avoca lit up in 1931, but Rossarden and Storys Creek had to wait until 1946 for street lighting.<sup>38</sup> By 1933 the Hydro-Electric Commission served 60% of Tasmanian homes, transforming lives by introducing electric light, stoves, hot water, heating and refrigeration.<sup>39</sup>

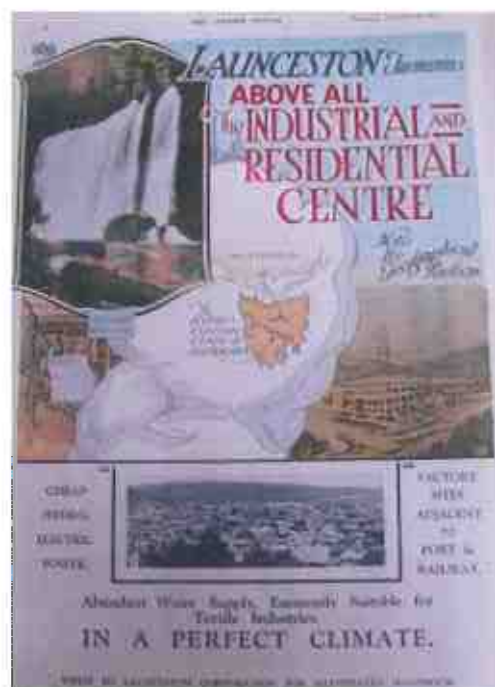
No northern Midlands towns were sewered in the pre-World War II era. In 1913 the Chief Health Officer for Tasmania, JS Purdy, advocated that Longford collect waste in a single septic tank, then dump the discharge into the river—which he asserted was common practice elsewhere.<sup>40</sup> Engineer A Harold Masters' plans for a sewer system were shelved, however, as being too expensive.<sup>41</sup>

Ross survived outbreaks of typhoid (1920), diphtheria (1923) and infantile paralysis (1937).<sup>42</sup> Cases of typhoid, scarlet fever and diphtheria in Campbell Town in 1922 prompted house-to-house inspections and the lime-washing of foul-houses and cowsheds.<sup>43</sup>

### Resisting reform

Over time, factors like changes in population distribution make it desirable that municipal boundaries are adjusted.<sup>45</sup> Rising overheads, the economic effects of the Great Depression, and pressure on councils to lower rates led to financial difficulties for municipal councils which also hastened the push for local government reform.<sup>46</sup> The 1939 Royal Commission on Local Government recommended amalgamating Ross and Campbell Town Councils, Evandale with St Leonards, and that the Fingal Municipality absorb part of the Portland Municipality.<sup>47</sup>

Lack of consultation was probably one reason that no amalgamations occurred.<sup>48</sup> Pre-empting any suggestion that it merge, the Longford Council asserted that it was the third largest municipality in the State and had a new council chambers.<sup>49</sup> Ross was in such a sound financial position that its ratepayers could only lose from any change.<sup>50</sup> Amalgamation would cause 'a loss of local interest' in Evandale.<sup>51</sup> Warden McKenzie of the Fingal Council asserted that amalgamation would not work because '[Fingal] has no community of interest with the neighbouring districts. It is very largely a mining area.'<sup>52</sup> Only Campbell Town considered potential amalgamation—providing it became the administrative centre of the larger municipality.<sup>53</sup>



While Launceston marketed the industrial might of its 'white coal' (hydro-electric power), the expectation that small municipalities could emulate its 1895 power scheme for street lighting and domestic use was unrealistic.<sup>44</sup> Photo from *Weekly Courier* newspaper

## Backing the baby boom

### Meeting the demands of a modern society 1939-98

During World War II (1939-45) councils were often the focus of home defence measures plus support for those at the front and victims of enemy attack. Although air raid shelters were considered unnecessary in Tasmania, councils appointed air raid wardens and erected honour rolls to highlight local patriotic sacrifice. Labour was restricted, petrol, rubber, machinery and spare parts almost unobtainable, making maintenance of infrastructure difficult.

The technological advances prompted by World War II changed rural Australia. Smaller, more reliable internal combustion engines, and improved tractors, bulldozers and four-wheel-drive vehicles were available. Bullock and horse teams and traction engines were now relics of a bygone era.



Skiing on Ben Lomond developed regardless of World War II. (Left) Fred Smithies arriving on horseback in the early days. (Right) Performing the 'Telemark' (free heel skiing), Legges Tor, 1942. The development of Rossarden and Storys Creek enabled the Fingal Council to petition the government for a road to the top of Stacks Bluff. The Northern Alpine Club, established in 1929, had ascertained that the Ben Lomond Plateau was northern Tasmania's most regular snowfield. Yet the access route most convenient to Launceston won out. Fingal effectively ceded Ben Lomond tourism to other municipalities when the road up Legges Tor was built in 1950.

Photos by Fred Smithies  
Courtesy of Margaret Carrington

Released from war-time constraints, many Australians enjoyed increased leisure time, disposable incomes and, apparently, producing 'baby boomers'. One of the biggest challenges for country councils at the end of World War II was the better water quality and sanitation demanded by a growing population. From 1944 the Water, Sewerage and Drainage Board examined municipal plans for such schemes and recommended which should be part funded by the State Government. By October 1944, sewerage schemes for Longford, Cressy and Perth had been submitted, plus water schemes for Perth and Avoca.<sup>54</sup> In 1951 Rossarden's water scheme opened.<sup>55</sup> The polio epidemic of 1950-51, which affected every northern Midlands centre from Ross to Bishopsbourne, increased the calls for improved sanitation.<sup>56</sup>

Sometimes petty politics intervened. In December 1938 the Director of Public Health instructed the Campbell Town Council to inaugurate a sewerage scheme. The Council tried to comply but, according to Warden Crosby Lyne, the local branch of

the Australian Labor Party induced Minister for Health John Gaha to insist that a poll of ratepayers should first be conducted.<sup>57</sup> What then would be the legal position if ratepayers voted against the proposed sewerage scheme? Lyne claimed that 'the whole question seethes with political intrigue of the lowest type'.<sup>58</sup> He repeated this line in 1946, when Labor Premier Robert Cosgrove sniped back that sewerage was a local responsibility, and Lyne an unseen Liberal Party political adviser.<sup>59</sup>

### Reshaping the rural landscape

A second round of solidier settlement followed World War II. By 1947 the Closer Settlement Board had purchased nearly 16,000 acres in the Longford Municipality for this purpose.<sup>60</sup> Some feared that breaking up successful merino studs would jeopardise the sheep breeding industry.<sup>61</sup>



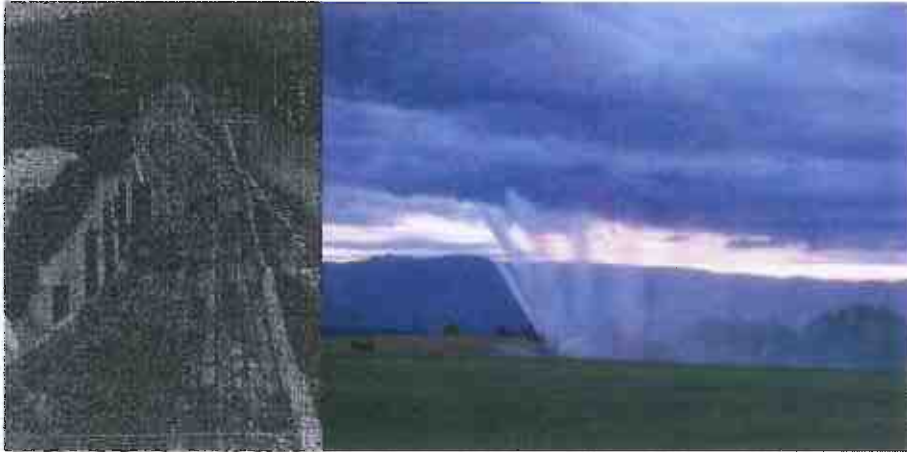
In 1954 a crowd of 5,000 farewelled Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh at Launceston Airport. The royal couple also visited Longford, prompting precautions against bovine embarrassment.<sup>62</sup>

Electrification and the wool boom worked in soldier settlers' favour. The hinterlands of most country towns received electric power during the two decades after World War II. Electricity lit dairies, drove water pumps, milking machines, separators, shearing and dipping plants, and created a market for instant (frozen) vegetables. In tandem with this advance, in 1950, at the start of the Korean War, the United States Government sparked the greatest wool boom in Australian history. The period 1954-64 was one of unparalleled agricultural and pastoral expansion. Larger properties, specialisation, the establishment of new Asian wool markets and improvement of herds through artificial insemination helped primary producers.<sup>63</sup>

The establishment of the Rivers and Water Supply Commission in 1958 signalled that finally irrigation was a State priority. Its first full-scale irrigation project was the Cressy-Longford Irrigation Scheme. This took spent water from the Poatina Power Station to irrigate lands in the Back Creek Valley between Cressy and Longford and along the Liffey River bellows Pitts Lane.<sup>64</sup> Longford Warden TJ Carins predicted that the new scheme would save small farms which were presently marginal operations. Already, in 1969, the district provided Launceston processors with 2,000 gallons of milk daily.<sup>65</sup> State Government funding and a Commonwealth Government grant enabled the scheme to be brought to fruition in 1974. Today there are about 94 kilometres of channels and pipelines irrigating more than 4,000 hectares.<sup>66</sup>

### Co-operation—but no amalgamation!

Despite the failure of municipal reform in 1939, the case for modernisation remained strong: services in country centres lagged decades behind those in the cities. Reforms were proposed.



On-going water issues. The 1969 flood was almost as devastating to the South Esk River catchment as that of 40 years earlier. Small councils could not adequately tackle the large problem of flood mitigation. (Left) The old wooden viaduct at Ross, which had been used as an emergency road in times of flood, was this time twisted out of service.<sup>67</sup> (Right) The advent of spray irrigation (pictured here near Cressy) during the 1950s and of irrigation schemes in following decades was a boon to agriculture.

Left photo from the *Examiner*, right photo by Fiona Dewar

#### **Some relevant suggestions for municipal reform 1952–79**

- (1952) Adult franchise instead of plural voting.<sup>68</sup>
- (1959) 14 councils, professionally trained municipal administrators.<sup>69</sup>
- (1961) The number of councils should be halved.<sup>70</sup>
- (1965) Fingal and Glamorgan Municipalities plus the Scamander region should form a new municipality. Campbell Town and most of Ross should join part of the existing Bothwell Municipality in a new jurisdiction. The rest of Ross which would help form a new municipality to the south.<sup>71</sup>
- (1973) Five regions should replace the municipalities. The Longford, Evandale, Fingal, Campbell Town and Ross Municipalities would be part of the same region.<sup>72</sup>
- (1979) The Longford Municipality should join with parts of the Evandale and Westbury Municipalities as the new Municipality of Cornwall.<sup>73</sup>

Local councils continued to refuse change, and again the State Government lacked the political will or consultation skills to intervene. However, councils achieved some efficiencies by learning to co-operate, a process perhaps encouraged by the establishment of the Northern Regional Committee after World War II to advise government on outstanding regional problems.<sup>74</sup>

#### **Some examples of efficiencies achieved by co-operation**

- In the 1950s the Fingal Council worked with Aberfoyle to provide and maintain streets and establish a new water supply.<sup>75</sup> The Council also tiptoed around the union policy of 'one man, one job' in order to appoint an Aberfoyle mine worker as night cartman.<sup>76</sup>
- In 1968 the Department of Aviation contributed 20% of the cost of Evandale's new water scheme, which also served Launceston Airport.<sup>77</sup>



One aspect of local government which changed very slowly was male domination. Each of the northern Midlands councils celebrated their centenary without producing a single female representative. The first appears to have been Ross Council's Mary Keach (pictured above), appointed in 1968. Nine years later, Barbara Stebbings was elected at Longford. Fingal had to wait until 1983—120 years after the municipality's establishment—when Ruth Saunders was welcomed to the chamber.<sup>78</sup>

- In 1973 the Longford Meat Company agreed to meet the continuing costs of Longford's sewerage scheme, of which it was by far the biggest user.<sup>79</sup>

For decades, the Campbell Town and Ross Municipalities seemed the most likely amalgamators—but those concerned saw it as a last resort.<sup>80</sup> Former Ross Councillor Kenneth Von Bibra recalls Campbell Town Warden Reg Taylor telling a commissioner into local government in the 1970s,

"Old son, if you join Ross and Campbell Town up there'll be blood in the gutters." So the two municipalities might have got into bed, but they were nowhere near consummating a marriage!<sup>81</sup>

### **The development of tourism**

The enthusiasm of Launceston motor sport fans and proximity to freight and passenger facilities guaranteed interest in a northern Midlands motor racing venue. Yet the Longford Council was slow to embrace the potential economic benefits of big spectator sporting events. In 1953 the Council allowed car and motorcycle races to be held on municipal roads once a year—so long as all profits went to local charities.<sup>82</sup> This led to the development of Tasmania's first international standard road racing circuit by the Longford Motor Racing Association. With John Youl's Tasmanian Motor Racing Company opening the Symmons Plains Raceway in 1960, the northern Midlands had two international standard venues in the space of 20 kilometres. The Longford circuit gained the reputation for being the fastest in the country, attracting champion drivers and riders such as Jack Brabham and Geoff Duke. With insufficient State Government backing, the annual Longford event folded in 1968, leaving Symmons Plains as Tasmania's primary motor racing venue.<sup>83</sup>

The impact of cars extended way beyond the race track. The percentage of the Tasmanian workforce engaged in primary production more than halved in the years 1954-71, representing less than 8% of the workforce in 1971.<sup>84</sup> While mechanisation partly accounts for the drop in workers, from the 1960s economic and social forces also disadvantaged farmers. There was less financial incentive to stay on the farm, better work opportunities in cities—and increased motor vehicle ownership (the rate almost doubled between 1960 and 1982) made it easier to leave the farm for the city.<sup>85</sup> From 1959, the popularity of Tasmania's roll-on/roll-off Bass Strait ferries confirmed that, in a time of general prosperity, Australians were more mobile.



The Longford raceway in its heyday. (Left) Bob Curran, driving a Triumph TR4, spins off the circuit in the Scratch Race. (Right) Flags are up and all eyes trained on the action.  
Photos courtesy of the State Library of Tasmania, Launceston

Tourism became a priority for local authorities. In 1971, Ross became the first town bypassed by the Midlands Highway, losing its function as a service centre to travellers. It gained tranquility and the chance to focus on its built heritage. Like Evandale and Longford, it developed its colonial history to win tourists, restoring the 1836 Ross Bridge and floodlighting historic churches.<sup>86</sup>



While the historic Ross Bridge (left) was long celebrated, the Government Railways' scrapping of ornamental pillars from the Longford Railway Bridge (right)—showpiece of Tasmania's first railway—suggests that built heritage was not fully appreciated in the 1960s.  
Photo by Dan Fellow (left) and HJ King (right)

Courtesy of Heritage Highway Regional Tourism Association (left)  
and Maggie Humphrey (right)

In 1973 Evandale joined Ross, Richmond and Longford in declaring itself an historic town.<sup>87</sup> By 1990 it had 29 buildings on the Register of the National Estate and 32 classified by the National Trust.<sup>88</sup> Floodlighting of Campbell Town's historic buildings was carried out as a bicentennial project.<sup>89</sup> Longford had magnificent Georgian architecture, but Longford Councillors disagreed about whether it had the accommodation to keep tourists in the area.<sup>90</sup> Events such as the now defunct Longford Folk Festival, the Longford New Year's Day Race Meeting, the Fingal Valley Festival, the John Glover Arts Festival and the Evandale Village Fair and National Penny Farthing Championship have all explored community traditions or historic heritage.



A central Tasmanian location near the Launceston Airport and other transport facilities made the northern Midlands ideal for hosting big agricultural events.

(Left) Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser opens the World Ploughing Championships at 'Mount Ireh' near Longford in 1982. With him from left are former Evandale Warden and National Ploughing Association President David Chugg and World Ploughing Association Chairman Arie Stehouwer. (Right) Agfest '84 at the Symmons Plains Raceway. In its second year, the annual agricultural field days events had already outgrown the circuit. The Southern Hemisphere's oldest agricultural show continued to thrive only about 30 kilometres away from Agfest at Campbell Town, demonstrating that tradition and innovation were not mutually exclusive.

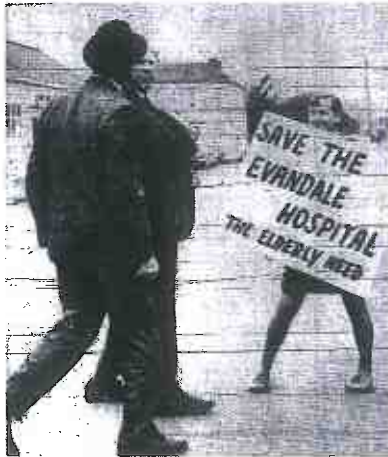
Photos courtesy of Don Walker and Janet Anderson

The northern Midlands' agricultural heritage was placed on the world stage in 1982. The World Ploughing Championships at 'Mount Ireh' near Longford recognised the importance of agriculture to an area in which ploughing has been practised as a sport for more than 150 years. The model plough in the grounds of Christ Church Illawarra celebrates the international event by crowning a cairn containing plaques from 22 competing nations. The World Ploughing Championships were a catalyst for the development of Agfest, Tasmania's enormously successful annual agricultural field days first staged on the Symmons Plains Raceway in 1983, and today at Oaks near Carrick.

### **Diminishing local services**

Increasing urbanisation erodes small centres. Services like post offices, hospitals, doctors, banks, libraries and schools are the lifeblood, not just of a service centre, but of a community, and their loss is felt keenly by local businesses and residents alike. Many local libraries had a long, proud tradition. Evandale, for example, had established a library in 1847, even before the advent of municipal government. At her retirement in 1980, Campbell Town's librarian, Joyce Leedham, had given 31 years of service.<sup>91</sup> In 1975, however, the formerly council-owned public libraries came under the control of the Department of Education and the Arts. In 1990 consultancy firm Cresap recommended the closure of 33 branch libraries, including those at Evandale and Ross.<sup>92</sup> Affected communities would be serviced by a bookmobile.

Medical services were likewise affected. In 1980 Campbell Town celebrated the centenary of its hospital, but the familiar difficulty of attracting doctors to rural districts was soon being felt.<sup>93</sup> In Longford there were fears that Toosey Memorial Hospital might close in 1990 and the local Post Office in 1991.<sup>94</sup> Against the wishes of local residents, Evandale's Hospital closed in 1991.<sup>95</sup>



A flashpoint between tiers of government in 1971: State Minister for Health Dr Nigel Abbott (left) faces picketers as he leaves a meeting with Evandale Warden RAC Cameron (centre). The State Government had earlier announced that the Evandale Hospital would be turned into a minimum security prison.  
Photo from the *Mercury* newspaper<sup>96</sup>



(Left) Rossarden in 1979 or 1980. (Centre) Only a few houses and the public hall remain at Storys Creek today, three decades after the tin and tungsten mine closed. (Right) The proximity of the mine's tailings dump and running water, however, is a reminder of remediation issues at abandoned mines.

Photos courtesy of (left) State Library of Tasmania, Launceston, and (centre and right) Nic Haygarth

The closure of the tin and tungsten mines at Rossarden and Storys Creek in the early 1980s anticipated the inevitable decline of community facilities and the onset of unemployment. Just as in the old farming and mining community of Royal George, the people who stayed on in those communities were joined by newcomers taking advantage of cheap housing. Changing communities have new needs—especially those with abandoned mines in their water catchment.



# Building the community

From rural village to global village  
1993 to present

These acts of economic rationalisation emphasised the greater community strength achievable by council amalgamation. Yet it took a more collaborative approach from state government in the years 1990–93 to finally—at the fifth attempt—reform the Tasmanian municipal system, reducing the number of councils from 46 to 29. A 'modernisation' agreement between the State Government and the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) was the catalyst for co-operative reform.<sup>97</sup>

Northern Midlands Councillors 2011: (left to right) Cr Jeff Carins, Cr Ian Goninon, Cr Matthew Brooks, Deputy Mayor David Downie, Mayor Kim Polley, Cr Michael Geeves, Cr Andrew Calvert, Cr Mary Knowles, Cr Richard Goss



Councils in the northern Midlands feared loss of their local identity. Each was prepared to amalgamate with a smaller council—Longford with Evandale, Evandale with Campbell Town, Campbell Town with Ross—in order to preserve its own primacy. When the Local Government Advisory Board's final report in February 1992 proposed the present Northern Midlands Municipal Area, which included part of the existing Fingal Municipality, the smaller councils expressed concern that they would be dominated by the Longford Council, fears that were reflected in efforts to have the new council headquarters established away from Longford. Checks and balances were instituted to ensure fair representation: Longford was granted four councillors and the other councils five between them. A Transition Committee chaired by Kenneth von Bibra from the Ross Council oversaw the preparations for amalgamation. No staff was retrenched, reductions being made by natural attrition.<sup>98</sup>

One of the advantages of combining four-and-a-half municipalities was the opportunity to start afresh, discarding all old practices in favour of an efficient, modern corporate model. 'The old councils just went on and on year after year', former Fingal Councillor and Northern Midlands Deputy Mayor Don McShane recalls. 'It was what it had been for generations.'<sup>99</sup> The neighbourliness of the small councils may have been lost (four members of the 12-person Fingal Council even shared the same car when travelling to and from council meetings in the early 1990s), but economies of scale brought previously unachievable benefits.<sup>100</sup>

The establishment of the Northern Midlands Municipal Chambers typifies the new council's innovation. New General Manager, Gerald Monson, formerly Council Clerk at Evandale, calculated that \$150,000 could be saved by retaining the Longford Council Chambers and closing the others. Some councillors were sceptical that the single-storey 1936 Longford Chambers could be upgraded for \$150,000. Having ascertained the requirements of a modern office, Monson asked architect Robert Morris-Nunn whether the Longford Chambers could be enlarged compliantly. Morris-Nunn was able to bring the project in on budget by utilising the peaked roof to install a mezzanine floor. As a sweetener to the Evandale community, the History Room

which occupied the former Library was shifted into the now vacant Evandale Council Chambers.<sup>101</sup>



(Left) Replacing the Morningside Bridge near Campbell Town has been Northern Midlands' largest road infrastructure project. Today 80% of the municipal area's 183 bridges are concrete. The written-down value of road assets is \$151 million. (Right) Northern Midlands' social capital and human heritage, on the other hand, are priceless. Here Tasmania's chief nurse Fiona Stoker (far left) opens a tribute to local bush nurses at Avoca in 2009. With her are (left to right) the artist Bruno Barcodi, Northern Midlands Mayor Kim Polley, Heritage Highway Tourism Region Association Chairman Len Langan and historian Dr Marita Bardenhagen.

Key decisions were made at early council meetings. Firstly, it was defined that councillors directed and managers managed those directions, with no interference from councillors in how their directions were carried out. Secondly, the decision to convert all road bridges from timber to concrete saved on infrastructure costs. Given that, covering 5,130 square kilometres, the Northern Midlands Municipal Area is one of the largest of the 29 new council areas, and at 979 kilometres (today) has the largest road network of all Tasmanian municipal areas, this was sound planning.

General Manager Gerald Monson streamlined Council processes and, according to Councillor and present Deputy Mayor David Downie, changed its work ethic.<sup>102</sup> Inaugural Northern Midlands Mayor Kenneth von Bibra pays tribute to Monson, Works Manager Wayne Chellis and Corporate Services Manager Maree Bricknell. Community assets are improved each year. Northern Midlands was Tasmania's first debt-free council, and for years kept rate rises beneath the CPI figure.<sup>103</sup>

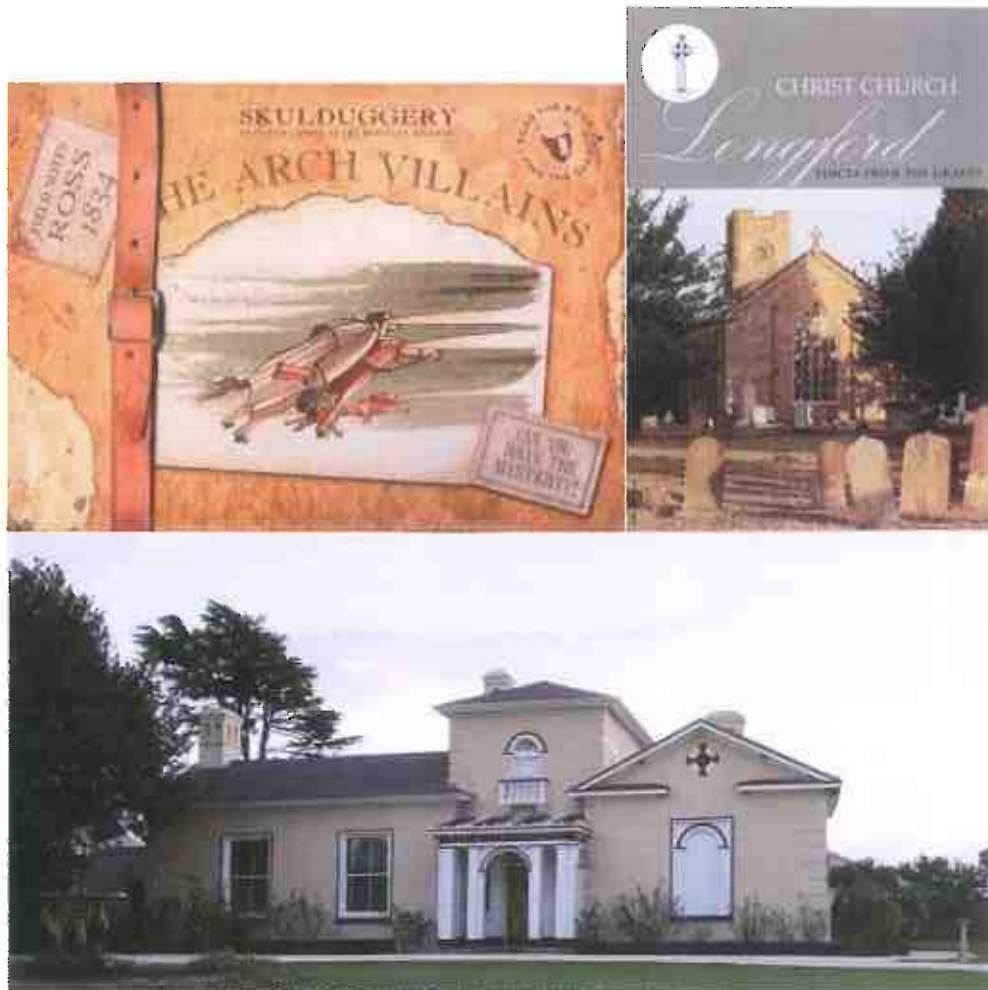
### **The Northern Midlands Municipal Area today**

Modernisation of local government went beyond amalgamation. The *Local Government Act* (1993) allowed all people on the electoral roll, that is, non-ratepayers as well as ratepayers, to vote in council elections. It also enabled postal ballots to be used in the hope of increasing voter participation.<sup>104</sup> In 1994, council clerks became general managers, wardens became mayors. Today, mayors are elected by the people, not as they formerly were by a vote around the council table.

Reform will not end there. In 1997, in *The Nixon Report: Tasmania Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Chairman of the Commission of the Commonwealth State Inquiry into the Tasmanian Economy, Peter Nixon, recommended a maximum of eight Tasmanian municipalities.<sup>105</sup> While the Rundle State Government subsequently failed in an effort to further rationalise local government, using the sort of 'primarily "top-down" approach' which had never worked previously, further change is inevitable.<sup>106</sup>

The Northern Midlands Council embraced change at its inception. A system of local committees enabled Northern Midland councillors to defuse some of the angst about

loss of local identity, break down barriers and to become apprised of local needs. At a meeting with the Rossarden community, for example, councillors encouraged residents to set up their own committee and list the things they wanted. The Council worked through all the items on the list until it ran out of money.<sup>107</sup>



Heritage Highway Region Tourism Association Inc initiatives enliven Northern Midlands history. (Top left) Longford, Ross and Oatlands, in the Southern Midlands Municipal Area, are the settings for *Skulduggery: Unsolved Crimes of the Heritage Highway*, an interactive game developed by a team led by Associate Professor Hamish Maxwell-Stewart of the University of Tasmania. Visitors play detective alongside real-life 1830s convict constable John James.<sup>108</sup> (Top right) Convicts tell their tales in *Voices from the Grave*. (Bottom) World Heritage listing of the Woolmers (pictured) and Brickendon Estates, ancestral homes of the Archer family near Longford, showcases both the region's Georgian architecture and its rich convict heritage.

Today seven community forums—Longford, Cressy, Perth, Campbell Town, Ross, Evandale and Avoca/Royal George/Rossarden—meet regularly. Former Campbell Town Councillor Geoff Duncombe, who is now Chairperson of the Campbell Town Community Forum, believes that that particular forum gives locals a good opportunity to air grievances and that 'it is a good way for Council to get down to grass roots'.<sup>109</sup>

Co-operation, consultation and collaboration have been the keys to progress. Present General Manager Adam Wilson explains that while resource sharing by councils saves money, it also shares knowledge and skills and 'grows' staff. Better staff enjoying new opportunities are happier, contribute more and stay longer. Cross-fertilisation brings news ideas, increases contacts and solves problems. Recently, Northern Midlands has been resource sharing with Flinders Island, Meander, City of

Launceston, Break O'Day and King Island Councils—both neighbouring and more distant municipal areas.<sup>110</sup>



Home-grown chainsaw sculptor Eddie Freeman's thematic carvings in living tree trunks have given Perth (left) and Campbell Town (right) traffic-stopping attractions.

Photos by Leigh McCullagh and Dan Fellow

The Heritage Highway concept is an outstanding example of the benefits of regional co-operation. As the wool industry has declined, the heritage industry has boomed, enabling some big wool-growing estates to revel in the way they used to be. The Heritage Highway, the brainchild of Alistair Blunt, has been a collaboration between the Northern Midlands, Southern Midlands and Brighton Councils under the banner of the Heritage Highway Region Tourism Association Inc. This body, set up to operate at arm's length from councils, manages tourism in the region from Pontville northwards.<sup>111</sup> While the internet fuels a growing interest in genealogy, 'gutsy' themes articulate the secrets of Tasmania's historic heartland. The 'Drawing the Line' 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel project and the bicentennial commemoration of the arrival of settlers from Norfolk Island (1813–2013) will further invigorate Northern Midlands tourism.

One of Northern Midlands' innovations is Tasmania's first sewage reuse scheme. Another is the establishment of Tasmania's first mobile childcare service, which alternates between centres in Avoca, Campbell Town and Cressy. A long day centre operates at Perth. With avenues to good quality childcare limited in the bush, this mobile service enables some women to participate in the annual harvest and others to return to regular work.<sup>112</sup>



Longford levee bank construction

Town	Population 2006
Longford	3,027
Perth	2,239
Evandale	1,059
Campbell Town	772
Cressy	670
Ross	272
<b>Nthn Midlands</b>	<b>12,091</b>

Population of major centres 2006

In 1973 the Longford Council built a flood levee which helped combat subsequent floods. In 2005–07, however, the Northern Midlands Council prepared Longford for its next '1 in 100 year' flood by constructing a levee bank and temporary flood gates. Estimating that 345 homes were at threat and that the cost of the next big flood could

be \$13.45 million, Council decided that the \$5 million investment in the levee bank was 'a wise and justified use of public funds'. The Council, Commonwealth and State Governments shared the cost of the massive project.

The levee freed Longford from strict planning regulations and insurance problems which had inhibited economic growth. The result of the construction of these earthen levees and concrete walls is the flood-proofing of 80 hectares of previously undevelopable land with the potential for development of up to 700 allotments.<sup>113</sup>

Other major infrastructure projects have included the planning and development of the Translink Light Industrial Area at Western Junction, the \$9.5 million water treatment plant for Longford, Perth and Evandale, upgrading the Longford Waste Water Treatment Plant and the Campbell Town-Ross Water Supply Pipeline project.

Small towns have been big winners from amalgamation. In Campbell Town for example, the Job Skills program re-trained some people left unemployed by the wool crash.<sup>114</sup> One of the municipal area's poorer performing schools was transformed into one of the best.<sup>115</sup> Garbage collection was introduced to Campbell Town, with treated water to follow.<sup>116</sup> The development of a well-designed toilet block in Valentines Park focused attention on the commercial centre. Campbell Town's tourism assets have increased, and it has a vibrant heart as one of the hubs of the Heritage Highway.<sup>117</sup>

Poatina is another success story. Council negotiations with Fusion and the Hydro-Electric Commission enabled that Christian youth and community organisation to buy the one-time Hydro showpiece village of Poatina in 1995 as its worldwide headquarters, a resort village, conference and training centre.<sup>118</sup> The new residents of Poatina and the new resources which have been assimilated into the Northern Midlands community have enriched it.

If local government is about providing the best quality of life we can afford, then investment in people is the ultimate way forward.



The logos of the four former municipalities which joined with part of the Fingal Municipality to form the Northern Midlands Municipal Area: (left to right) Longford, Evandale, Campbell Town and Ross.

As the Northern Midlands looks to the future, the distinct constituent parts of today's municipal area are not forgotten. Northern Midlands Mayor Kim Polley acknowledges all contributions to the greater whole:

I would like to recognise and thank all former and current employees and councillors of the respective Councils who have assisted their organisations to be successful and also engendered pride in their communities. Without their dedication the Northern Midlands would not be where it is today—a wonderful place to live, work and play.

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<sup>115</sup> Interview with Kenneth von Bibra 9 June 2011.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Geoff Duncombe 14 June 2011.

<sup>117</sup> Interviews with Kenneth von Bibra 9 June 2011, David Downie 1 June 2011 and Geoff Duncombe 14 June 2011; The Campbell Town Tasmania Revitalisation Project

[www.latrobe.edu.au/csarc/conferences/fact2/nonref/richardson\\_doc.pdf](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/csarc/conferences/fact2/nonref/richardson_doc.pdf).

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Kenneth von Bibra 9 June 2011.