

THE LOCAL RAGS

by Harry Dunn

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Way back in the Nineteen Fifties,
The Dunns moved around,
Korumburra, Leongatha, then Inverloch.
And in those pre-telly days,
I read whatever I found,
Including the local papers,
Parish-pump and local news,
In blackish print, with an occasional smudge or a blot;
I loved that page where readers write in
To express their ideas and views,
Especially when their letters got printed:
Some openly slandered their neighbours and friends
While others just quietly hinted.

In those innocent days
The papers and wireless were kings.
3UL, we thought was real cool, via our Astor mantle
With pop music, local footy and news;
And all manner of South Gippy things.
But we were spoiled for choice by the 'locals',
Those arteries of gossip and news;
Their reporters worked round the clock,
But the editor pulled all the strings.
So his were the only real views.

We had Tom Gannon's Express in Wonthaggi,
And the Sentinel too, a name which survives to this day,
The 'Gatha had their Great Southern Star;
In the Burra, Frank Juro – The Advocate,
Until Fifty-Nine, Christmas Day
When he bid his loyal readers *au 'voir*.
But the Burra's *Times* had verve and panache,
My favourite local by far
And its name still lives on in the *Sentinel Times*,
Where good DNA has kept it alive and on par.

In the era which I'm recalling
Some things were a bit more relaxed,
And the news they reported each week
Wasn't spoiled or much over-taxed
By the need for details excessive
As long as that paper came out on time,
Their readers cut them some slack
And if some details were missing,
Or the editor was singing his favourite song,
Its readers were mostly impassive
And their tolerance level impressive.

The Times got most of its scoops
From sources they described as 'reliable'
From a 'Spokesman' for this or for that,
Who preferred to remain anonymous.
Mostly old toss-pots who knew all the loops,
Shopkeepers with shop names eponymous
Some old geezers who drank at the clubs
And others who propped up the bars
At The Top, The Middle and Bottom,
Korumburra's great trio of pubs.

But the *contemporary* Sentinel Times,
Which I just happen to now be reading,
Is light years ahead in appearance,
And its sources sound mostly reliable
But... *there isn't much scandal and crime.*
Where's the colourful stuff their grand-dads published
Some of it undeniable;
And where's all that colourful prose
Which nourished our passions and ire?
Where are the hints as to who was seen running,
Just before the start of the fire?
And where did old So-and-so get all that dough
To buy another slow race-horse?
And who was that un-named third party
Caught up in the latest divorce?
And was there really a punch-up at Council,
And how did those long shots from nowhere
Manage to give our top golfers a bath?
Never mind, that's really just par for the course.
But who was the as-yet un-named reveller
Who drove his car home from the pub
Along that freshly-paved path?

Well, of course we want some excitement
Along with the stock sales reports,
So, have things really changed all that much
Or is it just me over-heating?
Have my past memories been corrupted
By exposure to too much telly?
And will I become over-wrought and excited
When they announce the start of World War Three?
Probably not; my craving for excitement has long been requited
And of course it's not right to expect them
To *invent* local scandal and gossip,
Just to amuse old rat-bags like me!