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HERITAGE SERVICES INFORMATION SHEET NUMBER 11

HISTORY OF THURINGOWA CITY COUNCIL

Under the *Divisional Boards Act* of 1879 the Thuringowa Division was formed. It covered an area that extended 170 kms along the coast from the mouth of the Burdekin River to Crystal Creek and inland to the coastal ranges. The Burdekin River formed the eastern boundary while the Leichhardt Range and Hervey and Paluma Ranges formed the inland boundary. In the north the boundary extended from the Paluma Range down Crystal Creek past Mutarnee to the coast. The municipality of Townsville was located within this area and consisted of the small area around the foot of Castle Hill.

Over the past 127 years the Thuringowa area has changed considerably, not the least of which has been the shifting boundary through which Thuringowa has gained and lost land to adjoining local authorities. Today the Thuringowa City area covers roughly the western third of the division's original area.

After the formation of the Division in 1879 the next two decades were ones of progress. Suburbs grew rapidly and by

1902 Thuringowa had 1020 dwellings listed on its ratebooks. Such rapid growth drove infrastructure development and thus early Chairmen, Arthur Bundock and Joseph Hodel, led the way with the construction of the Ross River Bridge, the bridge at the Causeway and the Stewart Creek Bridge. These roads and bridges were constructed to serve not only Thuringowa's rural base but also its residential subdivisions of Hermit Park, Mundingburra and Rosslea. Water reticulation and sanitary services were established in these suburbs and street lighting and beautification work carried out along Charters Towers Road. Also during this period the Council's first administration building was constructed at the Causeway, near the intersection of Flinders Street West and Ingham Road.

Under the 1902 *Local Authorities Act*, divisional areas were renamed shires. Consequently, in 1903 the Thuringowa Divisional Board became the Thuringowa Shire Council. The period up to 1918 was one of consolidation and minor works not major projects.





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In 1918 the Queensland Government transferred most of the urban area of Thuringowa to Townsville. The foreshore north as far as Cape Pallarenda and all the land north of the Ross River as far west as what is now Bamford Lane were lost. The population of Thuringowa dropped to 2,500, as the Council lost the suburbs of Belgian Gardens, West End, Pimlico, Hyde Park and Hermit Park, and the riverside farming areas of Mundingburra and Aitkenvale. As a result of this boundary change the Thuringowa Shire Office became located within the Townsville City Council area. The Council had objected strenuously to the excision and negotiated hard for compensation for the loss of land and infrastructure as well as outstanding loans. The episode placed enormous stress on the Chairman and Councillors and ultimately impacted upon the health of the Chairman, William Ireland, who died in July 1920.

The loss of this area meant Thuringowa became a poor rural shire serving the five rural areas of Giru, Woodstock, Mutarnee, Paluma and Rollingstone. Thuringowa's rural character predominated until the

1960s when urban development began in earnest. The Council adopted a conservative approach to policy during this period that included not only the depression years of the 1930s but also the period of World War II.

Although conservative in policy during this time, Thuringowa managed to take the initiative and implement three projects of regional significance. These were the Haughton Tramway extension in 1922 and the region's first commercial airfield in 1930 both during the Chairmanship of James Cummins and, under Chairman Charles Wordsworth, in 1935, the construction of the Toonpan Dam. While these were not expensive projects, they revealed the Council's commitment to the region as a whole.

In addition, James Cummins' Council was notable for its nomination to Council of one of the first women to local government in Queensland. Isabella Fitzpatrick, a businesswoman and community figure from the Rollingstone area replaced Abraham Ditton on the Council in 1924. While she did not stand for re-election later that year, her nomination at a time





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when women had just been allowed to enter local government signified Thuringowa's recognition of the contribution women could make to Thuringowa's future. However their initial prudence was short-lived, as women did not serve again on Thuringowa Council until 1970, when Ilsa Ryan was elected to Council.

While the Council maintained a policy of low rating and low spending during the period until the 1960s, infrastructure did continue to be established in the area, particularly as a result of Thuringowa's role during World War II. The Townsville/Thuringowa area was an important staging point for the Pacific war and was host to seventy thousand military personnel in hospitals, staging camps, air support depots and supply facilities during the 1942-1945 period. The government developed infrastructure in the area to connect and support the area's numerous military, air and service establishments.

The period from the 1960s to the present has been an era of progress for Thuringowa. Under John Brabon, William De Coursey, Dan Gleeson and Les Tyrell the area has gone ahead in leaps and

bounds. Its resurgence began with John Brabon and the construction of a new shire hall in 1963. The new hall replaced the old shire chambers at the causeway and was considered a symbol of Council's commitment to modernity.

As a priority the Council undertook major works projects to upgrade roads, and provide water and sewerage services to its fast developing suburbs. William De Coursey implemented water reticulation and sewerage connections in the new suburbs of Thuringowa. John Brabon widened Council interests to include welfare services and libraries. The Council developed recreational facilities; parks, gardens, playing fields and amenities. In 1979, under Dan Gleeson, Thuringowa Shire Council administration centre was moved back into the Thuringowa local area and in 1986 Thuringowa became a City.

Under the leadership of the present mayor, Les Tyrell, Thuringowa remains an interesting mix of urban, pastoral and industrial interests. There are still large cattle properties, sugar cane farms and orchards of mangoes and lychees within the city limits.





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Nickel is processed at Yabulu and light and heavy industries supply the needs of rapid growth in the region. Residential development continues at a fast rate with new subdivisions in the Northern Beaches popular with new home buyers, retirees and those interested in a 'sea-change'. Les Tyrell's Council is committed to providing its residents with a quality lifestyle and is about to begin Riverway, a project that will provide world-class recreational facilities for its expanding community.

Thuringowa is one of the fastest growing local government areas in Australia.

Acknowledgements

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- Lyn Henderson, *More Than Roads Rates and Rubbish*, PhD Thesis, James Cook University, 1992.
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