

Migrant stories

In the 1910s and 1920s, some assisted English migrants settled in Sutherland Shire. Then in the early 1950s families moving from the inner city and St George to inexpensive housing stimulated Sutherland Shire's population growth.

Migrants who flocked to Australia, occasionally came to the outer metropolitan area, but usually remained close to work in the industrial suburbs. Despite some non-British migrants making Sutherland Shire their home, the district's population has remained essentially Anglo-Celtic, as in the past.

British and European migrants were housed at the Cronulla Migrant Hostel from 1949 to 1967. This hostel was sited in one of Cronulla's most spectacular locations, adjacent to the CSIRO Fisheries and Research Station at Hungry Point.

Accommodation was basic, but because of its location the hostel was said to be the 'best in Australia'. The South Cronulla Progress Association, however, believed the Hostel was not 'in the best interests of this district'. It closed in 1964, reopened in 1966 for British migrants, but closed permanently in 1967. Two former hostel buildings – now heritage listed – can still be seen at Hungry Point.

Migrant stories

In the 1910s and 1920s, at a time when assisted English migrants were coming to Australia, a number of the new arrivals settled in Sutherland Shire, and were welcomed by fellow countrymen and women who had arrived earlier.

Leslie Clarke recalled arriving from England as a child in 1912. His father took up a 5-acre block of 'virgin bush' at Gymea Bay, as the Holt-Sutherland Company was offering cheap leasehold land. A cart track – later Forest Road – was cleared and the family set about building their first home in Sutherland Shire, a crude shed made of 'bush poles, tarred felt and corrugated iron'.

Englishmen Ned and Jack Scribbins had settled in Miranda in the early 1890s, and established a successful poultry farm. In about 1915 Ned sold four of his eight acres and with the proceeds built a weatherboard cottage on the remaining land. He invited his daughter Mary and her husband George Swattridge to join him in Australia.

George, Mary and their four children sailed from Plymouth, under the escort of a Japanese destroyer in February 1918 and arrived in Sydney a month later. Ned died not long after and his son-in-law George passed away in September 1919.

Undeterred Mary Swattridge sponsored her friend Beatrice Nicholls and her family to migrate from their home in south Wales. While Beatrice enthusiastically embraced the chance of a new life with better economic prospects, her husband Jesse was a reluctant migrant. Their teenage daughter Dorothy (1908-1993), who later married young George Swattridge, recalled how they arrived in Sydney on 8 October 1921 and travelled to Sutherland by train, then by steam tram to Miranda, alighting at the corner of the Kingsway and Sylvania Road. In 1988 she wrote in her memoirs:

It was night-time and when the tram left us it was pitch black, not a street light anywhere ... we saw a light coming up Sylvania Road. It was George's brother Bill coming to meet us. That was our introduction to Miranda 67 years ago.

After staying with their friends for a few weeks, the Nicolls eventually move to an eight-acre Holt-Sutherland lease near the intersection of Garnet and Marshall Roads, Sutherland. Dorothy Swattridge recalled how there was, 'no water, electricity or tar sealed roads, only rough bush tracks'. The family built a 'rough house of four rooms ... in a real pioneering area' that was 'all bush and rocks'. As they had neighbours from Lancashire, this area – now Albany Place, Kirrawee – became known as 'Pommy gully'. Beatrice who apparently 'collected people' like others collect stamps, was affectionately known as the 'duchess of Pommy Gully'.

Not all English migrants were impressed with their new life. Lena Bridge recalled her unhappy early years in Caringbah where she arrived as a 16-year-old with her family. In 1922 quiet Caringbah was not where this teenager from Manchester wanted to be. She later recalled how she would lay in bed at night under her

mosquito net thinking, 'What a terrible place this is. No electricity, no gas, no sewer, just flies, mosquitos, ants, spiders, sandflies, snakes and bedbugs'.

Lena eventually found her feet, as did other English migrants. Sport was often a catalyst for wider community involvement. Soccer has been popular in Sutherland Shire since the influx of these British migrants. By the 1920s the 'Miranda Congs' – attached to the Miranda Congregational Church – was a formidable team. Apparently, Mrs Dugdale of 'Pommy Gully', with her distinct Lancashire accent, was renowned for her loud barracking of the 'Gully boys'.

Post-war migrants

In the early 1950s, families moving from the inner city and the St George areas to more affordable housing, partly fuelled Sutherland Shire's dramatic population growth. It was a similar pattern in other outlying areas of Sydney such as Warringah Shire on the northern beaches. Migrants, who flocked to Australia at this time, only occasionally came to these outer reaches of the metropolitan area, but remained close to work opportunities in the older industrial parts of Sydney.

British migrants, and others from a range of nationalities, housed at the Cronulla Migrant Hostel were exceptions. From 1949 to 1967, this Hostel was sited in one of Cronulla's most spectacular locations, adjacent to the CSIRO Fisheries and Research Station at Hungry Point.

Cronulla Migrant Hostel

Accommodation was fairly basic at the Cronulla Migrant Hostel. A married couple were allocated a small room with two single beds and a cupboard, but no private bathroom or cooking facilities. Nevertheless, because of its beautiful location this was considered the 'best in Australia'. Apparently, it was so amenable, one migrant resided at the Hostel for ten years.

As housing on the Cronulla peninsula gradually transformed from shabby weekenders to more upmarket residences, the presence of the hostel became an irritant to some local people. The South Cronulla Progress Association in particular was disgruntled, as the hostel was said to be 'not in the best interests of this district'.

The hostel temporarily closed in 1964, but when plans to reopen it were announced the South Cronulla Progress Association claimed it was, 'out of character with the surrounding residential development' and was a 'constant source of annoyance to people living nearby'. South Cronulla was becoming an exclusive residential area.

In early 1966 the hostel re-opened to accommodate mainly British migrants. But a year later, now surplus to requirements, it closed again permanently. When the land was transferred to the CSIRO, South Cronulla Progress Association were again up in arms as it had wanted the site for public recreation. Long-standing members of the Association such as Charles Heyde remembered how local people and visitors had used this pleasant spot for recreation in the past.

Three former hostel buildings – now heritage listed – are still at Hungry Point. Although these humble structures provided only basic accommodation for newly arriving migrants, they are now valued as reminders of the past history of the site.

Erika and Kurt Springstub

As a young married couple Erika Springstub and her husband Kurt migrated to Australia from Germany in 1957. After the war she was stunned to learn from a friend, 'For one hour's work you can buy a whole case of bananas in Australia'. Apparently, this revelation convinced her and Kurt to migrate. Because Kurt was from East Germany, he had refugee status and so they were given a free passage to Australia on the Dutch vessel the *Groote Beer*.

They were housed at the Cronulla Migrant Hostel where they felt 'as though we were on a holiday'. Erika recalled how although 200 migrants could be accommodated in the ten buildings on the site, the hostel was never full during their time there. About 70 migrants – all married couples and single adults – were housed at Hungry Point. No children were allowed as, with its steep cliffs, the site was considered dangerous.

After ten days in Australia Erika, a trained shop assistant, and Kurt, a master painter, both had jobs. Kurt worked at the Lucas Heights reactor, while Erika was at Woolworths at Kings Cross. She returned home each evening at 7pm – after dinner. Although Kurt used to collect her meal at the last possible moment it was always cold. She has vivid memories of eating 'cold cabbage that wasn't cooked properly'.

Only 22 at the time, Erika found her 'little bit of school English' inadequate for the public contact position at Woolworths. She returned home in tears every night. Her husband gently encouraged her to keep going for 'just another day'. It did not take long for the Springstubs to become proficient in English as they were able to attend twice-weekly lessons at the hostel. Erika later worked at Woolworths in Rockdale and was on the staff when Woolworths opened their store in Cronulla in 1959.

After just one year, the Springstubs were able to buy a house on the corner of Sylvania Road and Omaru Avenue Miranda where Erika still lives. Now a widow, Erika has made many trips back to Germany, but happily returns to Sydney. In fact, she always felt that her time in Australia has been, 'a never-ending holiday'.

Migrants in the 1960s

Despite the fact some non-British migrants such as the Springstubs made Sutherland Shire their home after leaving Cronulla Hostel's 'holiday resort' atmosphere, the district's population remained essentially Anglo-Celtic, as it had been in the past. Over the next 20 years more English 'ten-pound Poms' arrived.

After a particularly severe winter in 1962/63, Jim and Barbara Partington decided to migrate to Australia with their two small daughters. While this harsh winter was crucial for Barbara, for Jim the decision had more to do with the British class system. He felt if his children grew up in Nottingham with regional accents, they would not have the chance to realise their full potential.

The Partingtons became 'ten-pound Poms' and sailed from Southampton in September 1963. An aunt and uncle who sponsored them brought them to Cronulla where they bought a house. Jim had no trouble getting work and Barbara and the children soon settled into their new life.

Later as the family grew, they bought a larger house in Miranda where they lived for 36 years. They were surprised to find how monarchist Australia was when they arrived as they had always been republican. They did not become Australian citizens until the requirement to swear allegiance to Queen Elizabeth II was removed.

Jim and Barbara Partington never regretted the decision to migrate, as the Australian way of life was congenial, especially the camaraderie amongst Barbara's colleagues when she worked as a journalist at the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader*.

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