

The *Observer*, a Cronulla newspaper

In 2020 Oyster Bay resident Leigh Wallbank and her brother Scott Williams donated copies of *The Cronulla Sutherland Advocate* and the *Observer* to Sutherland Shire Historical Society. These newspapers had been run by their grandfather, Fred Williams (Snr) and father Fred (Jnr) over periods from 1927.

While only random copies of the *Advocate* remain, there is a complete run of copies of the *Observer*, from 1940 to 1979, the years in which the Williams family operated this Cronulla newspaper.

As custodians of hard copies of this important primary source, Sutherland Shire Historical Society seeks to conserve in safe storage 40 years of the *Observer* newspaper and the remaining copies of the *Advocate*.

The *Observer*, a historic Cronulla newspaper

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The Cronulla Sutherland Advocate and the *Observer* under the stewardship of Fred Williams Snr, and later his son, Fred Williams Jnr., are closely connected with the history of Cronulla. Fred Williams Snr. started the *Cronulla Sutherland Advocate* in 1927, later selling it in 1938 to Councillor Frank Bardsley, who – it is alleged – used the newspaper for political purposes.

Meanwhile Fred Williams Snr worked as the manager for another local newspaper the *Observer*, which he bought from its owner E. Weekes in 1940. Within a year Bardsley's *Advocate* was out of business, and the *Observer* – published weekly – was thriving.

From 1941 Williams' 15-year-old son, Fred Williams Jnr began working with his father – editing, reporting, doing deliveries and selling advertisements. On his father's untimely death in 1943, Fred Williams Jnr – at the age of 17 – assumed control of the *Observer* as editor and publisher. As Cronulla boomed in the 1950s and 1960s, the *Observer* recorded the changes occurring and, in many ways, became the voice of Cronulla, until its closure in mid-1979.

Following the death of their father Fred Williams Jnr in 2018, Leigh Wallbank and Scott Williams decided to honour his memory by funding the digitisation of the existing copies of the *Observer*, up to the year 1954. Upon completion of this project these newspapers will be available on Trove. This will preserve and make accessible the valuable local history within their pages, relating to a period of unprecedented growth and dramatic change in Sutherland Shire generally and Cronulla in particular.

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References:

- 'Seaside Masts', *The Leader*, Cronulla Magazine, Oct. 2009, p.30
- Bill of Sale of the *Observer*, 31 December 1940
- Leigh Wallbank, email and phone, 9 August 2021
- Elizabeth Craig, 'Story of *The Advocate* and its successor, *The Observer*, *SSHS Bulletin*, November 2021, p.8