

Boat building in the Shire

The Sutherland Shire has many kilometres of waterways on the Hacking, Woronora and Georges Rivers. Many of the waterways are shallow, suitable only for small boats. Most of the riverside boatsheds combined small boatbuilding with boat hire, boat brokerage, ships chandlery and fishing tackle sales. The number of riverside boatsheds and the number that actually built boats is unknown, but at least five boatsheds existed on the Woronora River alone.

The items displayed were mostly collected from around Don Roberts' boatyard on the Georges River at Illawong. This boatyard built only timber boats up to 50 feet (12m) long from the 1940s up till the 1980s.

1. Traditional block (pulley):

This is a replica block of a type used on small sailing boats up till the early 20th century.

2. Rowlock (oarlock):

These were used on the hundreds of clinker rowing boats that were once common on Sydney waterways.

Elias Laycock's boatshed was built in the early 20th century and situated at the head of Gunnamatta Bay.

Elias was a champion sculler in the 1870s/1880s and visitors to the shed always noticed the winner's crossed sculls on the wall. *The Australian Country Life* noted in September 1911 (page 32) that sailing boats could be hired for outside fishing from Laycock for 10 shillings, 15 shillings and one pound, according to the size of the boat. A professional fisherman could also be sent along to manage the boat and show where the best fishing grounds were.

Laycock died in 1938. After his death his daughter-in-law ran the boat shed, buying prawns from the markets, salting down and selling the smaller ones for bait and cooking the larger prawns for sale at the boat shed. The family lived on seafood – oyster patties, lobster caught in pots and an abundance of fish.

Reference:

- Pauline Curby, *A Pictorial History of Cronulla*, Kingsclear Books, 1998, p.19
- Merle, Kavanagh, 'Early Commercial Boatsheds – Boat Building, Industrial and Hiring, Pt 1, Port Hacking, *SSHS Bulletin*, November 2010, pp.31-34.

Merle Kavanagh researched and wrote a series of three articles on early commercial boatsheds in the Shire's waterways.

- Part 2 appears in *SSHS Bulletin*, February 2011, pp.18-19
- Part 3 is published in *SSHS Bulletin*, May 2011, pp.17-19

These can be accessed and downloaded from SSHS website: shirehistory.org. Go to main menu and scroll down to Publications/Bulletins