



NUMBER: 214 — FEBRUARY 2020



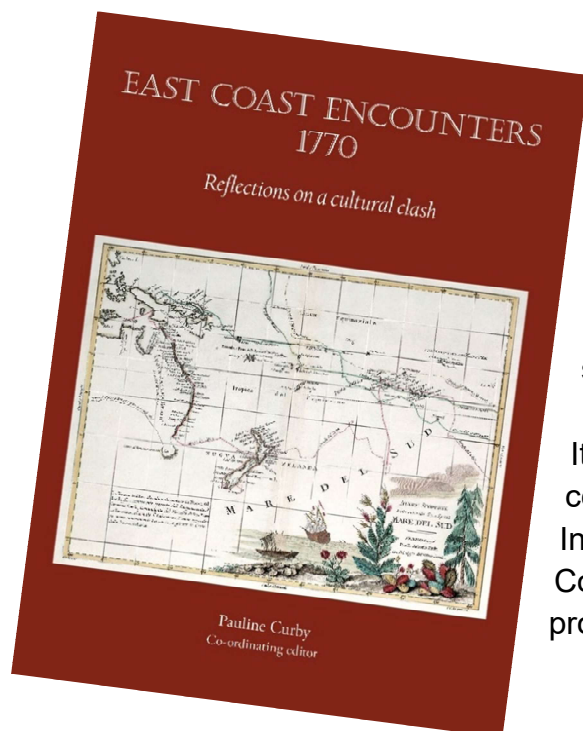
Carl Plate at his Woronora studio, 1964 [Courtesy: Cassi Plate]

See the story of Woronora's post-war artist colony, page 25.

MINDFUL OF THE PAST – FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE

EMAIL: shirehistory@gmail.com **SSHS WEBSITE:** www.shirehistory.org

FACEBOOK: Sutherland Shire Historical Society



East Coast Encounters 1770 was produced by SSHS Publications Committee to mark the 250th anniversary of the arrival of Lt Cook and his *Endeavour* crew to our shores.

It is not just another book about James Cook. It is a compilation of articles by ten different authors – both Indigenous and European – reflecting on the impact of Cook's encounters with the local inhabitants in 1770. It provides new perspectives on a well-known story.

For an idea of the scope of perspectives covered in this book, here are the titles of the articles included, together with the authors.

East Coast Encounters 1770
will be launched

at **Club on East** (7 East Parade,
Sutherland)

on **Saturday, 18th April at 1.30 pm**

All welcome!

Normally \$35, books will be
available for sale on that day for a
discounted \$30

Attached is an order form with
details of book and delivery costs
and how to pay

1. Pauline Curby, *The Kurnell Peninsula, an isolated community*
2. Paul Brunton, *The quest for the legendary Great South Land*
3. Elizabeth Adams, *Uncommon endeavour: James Cook from Yorkshire to Newfoundland, 1728-1768*
4. John Gascoigne, *Banks and Solander: a Linnaean partnership*
5. Ian Stewart, *Remembering Forby Sutherland*
6. Bruce Howell, *First encounter: a reassessment based on the Endeavour journals*
7. Ray Ingre, Shane Ingre and Paul Irish, *Warrawarrawa – What was really said to Cook?*
8. Beau James and Stephen Gapps, *Too Many Captain Cooks - the National Maritime Museum collection*
9. Stephanie Bailey, *Commemorating Cook*
10. Mark McKenna, *A bridge to reconciliation for Cooktown – and for Australia?*



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SUTHERLAND SHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE SOCIETY

The SSHS has a proud tradition stretching back more than 50 years and is an entirely volunteer and not-for-profit organisation. Over the years the Society has taken on the responsibility of recording and preserving local history so that Shire residents can learn more about our past.

WRITING FOR THE *BULLETIN*

Since its beginning, the Society has fostered the skills of local writers and their work is recorded in the *Bulletin* – copies of which can be accessed in Sutherland Shire Library Local Studies room. Members and non-members are invited to submit material for future editions and although we give local history priority, we are happy to accept stories on Australian history generally. We ask that you quote your sources and acknowledge any material used as well as obtaining permission from authors. Any enquiries contact the Editor: Elizabeth Craig at elizabeth.craig@y7mail.com or phone 0491 096 642.

Digital copies of the *Sutherland Shire Historical Society Inc Bulletin* are emailed to all Society members with online access. Print copies are sent free to members with out online access. Digital copies are also emailed to all Shire council libraries, the Mayor, Shire General Manager, all Councillors, the Royal Australian Historical Society, National Trust of NSW, NSW State Library, National Library of Australia, University of Sydney, University of NSW, State Rail Authority, Australia Post Archives, Sydney Water Board Historical Research Unit and Shire high school libraries. Issues from September 1966 are also posted on the SSHS website: www.shirehistory.org

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REGISTRATION

SSHS BULLETIN – ISSN 1444-2930 (from February 2000); ISSN 2652-0400 (Online) (from May 2019)

Society publications are registered with the National Library of Australia in accordance with International Standard Serial Numbering and have an ISSN or ISBN number.

SUTHERLAND SHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETINGS

Monthly meetings are held on the THIRD Saturday of each month at 1.30 pm (except December) – at Stapleton Centre, 3A Stapleton Avenue, Sutherland (near the library). We welcome visitors to hear our guest speakers, mix with local history enthusiasts and share afternoon tea and a chat.

SUTHERLAND SHIRE MUSEUM

Our museum is located in the Sutherland Memorial School of Arts, 23 East Parade Sutherland (on the western side of Sutherland Railway Station).

Aside from the Christmas–New Year period, the Museum is open on each Saturday from 9am to 1pm and contains some gems of Shire history and a fine collection of old photographs. For schools and other groups requiring a special tour at other times: contact the Curator, Ian Kolln on 9528 3094 or iankolln@yahoo.com.au.

DONATING MATERIAL: If you have items of historical significance for Sutherland Shire, we welcome their donation to the museum to keep for posterity. If you do not wish to part with items, we would appreciate having copies of documents and photographs. Temporary loans for specific periods are also welcome. Cash donations and sponsorship assist us to improve the museum and perhaps you can keep the museum in mind when planning your estate.

CONTACTING THE SOCIETY

All correspondence and membership enquiries should be addressed to The Honorary Secretary,
Sutherland Shire Historical Society, PO Box 389, Sutherland, NSW. 1499

Alternatively, email us at shirehistory@gmail.com

SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: 2019-2020

ELECTED MEMBERS

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| PATRON: | Shire Mayor, Clr Carmelo Pesce | | |
| PRESIDENT | Bruce Watt | 0405 493 187 | watto51@optusnet.com.au |
| DEPUTY PRESIDENT | Joe Hales | 0418 270 744 | joe_hales@outlook.com |
| SECRETARY/PUBLIC OFFICER | Don Rothnie | 0409 820 815 | bardon@bigpond.com.au |
| TREASURER | John Doherty | 0402 848 344 | johndoherty55@gmail.com |
| | | | |
| COMMITTEE MEMBERS | Carol McDonald | 9528 5122 | jmcdonald@optusnet.com.au |
| | Elizabeth Craig | 0491 099 642 | elizabeth.craig@y7mail.com |
| | Helen Rosner | 8539 7707 | hmrosner@bigpond.com |

APPOINTED POSITIONS

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| MUSEUM CURATOR/MANAGER | Vacant | | |
| BULLETIN EDITOR | Elizabeth Craig | 0491 096 642 | elizabeth.craig@y7mail.com |
| ONLINE ADMINISTRATOR | Creo Moore | 0425 226 405 | creoaus@gmail.com |
| PUBLICATIONS OFFICER | Pauline Curby | 0427 527 721 | pcurby@iprimus.com.au |
| PUBLICITY OFFICER | Pauline Curby | 0427 527 721 | pcurby@iprimus.com.au |
| ARCHIVIST/RESEARCH OFFICER | Carol McDonald | 9528 5122 | jmcdonald@optusnet.com.au |
| GRANTS OFFICER | Don Rothnie | 0409 820 815 | bardon@bigpond.com.au |
| ASSISTANT SECRETARY | Carol McDonald | 9528 5122 | jmcdonald@optusnet.com.au |
| EXCURSIONS OFFICER | Vacant | | |
| BULLETIN PROOF READER | Vacant | | |
| EXCURSIONS BOOKING CLERK | Vacant | | |
| HERITAGE WEEK LIAISON OFFICER | Helen Rosner | 8539 7707 | hmrosner@bigpond.com |
| WELFARE OFFICER | Gloria Hans | 9589 0251 | |
| HONORARY SOLICITOR | Michael Solari | | |

If you are interested in volunteering for any of the positions still vacant and wish more information, please don't hesitate to contact an Executive Committee member by email or speak to us at the next meeting

SSHS CALENDAR: MARCH 2020 – MAY 2020
(See website: www.shirehistory.org for updates)

| MEETING 1.30pm, 3 rd Saturday in month Stapleton Centre | | MUSEUM 9.00am-1.00pm Saturdays Sutherland Mem. School of Arts 23 East Parade, Sutherland |
|---|-----------------------------|--|
| DATE | | |
| MARCH 2020 | Sat. 21st | SPEAKER: Judith Carrick will speak to us on the Royal National Park, its hidden places and places no longer accessible. |
| APRIL 2020 | FRI 17th | Launch of Heritage Week by SSHS At Club on East at 6.00 – 8.00 pm (Details provided at meetings) |
| | Sat. 18th | Launch of SSHS new publication: <i>East Coast Encounters 1770 – Reflections on a cultural clash</i> Co-ordinating editor, Pauline Curby At Club on East at 1.30pm (see inside front cover for details) |
| MAY 2020 | Sat. 16th | SPEAKER: Paul Brunton, Emeritus Curator, State Library of NSW, and contributor to the SSHS publication, <i>East Coast Encounters 1770: Reflections on a cultural clash</i> , will provide an overview of the book and discuss aspects of the long search for the 'Great South Land'. |
| | Sun. 24th | EXCURSION: to the Nursing Museum at the Old Prince Henry Hospital, then on to La Perouse Museum and Bare Island guided tour. Cost: \$15 (\$13 concessions) for Bare Island tour. Advise to bring lunch. Departing Sutherland outside Museum at 9.15am and car pool. Let Christine Edney know if you will attend – 8519 4711 or cmedney@gmail.com.au |

MUSEUM

Please refer to the roster located at the Museum and at meetings.
If you are unable to attend at your allocated time, please make private arrangements to swap your roster time

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

The task of the Editor of a magazine such as the Bulletin can be a thankless one, as I know from personal experience. While readers may not be aware, contributors know full well the extent of the contribution of an Editor to the success of their articles. Again, I speak from personal experience, in this case, relating to my article on Villers-Bretonneux (Bulletin, November 2019, 19-25).

As I stated at the beginning, the article was in two parts – namely pages 19-21 and 22-25. My contribution to the second part was merely the list of names, service details and the page references to Handley & Hewitt, Service and Sacrifice. The rest was contributed by our Editor.

So, it was instructive to read Dennis Burns' article ('BURNS FAMILY – Shire Timber Merchants' Bulletin, November 2019, 29-34), which featured his forebear, William Joseph Burns, who also featured in my article. I moved to Caringbah as a "babe in arms" in 1949. While I have vague memories of the Burns Timber Yard, cnr of President Ave and the Kingsway, I did not know the link with William Joseph Burns. However, our Editor did.

*So, I take this opportunity to acknowledge Elizabeth's very significant contribution to **our** article. Hence, it is only right that Elizabeth Craig should be cited as co-author.*

Garriock Duncan

Editor's reply:

Thank you, Garriock. I truly appreciate your kind comments. I do see producing the Bulletin as a collaborative effort between writers and editor, and certainly, if I contribute any original research it would be fair for me to be cited as co-author. In this case, I pounced on the link between Dennis Burns' story and yours and then merely followed the trail you already had in place for the extra information.

Dear Editor

With the Society made up of both active, experienced researchers and those with a more general historical interest, the Bulletin's challenge is always to try to satisfy both. However, because our Bulletin stands as a permanent record of the Shire's history, as that history continues to unfold itself to us, I felt this was the right place to share my experience using one of our most important primary sources, the Holt-Sutherland copy letter books, to assist others who may have cause to consult them.[See 'Bread, Beef and Beer and a few small Oysters', page 11] The piece could have been much longer had I included more of the personal stories I uncovered, but I decided to concentrate on a guide to the letter books for my first Bulletin submission. Perhaps in a future Bulletin there will be opportunity to share further glimpses into the lives of our pioneers as revealed through these fascinating letters.

Kim Hatherly

Editor's reply:

Kim, your article is a wonderful model of how to use primary source material such as the Holt-Sutherland copy letter books to tell the story of our local history in a credible and meaningful way. They reveal not just a record of events, but the context - the values, pressures and influences the writers were under: Thus, they provide a unique social history of the Shire from the pens of those who were there. We look forward to more stories you have unearthed from those copy letter books.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

BRUCE WATT



My first task in welcoming in the New Year is to thank the many members/workers who have tirelessly contributed to the operations of the Society over the last year. Others, including sponsors, supporters and friends of the Society have added encouragement as we begin a challenging process of moving the museum to a new site, possibly by May of this year.

Where to now for SSSH?

Challenges also bring opportunities. While we may lament the move from the Sutherland Memorial School of Arts after tenure of 34 years, we must remain positive. The move is disruptive, tiring and not without internal opposition. However, viewed positively, it is an ideal opportunity to do some 'navel gazing' and to reassess who we are and what directions we wish to pursue. The museum is a very important function of the Society as it represents a tangible collection of artefacts and a vehicle for telling a story at a local level. This is important, especially for an area such as the Sutherland Shire with so many important stories to tell.

But this can be challenged. Museums are no longer a bunch of old things from the past. Larger museums, admittedly well resourced, funded, occupying large spaces and with professional curators tell their stories in a variety of ways. Small local museums, run by volunteers cannot hope to compete in terms of marketing and audience pulling power. Sophisticated technology appeals to a younger audience.

Those realities acknowledged however, we have been faced with the alternative of closing down the museum altogether. We are in the process of accepting a site at Sylvania Heights

in a small former Baby Health Centre. I could list off a series of features about the site that are not ideal. However, I repeat; we must move ahead in a positive way. Many organisations would relish a facility on about 700 square metres that will be 'refreshed' by Sutherland Shire Council to make it suitable to mount our display. It is a challenge for us to make it work by breathing life into it. We have the expertise of a consultant from Museums and Galleries who is advising us about our collection and assisting with 'downsizing' our storeroom collection. This is necessary because there is no storage space at the new site. Our Secretary, Don Rothnie and our Vice President, Joe Hales have been of great assistance in this regard.

[Any member who has unused storage space, even in the short term, would be welcomed with open arms!]

Most museums, I believe have one per cent of their collection on display at any time. We don't have that luxury. We are in the process of wading through the collection of objects in the store room to assess their relevance. Just because an object is old doesn't guarantee that it is relevant or of museum quality. Inevitably there will be a cull of items of dubious worth. Those of general interest may be sold when we are in the new premises. Any members who would like to assist in settling us in over the next few months would be welcomed.

Unlike the museum space at the Sutherland Memorial School of Arts which was rent free, the Society will enter a five-year contract with Council for the rent of this premise. It will be up to the Society to make a go of it. Passing trade will be very limited so advertising and promotion will be necessary. At the Sutherland Memorial School of Arts there were 'break-out' areas that enabled us to stage exhibitions and

host people. We are hopeful that additional built space may be awarded through a grant.

We will ask your opinion about SSHS priorities

In the near future we will be surveying members to gauge what features of the Society that they value. The museum is only one aspect of the Society. Meetings, talks, socialising, the *Bulletin*, excursions, publications and advocacy are other important aspects. Our membership demography shows an older cohort. Younger members need to be attracted. What would we offer them? I note and add praise to the organisers of the exhibition at Hazelhurst Regional Gallery which featured surfing culture in the Shire. We cannot expect to match that level of display. Do we downsize or even forget about a museum and go into storage, an option that was put to us when negotiating over suitable alternative accommodation for our museum.

We have all heard the jibe about the 'Hysterical Society'. Should we diversify? Two years ago we hosted an art show that featured local artists and attracted a large crowd. Many attendees would not have attended an Historical Society event before. Our focus on Aboriginal culture is significant. Can we/ should we be drawing in like-minded groups that share art and culture? Can we adapt and evolve? Organisations sometimes change their name to reflect their core interests or constituents. We are hoping to explore these ideas at a future meeting to begin to develop a strategic plan for the Society.

2020 Heritage Festival

Meanwhile there is much happier news. To mark the 250th anniversary of Cook's arrival, the Society is launching the Sutherland Shire's Heritage Festival at Club on East from 6.00pm on Friday 17th April. The theme is 'Our heritage for the future'. This can be interpreted in many ways. But in a rapidly changing built environment and social change, an

understanding of who we are, where we came from and what are some core values are vital. The Society is one cog in this understanding.

A significant achievement by SSHS

The Society's major contribution to this anniversary is an important new book produced by our Publications Committee led by Pauline Curby. *East Coast Encounters 1770: Reflections on a cultural clash* takes a bold look at the impact of Cook's arrival. Neither hero-worshipping nor vilifying Cook, ten writers – indigenous and European, have each contributed their perspective on a range of issues resulting from those meetings of two so very different cultures 250 years ago. (See details on inside front cover.)

Interestingly, SSHS also produced a book for the 200th anniversary of Cook's arrival in 1970 arising from eight papers given at a symposium organised for Sutherland Shire Council by the Society's secretary. *Employ'd as a Discoverer* was very much focussed on Cook. In the years since then there has been a re-evaluation and a more nuanced approach to the meaning and ramification of this event.

East Coast Encounters 1770, reflections on a cultural clash is a major contribution to our understanding of this historic period. It will be launched at 1.30pm on Saturday 18th April at Club on East. I recommend its content.

A new walking tour of Sutherland

Another significant contribution is an illustrated one-hour walking tour of Sutherland Township (visit www.shirehistory.org, click on 'More' for details). Its creator, a young student, Tess Dowell asked if she could undertake research of the Shire using information in the Museum archives. Congratulations Tess. I would like to see many more suburb walks.

I commend you to the latest edition of the *Bulletin* and congratulate its general editor, Elizabeth Craig on another memorable effort.

Thank you to Joe Hales, our Vice President, for filling in for me in my absence and writing a report for the November 2019 *Bulletin*

RELOCATION OF SUTHERLAND SHIRE MUSEUM

Editor's note: The following letter was sent to Sutherland Shire Councillors on 4 December 2019. The writer has given permission to reprint the letter here.

Dear Councillors,

I am writing to voice my concerns of the lack importance paid to the heritage of our Shire. Whilst I understand the need to renovate the Sutherland School of Arts and the need to relocate the museum, the planned relocation of the museum to Sylvania shows a calculated lack of concern once again of the Shire's heritage.

What I would like the Council to do is to reconsider relocating the Sutherland Historical Society Museum to a more accessible area in the Shire such as the original house in the grounds of Hazelhurst. The patronage of Hazelhurst by Shire residents is evident in the exhibitions, events held at Hazelhurst throughout the year, and what better location to house our heritage.

As a resident whose family has bequeathed a considerable number of items, information and photographic material documenting the Shire's history (the Rupert Gough collection) I obviously have a vested interest, as I am sure many other residents of the shire who are in a similar situation. Why hide our heritage in the backblocks of Sylvania which is not easily accessible to all.

We owe it to future generations to preserve our heritage and make it accessible to all. I implore the council to reconsider its decision and look at the feasibility of locating the museum to the cottage in the grounds of Hazelhurst, which will only enrich the experience of Hazelhurst patrons.

Yours faithfully

Christine Horrocks

cc Sutherland Shire Historical Society

Response from the President, Sutherland Shire Historical Society Inc.

I commend Christine's show of public support and advocacy for the Sutherland Shire Museum. I share these concerns that have been echoed by others. Heritage is strong when publicly promoted and funded. Heritage involves physical items and cultural beliefs and practices that are passed down and define who we are. Through our museum, publications and many other activities, the Sutherland Shire Historical Society Inc. is proud of its record of participating in, nurturing and reflecting the rich heritage of The Shire.

Following a long period of negotiations with Sutherland Shire Council, the Sylvania site was seen as the least unacceptable option available in terms of size, location and heritage appeal. This offer can be viewed as a lack of concern for the Shire's heritage. But the unavailability of a suitable heritage property or even one meeting other needs, was also a reality. An alternative put to the negotiating team if this offer was rejected was for the museum to be put into storage. This and some other options were considered. Relocation does come with some Council support.

Successful venues combine multiple functions. Hazelhurst Regional Gallery is a model of cultural engagement in a vibrant and desirable destination for multiple users. We would have welcomed a move to this site; however, several requests to relocate on site or in the cottage were firmly rejected.

The current museum's location attracted passing clientele and theatre goers as well as special groups. We cannot rely on 'walk-ins' at Sylvania. The challenge arising out of the concerns that our advocates outlined will be to create an environment and a facility that makes Sylvania a destination and preserves our heritage for future generations.

Bruce Watt

WE NEED TO CAMPAIGN FOR A NEW SUTHERLAND SHIRE MUSEUM

PAULINE CURBY

Australia seems to be awash with large community grants for all sorts of things at the moment. I believe Sutherland Shire deserves a generous grant – or series of grants – to establish a professionally run and – if possible – purpose-built museum.

As we know the proposed renovation of Sutherland School of Arts will mean that eventually Sutherland Shire Historical Society will either not have a museum or find itself housed in an unsatisfactory location. Even if a new museum venue works reasonably well, I believe that the Historical Society should look to the future, to keep abreast of trends, especially as modern museum practice evolves in new and interesting directions.

I suggest we launch a long-term campaign for a Shire museum, operating under the auspices of the Council but with seed funding from government grants. Such a museum should be professionally run by curatorial staff, overseen by a board/trust of committed, interested and qualified local residents.

The first step would be to research the operation of institutions such as Georges River Council's Hurstville Museum & Gallery. In addition, an examination of the structure and funding of our highly successful Hazelhurst can perhaps enlighten us as to how such organisations are administered.

This is not a pipedream, and I suggest members focus on some important facts. One is that Sutherland Shire is not a disadvantaged area, hence it should be able to provide quality services for residents. In fact, this local government area is one of the largest in Australia. Massive revenue is generated every year. Yet we may end up with no museum once our tenure of the rooms in Sutherland School of Arts comes to an end. As some of us are aware many country councils maintain impressive museums which are often part of a larger complex. Sutherland Shire is certainly able to do likewise and develop an inspiring institution which tells the story of this district in dynamic and accessible displays.

Don't let anyone tell you our history is not interesting! In some ways it is a vital part of the larger Sydney/NSW story, but at the same time many aspects are unique. The story of the Holt Sutherland Estate is an unusual one which has resonated throughout Shire history. Then there is the Shire's forgotten history found in out of the way places. The story of the lively diverse community on the Woronora River, for example, is largely unknown, as are many migrant stories in what is a predominantly 'Anglo' area. Some of these stories are already available in the extensive oral history collection lodged in the Local Studies Collection at Sutherland Library. This underutilised resource includes interviews recorded from the 1980s to the present – a treasure indeed. Remember history did not stop in this area when Captain Cook sailed out of Kamay Botany Bay.

Contact me at pcurby@iprimus.com.au if you would like to be part of this discussion or if you have any input such as different ideas as to how a well-run Shire museum can be achieved.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

ELIZABETH CRAIG

Printing the *Bulletin*

At the January general meeting I discussed with those attending whether we should resume printing the *Bulletin* for all of those who want it, regardless of whether they can access it electronically. While some people were happy with the electronic version, others were adamant they like to have it in print.

As you know, Sutherland Shire Council no longer print the *Bulletin* for us free of charge, and it would cost SSHS half of our annual subscriptions to print and post 80 *Bulletins* per quarter.

The most likely scenario is that we will charge those who wish to receive a printed copy \$20.00 a year on top of their normal subscription. This, however, will be resolved through proper process in a forthcoming meeting. For this month though, I have printed a few extra copies which people can purchase at the meeting for \$5.00 each.

Let us know your thoughts by emailing us at shirehistory@gmail.com

This Bulletin

I am delighted to say we have contributions from new writers in this issue. Kim Hatherly (a new SSHS member) on how to tap into a rich resource of local history through copy letters kept at the Mitchell Library. Cassi Plate writes about her father, Carl Plate, who founded an artists' colony in Price's Circuit, Woronora in the 1940s. Both of these articles contain priceless, largely unknown information on the history of our Shire. Truly valuable additions to the *Bulletin* collection.

We are forever indebted to our regular contributors who consistently come up with well researched, quality articles. This month, Greg Jackson wrote about Pugilism (bare knuckle boxing) in the Shire in the 19th century and Stephanie Bailey tells of a 'geological freak' – a limestone cave nestled in the National Park - that has intrigued visitors since the 19th century.

Thank you to everyone for your contributions.

Society News

Welcome to new members, Kim Hatherly (see her article on page 11), Karen Louise Mann and Christopher Sim. You have joined the SSHS as we stand on the threshold of change, especially with the imminent closure of our museum venue, and we are looking for ways to remain relevant and an effective force in protecting our heritage and presenting it to the local community. If you or anyone else have any ideas on this, or would like to be involved somehow, we'd love to hear from you.

Important dates related to this year's Heritage Festival, the 250th anniversary of the arrival of James Cook and the *Endeavour* crew.

- Friday, 17th April at 6.00 pm at Club on East for the launch of the 2020 Heritage Festival by SSHS. All SSHS members are welcome.
- Saturday, 18th April. Launch of our new publication: *East Coast Encounters 1770 – Reflections on a cultural clash* at Club on East at 1.30pm. See details of the book and the launch on the inside front cover of this *Bulletin*. All members and their friends are welcome.
- Wednesday, 29th April – Meeting of Two Cultures ceremony at Kurnell

BREAD, BEEF, BEER AND A FEW SMALL OYSTERS

Using the Holt-Sutherland Company copy letter books

KIM HATHERLY

It was a busy summer for Holt-Sutherland Estate foreman Ted Lye in 1895. He and his team of labourers cleared a track 10 feet wide along Kareena Road from The Boulevarde to Holt's fence; laid gravel by two bridges on Kiora Road between Malvern Road and Midgley's; dug up gums and spiked two bridges on Sylvania Road between Mrs Lye's and Stapleton's; cleared a track along Hotham Road from Malvern Road to Woronora Road and burnt off small growth and ferns along Willarong Road.¹

These tasks, just a handful on a long list of work orders issued by estate manager James Murphy, are found in thousands of pages of outgoing correspondence preserved in a series of copy letter books lodged by Thomas A. Holt with the Mitchell Library in 1971 and microfilmed by the Library in 2010. They contain letters to Thomas Holt and later, his son Frederick S.E. Holt, to government departments (tax, railways, lands, Registrar General), to solicitors, shareholders, prospective land purchasers and, from 1906, the Shire Clerk. Of special interest to lovers of Shire history are those addressed to tenants, overseers, Estate workers and *ad hoc* service providers like punt and boat operators and stationmasters. The letters paint a fascinating picture of life on the Holt-Sutherland Estate in its first 50 years, shedding new light on the personalities of, and challenges faced by, our earliest settlers and Estate management.



A leather-bound volume of copy letters from the Holt-Sutherland Estate at the Mitchell Library. [Photos: K. Hatherly]

Inaugural Company manager James Murphy emerges as a canny businessman, methodical organiser and silver-tongued PR man. To a prospective buyer of the 230 acres in Portions 51 and 52 of the Estate, Murphy wrote in 1888:

This is a tongue of land in a convenient and romantic situation, embracing the whole of the west side of Yowie Bay and the east side Gynea Bay, with from two to three miles of the deepest water frontage in Port Hacking, surrounded by grand scenery and within twenty minutes drive of Sutherland Railway Station. My directors are ready to negotiate at fair prices if you can see your way to submit an offer of seventy shillings (70/-) per acre per annum, for the whole of the two blocks mentioned, it is likely that we can come to terms.²

Managers' letters to Thomas Holt or, after his death, to F.S.E. Holt, range from formal requests for approval to carry out certain activities, to more personal, quite candid correspondence (particularly from Murphy) discussing current situations or particular tenants — these letters

have great historical value in establishing time lines for, and attitudes towards, events in the Shire's development.

Discussing a meeting to nominate trustees for the Illawarra Road Board, Murphy wrote to F.S.E. Holt in 1890:

Mr Thacker is a gardener who holds a block from us. He lives on the Boulevard near to the corner of Sylvania road ... He travels the [Illawarra] road a good deal with his vegetables for market and he, of course, knows who you are very well and I suppose he thinks you know him. I think he must have been asked by the chief actors at the meeting to write to you. I understand that Mr Stapleton did not attend the meeting and I took that as a sign that he was indifferent about being made a Trustee and that as Mr Thacker was present and took (as I understand) an active part, they nominated him instead of Mr Stapleton.³

Some letters are addressed to or mention Estate employees including overseers Ralph Stennett, John Kelly and Charles Diston and labourers like William and Edward Lye. These, and letters to others not directly employed by the Company (punt and ferry operators Albert Emerson and James McLenahan, or Sutherland stationmasters), provide interesting insights into progress on the Estate and its day-to-day running.

We learn that every Wednesday and Saturday in the 1890's, prospective lessees were met at Sutherland Station off the 9.30am train from the city to be escorted around the Estate inspecting available sites.⁴ Important visitors were accorded special treatment. Wrote Company secretary Michael Maloney to Mr A Emerson Esq, Woniora, in 1882:

Will you please have your steam launch at the public wharf Botany on Thursday morning next at 10 o'clock and instruct the man in charge to wait there until he sees Mr S. A. Want. You will also please put some bread, beef, beer and a few small oysters on board.⁵

Condition

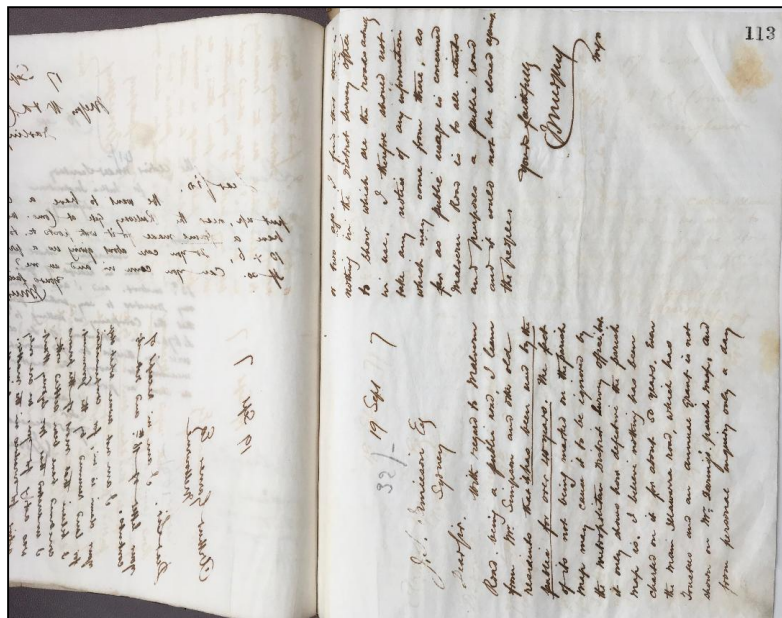
In June-July 2019, frustrated at the difficulty of reading microfilmed copies of the letter books, I was granted permission by the Mitchell librarians to consult the original hard volumes in the library's Special Collections area.

These volumes are the bound copies of most letters dispatched by Holt-Sutherland Estate Company secretaries and managers (James Murphy, Michael Maloney and Michael McDonald) from August 1881 to November 1933.

Early volumes contain handwritten letters while later volumes are mainly typed. Before the advent of carbon paper, stationers produced leather-bound books of 500 to 1000 pages of extremely fine, unsized tissue-like paper. Letter copies were produced by positioning the original correspondence between two of these sheets and dampening the top sheet. Further oiled sheets were placed over and under this damp 'sandwich'. The book was closed and clamped in a letter press, the pressure thus transferring an impression of the original writing onto the underside of the damp page which, being transparent, enabled the copy to be read when the book was opened and the page dried.⁶

Over the decades, these ink impressions have in many places 'eaten' through the tissue paper, resulting in pages that have begun to tear or even stick together, rendering them too fragile to safely handle. Some pages have faded so badly that it is impossible to distinguish the contents at all.

Tissue-thin copy book pages and letters copied horizontally and vertically. Two letters copied onto p.112 seen through transparent page on left

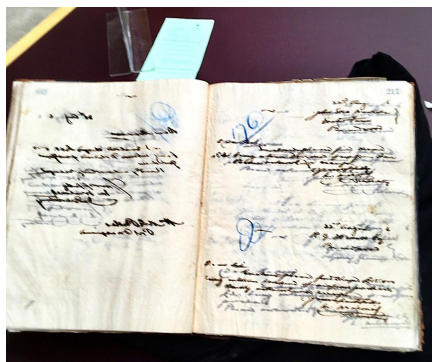
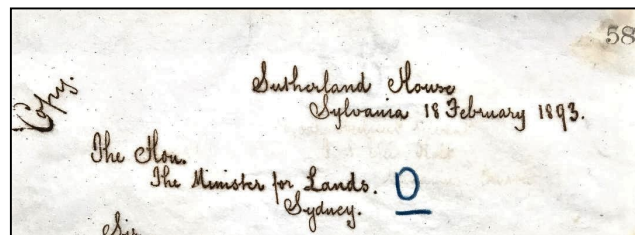


Handwriting ranges from clear and distinct to unintelligible scrawl, compounded by inkblots and 'bleeding'. Michael Maloney rivals Clancy's shearing mate, apparently having penned his letters with a thumbnail dipped in tar. Like the girl with the curl, when the pages are good they are very, very good but when they are bad they are horrid!

Format

Each volume begins with a surname index referencing the addressee of the letters. The limited value of the index is that many tenants' names appear *within* letters to solicitors or the Registrar General, so the addressee's name is indexed but the relevant tenant's name is not. Occasionally, a letter is found within the volume which has been missed from the index. Conversely, sometimes the addressee's name in the letter is now undecipherable but the name in the index, written on heavier paper, is fortunately legible.

Each page has a typeset number in the top right corner. The index refers to these typeset page numbers. In earlier volumes, many pages contain two letters, one running horizontally and the second vertically. Using microfilm, this necessitates repeated screen rotation to read the second letter.



Handwritten numbers also appear on many pages. These are cross-references to a page earlier in the same volume containing the most recent letter to the same addressee. If the handwritten number is '0' it is the first letter in that volume to that addressee.

Contents and usefulness

The letters to shareholders are mainly form letters requesting payment, receipting payment, or are covering letters dispatched with dividend cheques.

Letters to the Registrar General are generally covering letters asking for subleases to be re-entered in the Holt-Sutherland Estate head lease (number 50990) as per an enclosed statutory declaration (not copied). These letters only quote the sublease number, though occasionally the leaseholder's name has been added in pencil to the letter copy.

Letters to the Shire Clerk usually notify recent land sales or conversions of leaseholds to freehold, enabling council rates to be directed to the responsible landholder. These are referenced by Lot, Section and Plan number; very rarely are names included.

Other letters to the Shire Clerk, Railways Commissioner and Under Secretary for Lands help establish dates that road clearances and land resumptions were first mooted. Useful letters include those concerning land resumptions for the Shire's earliest schools and churches.

Letters to tenants and tenants' solicitors are frequently form letters, particularly during the economic depressions of the late 1880's and 1890's, and 1930's, seeking payment of rent in arrears and threatening legal action if overdue payments are not received. These are useful in establishing dates by which early pioneers had actually settled on the Estate (not always clear from Lands Office records), and for noting that even the Shire's most revered pioneers or well-off early investors were as capable of falling behind in rent payments as poorer settlers.

Other letters to tenants or prospective tenants, mentioning which lots are available for sale or have already been taken, and by whom, or discuss the transfer of leases between tenants, also help identify the names of settlers and dates of settlement not always accurately reflected in government records.

Many letters to tenants (or trespassers) warn of the illegality of taking timber or sand from the Estate without permission or, in the case of timber, of paying the associated royalties to the Company.

Less formal letters reveal tenants' personal circumstances, particularly during hard times when Company personnel displayed compassion and endeavoured to assist, sometimes in surprisingly creative ways. In 1932 Aubrey Geddy, no longer able to afford the ground rent, requested the cancellation of his lease at Gynea Bay. The Company agreed, providing Geddy paid his overdue council rates, but even this was beyond Geddy's means. Around that time, Nicholas Carver of Oyster Bay requested Company assistance to clear silt from the creek on his property. Secretary Michael McDonald offered Geddy two weeks' work digging up Carver's silted creek to liquidate the rates debt.⁷

How to access

Understandably, Mitchell librarians are unwilling to grant access to fragile original volumes when microform or digitised copies exist. Being able to cite a legitimate research project facilitated my request to handle the original Holt-Sutherland letter books; using them has made it easier to understand and interpret the microfilm copies.

In the Local Studies room at Sutherland Library are films with the following catalogue references:

11 Aug. 1881-16 July 1884 (CY reel 966; Mitchell Library MSS.2170/6)
16 July 1884-18 May 1887 (CY reel 3668; Mitchell Library MSS.2170/7)
7 Mar. 1890-15 Nov. 1892 (CY reel 3609; Mitchell Library MSS.2170/8)
15 Nov. 1892-2 Mar. 1896 (CY reel 3958; Mitchell Library MSS.2170/9)
23 Mar. 1896-15 Dec. 1899 (CY reel 3972; Mitchell Library MSS.2170/10-11)
1899-1904 (CY reel 3634; Mitchell Library MSS.2170/12)
30 Sept. 1908-9 Nov. 1911 (CY reel 3973; Mitchell Library MSS.2170/13)
10 Nov. 1911-19 Dec. 1913 (CY reel 3998; Mitchell Library MSS.2170/14)
19 Dec. 1913-24 Nov. 1915 (CY reel 4032; Mitchell Library MSS.2170/15)
17 Nov. 1915-26 Nov. 1917 (CY reel 4042; Mitchell Library MSS.2170/16)
29 Mar.-3 June 1920, 30 Jan. 1924-19 Mar. 1926 (CY reel 4051; Mitchell Library MSS.2170/17-18) 22 Mar. 1926-3 July 1929 (CY reel 4054; Mitchell Library MSS.2170/19)
21 June 1929-3 May 1932 (CY reel 4055; Mitchell Library MSS.2170/20)

** 18 May 1887-6 Mar 1890 inexplicably not microfilmed. Original hard copy book covering these dates held at Mitchell Library at MLMSS 2030/13. Special permission not required to view this volume **

Mitchell Library also holds on microfilm:

9 May 1932-24 Jan 1933 (CY reel 4058; MLMSS 2170/21) 24 Jan 1933-17 Nov 1933 and 28 Nov 1917-29 Mar 1920 (CY reel 4064-4065; MLMSS 2170/22-23)

Missing years (no listings for either hard copies or microfilms) appear to be 1904-1908 and 1920-1924.

Value

The Holt-Sutherland copy letter books are a sorely under-utilised resource for researchers of Shire history. Time-consuming and frustrating to negotiate on microfilm, the contents frequently tedious, the handwriting often exasperating, nonetheless the letters reward patience and perseverance, particularly since the unusual leasehold tenure of Holt-Sutherland land renders more commonly-used government land records notoriously unreliable. The letters turn up so many valuable gems of information, shedding important and surprising light on the Shire's earliest years and expanding our knowledge and understanding of our pioneers, that they deserve more serious attention.

¹ James Murphy to Edward Lye, MLMSS 2170/9 p 444

² James Murphy to Broughton Young Esq, MLMSS 2030/13 p 365

³ James Murphy to F.S.E. Holt Esq, MLMSS 2030/13 p 760

⁴ James Murphy, MLMSS 2170/9, 6 Dec 1892

⁵ Michael Maloney to A Emerson Esq, MLMSS 2170/6, 28 Feb 1882

⁶ Dr Brian Davies, *Before the Photocopier*, archifdy-credigion.org.uk/uploads/before_the_photocopier.pdf

⁷ Michael McDonald variously to A.W. Geddy and Nicholas Carver, MLMSS 2170/21, June 1932

PUGILISM ON THE HACKING

GREG JACKSON

Introduction

One of the favourite sports in colonial Sydney was the noble art of bare-knuckle boxing. The lower classes in Sydney town favoured this brutal sport, but it was vigorously opposed by the religious and upper class elements of society backed by the authorities. In 1863 pugilism came to Port Hacking with a fight (mill) between experienced campaigners John Sullivan and George Dodd.

Pugilism in Sydney

Pugilism, or bare-knuckle boxing, was a brutal, bloody sport that was popular in Australia for about 70 years. Prize fights in Sydney were reported in the newspapers from the 1820's and most newspapers of the day reported them in a disapproving tone. *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 10 March 1829 noted

...there appears to be a growing taste in our infant community for the brutal and demoralising effects of prize-fighting...

However, *Bell's Life in Sydney and Sporting Chronicle*, a proponent of all sporting endeavours, actively supported prize-fighting and reported round by round descriptions of the mills.



Fight between Paddy Sinclair and William Sparkes. State Library of New South Wales BN637

The location of these mills was not generally revealed until the last moment to prevent 'the beaks getting an inkling and to spoil sport'. The prize money for these fights was considerable, 30 pounds reported for an 1838 fight between William Sparkes and William Hall. This would be equivalent to more than \$4000 today. However, the real money was in the betting, already a great Australian tradition. As the nineteenth century progressed the police made it increasingly difficult to arrange prize-fights in Sydney and the action moved to the country with fights reported at Parramatta, Windsor and, in the south, around Tempe. The Georges River was also the venue for several prize-fights in the 1840's and 50's with some taking place near Horse Rock Point (what is now Sylvania). Tempe (Cooks River or Mud Bank) became a

very popular fight venue. This area had a working-class population of brick makers and lime burners who often provided the protagonists.

The participants in this sport usually used aliases although their real names were often reported in the press. The Sparkes family (real name thought to be Parkes), who came from Sparkes Camp on the Cooks River, were a family of boxers with all five brothers' proponents of the sport. William Sparkes travelled to England for a fight with one Paddy Sinclair in 1847, a fight he lost after breaking his arm in the 63rd round. On his return to Sydney, Sparkes was greeted by a crowd at the Sydney Quay as a national hero.

The mill at Port Hacking occurred rather by accident. A prize-fight between Young (John) Sullivan (he was 23 years old) and George Dodd (real name George Curran) from Tasmania was arranged with a prize of 300 pounds for the 4th August 1863. George Dodd was hauled before the courts on the 1st August on a charge of being 'about to break the peace' and ordered to pay a surety of 50 pounds, presumably not enough to stop him fighting. Young Sullivan was a seasoned campaigner with many fights to his credit, mostly victories. Why, like Dodd, he was not bound over to keep the peace is a mystery.

On the day of the fight two of the Illawarra Steamship Navigation Companies ships, the *Kiama* and *Mimosa* (see side box) came from Circular Quay to Kurnell with about 400 people to view the spectacle. However, the police under senior sergeants Taylor and Rawlinson were also there. Not to be denied their sport the multitude re-embarked and proceeded to the Hacking where 'in a bight on the southern side of the bay' the fight took place. This bight was possibly Jibbon Beach. The *Kiama* and *Mimosa* were steamships of considerable size and Jibbon beach has sufficient depth of water close-in to facilitate the unloading of the passengers and, like Kurnell, Jibbon's sand beach would also be an ideal place for a boxing ring.

The roadstead off Jibbon beach was a common place for large ships to shelter from southerly storms. Prize fights, before the Marquis of Queensbury's rules were often protracted affairs and this one was no different. *Bell's Life in Sydney and Sporting Chronicle*, 8 August 1863, reported at length on the fight. which started at 3:00 pm and lasted till almost 5:00 when, with darkness falling, a long trip back to Circular Quay and the protagonists tiring it was declared a draw after 28 fairly uneventful rounds:

...neither of the men showing signs of severe punishment though both seemed extremely weak.

Bell's Life however expressed themselves well satisfied with the mill and suggested that a re-match would be in order. The multitude re-embarked onto the steamers and returned to Circular Quay by 8:00pm.

Conclusion

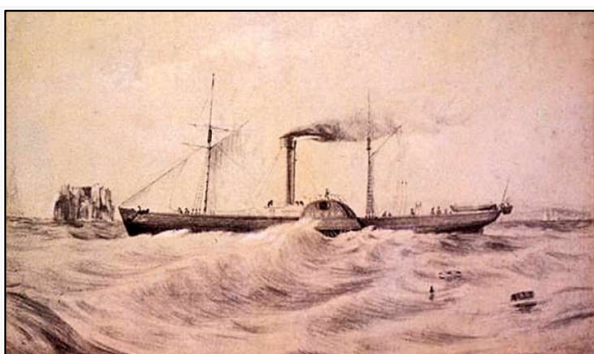
Thus, ended Port Hackings only recorded bare-knuckle prize-fight, probably an unplanned event forced on the organisers by circumstances. An uneasy truce was declared between the proponents and detractors of boxing when the Marquis of Queensbury rules were phased-in in the 1870's making the sport acceptable for at least a small majority of the population.

Bare-knuckle boxing in colonial Australia became an avenue to express our national identity with the idolization of sportsmen. The ongoing idea of boxers as celebrities can be seen in the mythology that still surrounds 20th-century champions like Les Darcy and Lionel Rose.

The Illawarra Steam Navigation Company ships *Kiama* and *Mimosa*

| Ship | Built | Type | Tonnage | Length | Beam | Draft |
|---------------|-------|----------------|---------|----------|----------|---------|
| <i>Mimosa</i> | 1854 | Paddle Steamer | 162 | 141'/43m | 18'/5.5m | 9'/2.7m |
| <i>Kiama</i> | 1854 | Paddle Steamer | 145 | 121'/37m | 20'/6m | - |

Note: The *Mimosa* was lengthened to 163'/50m in 1863



Mimosa

[Courtesy: State Library of Tasmania]



Kiama

[Courtesy: ANMM Collection]



The Sparkes Cup

Credit: National Maritime Museum, Object 127806

The Sparkes Cup – a sterling silver bare knuckle boxing trophy – is engraved with the words:

Presented to W. Sparkes by the Gentlemen of Richmond for his manly conduct in the late fight with Langham on May 17 1847.

William Sparkes was the son of convicts and eldest of four brothers who grew up in Sparkes Run, a town on the Cooks River in Sydney. He was one of the first Australian sportsmen to pursue a career in bare knuckle boxing overseas, and is a significant figure in the history of Australian boxing, developing from bare-knuckle league in the 19th century to a multi-million dollar enterprise today.

References:

St Peters Cooks River History Group, 2012, *Pugilism*
<https://stpeterscooksriverhistory.wordpress.com/2012/06/11/pugilism/>
<http://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/object/127806>
<https://www.nma.gov.au/explore/collection/highlights/the-sparkes-cup>

PALONA CAVE, ROYAL NATIONAL PARK

STEPHANIE BAILEY

Written for Sutherland Shire Library Series: Local History, Local Stories

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‘A limestone cave within 20 miles of Sydney. It seems unbelievable, and yet it is true,’ reported the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1933, ‘for in the National Park, not a mile from Lady Carrington Drive, nestles this geological freak.’¹

Now known as the Palona Cave, this ‘Jenolan in miniature’ is a remarkable natural time-capsule which has surprised and intrigued visitors who, over time, have continued to discover – and rediscover – this ancient and vital edifice.



Sign post to Palona Cave on Lady Carrington Drive [Photo: S. Bailey]

Today, fit walkers can access Palona Cave reasonably easily by following the sign-posted track which leads up the hill from the intersection at Lady Carrington Drive. The trail then winds its way through dense forest before reaching its final destination near the impermanent Palona Brook waterfall. Maps and hiking notes for alternative routes to the cave can be found online, and information and alerts for the Royal National Park are updated regularly on the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service website. Therefore, Palona Cave is by no means hidden or unrecognised. The amount of graffiti and markings that has accumulated on sections of the nearby rock facings certainly indicates that it receives regular visitors. And, of course, this special place would have been known to the local Aboriginal people for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Yet it's difficult not to feel that you have happened upon some secret place when, at track's end, the cavern suddenly opens itself up and reveals its limestone treasure – dainty minarets, knobbly columns, mammoth boulders, and contorted rock formations that seem to have been deliberately arranged by nature to resemble the ribcage of some long-dead beast. Perhaps it's little wonder then that many European adventurers who came to the National Park in the late 19th and early 20th Century assumed that they must have been the first to set foot inside this distinctive cave.

Australia now has more than five hundred parks, but when the large tract of unspoilt bushland in the Port Hacking district was dedicated as a National Park in 1879, it was the first of its kind in this country and the second in the world after Yellowstone in the United States. The National Park (it gained its Royal title in 1954) owes its existence to the foresight of Sir John Robertson, New South Wales' fifth Premier, who anticipated the future health benefits of preserving parks and reserves as the 'lungs' of a city. Just over 7000 hectares of Crown land was initially proclaimed as National Park but following overwhelming public endorsement this area was extended to more than 15000 hectares. Early attempts to 'civilise' the National Park led to the clearing of under-scrub; the creation of English park-like ornamental gardens; and the introduction of exotic flora and fauna such as European freshwater fish and five *Rusa* deer whose descendants still roam the park today.² Nevertheless, in the years following its dedication it was the National Park's very wildness and inaccessibility that most attracted venturesome Sydney-siders who came to explore and experience the park's breathtaking and challenging landscape.



Palona Cave, Royal National Park [Photos by S. Bailey]



In February 1881, a writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald* described his trip to the National Park and Palona Cave under the guidance of an old Botany fisherman and another well-known local character, 'Black Bob' known for his penchant for quoting Shakespeare. Travelling in an open boat, the group departed from Botany Bay, navigated their way around the coastline at Cape Solander, crossed six miles of saltwater, and then sailed deep into the Port Hacking River which 'stretches its arms, like an octopus, into the borders of Australia.' The party later fixed their camp at the site of an old sawpit called the 'Peach Trees' and so-called (presumably) because of the profusion of passion-flower, English raspberry and, of course, peach trees that grew in the area.³ 'Carried home by flying foxes,' conjectured Bob, 'and dropped here where the trees are higher, the foliage denser, the glens in deeper gloom, and the jungle thicker.'⁴

Early the following morning the party continued on to Palona Cave. But unlike visitors who explored the National Park in later years, the *Herald* writer was under no illusion that it was he who had discovered the site.

We followed a track by the side of the stream, now much shrunken, and so filled with logs and snags as not to be navigable for our boat. Far up the glen we reach the stalactite caves, of which many Sydney people have heard. It is a long and rough, but beautiful walk. The river is lined by gigantic trees, draped to their summits, 100 feet high, with creepers in every shade of greenery – not choking their own bright foliage, but adorning their gnarled boughs – and festooned in all the graceful forms that Nature can assume in her wildest freedom. Tree-ferns, cabbage palms and mahogany trees are 'docked in tears' of the morning dew. No Indian or Brazilian jungle can equal this Australian glen in varied and beautiful foliage.⁵

He was less enthusiastic about the actual caves:

The stalactite caves are small — not worthy of rapture. The marble icicles have lost the sheen that so brilliantly lights up the gloom of the galleries of the Fish River — and are dull and muddy in colour — but the few columns are massive and fantastic, the gradual work of centuries.⁶

On 30 September 1886, Lady Cecilia Carrington travelled to the National Park with her husband, Lord Charles Carrington, Governor of New South Wales, and other assorted dignitaries where she inspected and officially declared open the road which bears her name.⁷ Lady Carrington Road (now Drive) skirts the east bank of the Port Hacking River from Audley at its northern end to the intersection with Sir Bertram Stevens Drive in the south.



Lady Carrington Drive, Royal National Park, c.1900-1920
[Source: Sutherland Shire Libraries MF004777]

Construction of the 10km road took several years to complete and involved numerous heavy rock and shale excavations as well as the erection of strong bridges and culverts over the fifteen creeks – each allocated an Aboriginal bird name (e.g. Palona = hawk) – that the historic carriageway crosses. Today the road is popular amongst bushwalkers and cyclists, but for many years it was open to other forms of traffic including cars. And yet despite the increased ease of access which Lady Carrington Road would have provided, it seems that during the early part of the 20th Century Palona Cave – which is only 800m off the thoroughfare – was largely overlooked by many Sydney-siders.

‘A stalactite cave in the National Park was discovered in 1870 and has since been forgotten,’ stated the *St. George Call* newspaper in 1904; ‘it would be of interest if some local reader could afford information as to the whereabouts of this cave.’⁸ Although it is not known to what extent this request may have elicited any response from the public, someone had obviously been busy because the following year the *Daily Telegraph* reported that:

A person who alleged that he had discovered a deposit of marble in the National Park applied for permission to work it, but would not disclose the locality unless his request was granted. Since then unfrequented areas have been explored, with the result that a cave has been found about 120 feet long and 20 feet wide, containing scores of stalactites and stalagmites, and as some have been broken, it is evident that the applicant referred to obtained his specimens from here.⁹

The chairman of the National Park Trust was sent out to investigate and the Government Geologist was also asked to make inquiries.

In 1925, Mr Norman Friend of the Australian Museum and the Royal Society was out searching for lichens in the National Park when he stumbled across Palona Cave. Clearly very excited with this unexpected find, Mr Friend soon returned to the site with a team of scientists from the Geological Section of the Royal Society to photograph the unusual grotto and to examine its limestone formations. Apparently, none of the Society’s members knew anything about the cave or, indeed, of anything resembling it in the Sydney area. The group contacted the media and news of the cave’s unearthing – with accompanying images - was widely broadcast in the Sydney newspapers.¹⁰ The following report by Mr R.T. Wade of the Royal Society explains how, in September 1925, it was thought that Palona Cave may have been created:

When caves form in limestone districts they do so with exceeding slowness. The limestone must be dissolved by water that is only very slightly acid and has, therefore, only the weakest powers of solution. But this condition suits stalactites for they, too, require ages to grow to any size. Geologists allot some 500,000 years for the formation of Jenolan Caves.¹¹ [The age is now estimated to be 340 million years¹²].

The grottos we find in sandstone are in a different case. These are not formed deep in the ground as, for example, the Orient or Lucas caves; we find them at the foot of cliffs. And when they grow they soon work their own destruction by bringing down on them the overhanging cliffs. They are, moreover, of no great depth. They are quite exposed, and the wind would show scant mercy to any such limpid drops as we see delicately lingering on roof and stalactite at Jenolan, as they add an infinitesimal particle to some dainty design. Lack of time, lack of suitable protection, and

usually, too, in the Hawkesbury sandstone of Sydney's surroundings, lack of necessary carbonate of lime, are all against the formation of large stalactites in our grottoes.

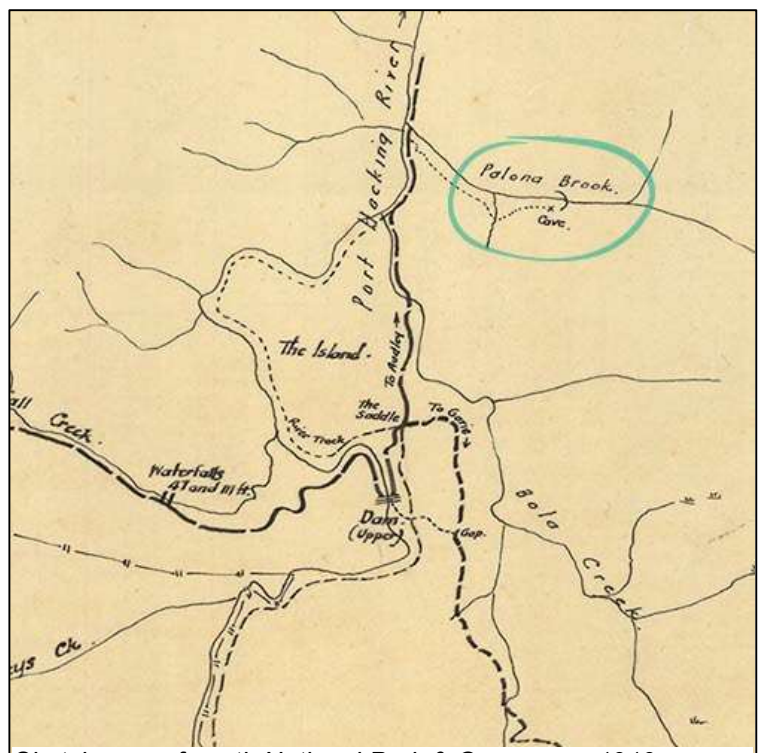
At National Park, however, when the lower beds of a cliff broke away the bed of sandstone next above held magnificently, and standing out some 30 feet, has borne on its brave back the full weight of the upper cliff. The fallen beds have protected the foot of the cliff from further attacks, and have also partially closed the entrance. Here Nature has seized her chance. Gathering up carbonate of lime from a deep-seated spring, maybe, or perhaps from some basalt dyke that may be nearby, she set to work where roof and wall of the grotto join, and with oozing water fashioned pendant draperies and pillars.¹³

Of course, following the announcement of the Royal Society's 'discovery,' it wasn't long before a number of Sydney newspapers made it politely, but firmly, clear that the cave's existence had been acknowledged for quite some time. Mr W. Watson Sharp of the Bush Tracks Club of New South Wales advised the *Sydney Morning Herald* that he and a number of his friends had been familiar with the cave for years.¹⁴ Furthermore, he added, some person had evidently viewed the cave back in 1905 as they had scratched their initials and the date on the sandstone. And just three weeks earlier Mr Sharp had witnessed a party of five leaving their marks, 'thinking, apparently, that they too, were improving the natural beauties of the cave.' Another *Herald* reader, Mr R.T. Goddard, wrote to inform the newspaper that the cave was actually known as 'Farnell Cave' in honour of the chairman of the National Park Trust, Mr Frank Farnell.¹⁵ (It was not until 1973 that it was officially assigned the name 'Palona Cave' by the Geographical Names Board of NSW.)¹⁶

The cave had also been clearly identified on at least one map dating back to 1919.¹⁷

In light of this information, the Geological Section was quick to concede that the grotto had indeed been discovered many years ago and could not, therefore, be attributed to a member of the Royal Society. But they had also learnt that efforts to interest the Mines Department in the cave's preservation back at the time of an earlier 'discovery' had failed. And so they called upon the National Park Trust to take the immediate and necessary steps to safeguard the cave from vandals.¹⁸

Today, Palona Cave – along with other local geomorphological and landscape features such as the Jibbon cliff top dunes and the Cabbage Tree Basin beach ridges – is protected under the



Sketch map of south National Park & Garawarra, 1919
[State Library of NSW Collection]

National Park and Wildlife Act (1974). Although, as already stated, this has not stopped some sightseers from choosing to damage or deface the cave. Never-the-less, most visitors to this extraordinary natural landmark undoubtedly appreciate what a unique and surprisingly beautiful site Palona Cave truly is – no matter when it was first ‘discovered’ – and how exceedingly fortunate the Sutherland Shire is to have the magnificent Royal National Park, with all its gems and mysteries, right here on our doorstep.

Further Reading*

Books and Websites

- History of Royal National Park 1879-2017 by Judith Carrick
- NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service – Lady Carrington Drive, Royal National Park
- NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service – Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Recreation Area Plan of Management
- Wild Walks – Lady Carrington Drive to Palona Cave and Wallumarra to Palona Cave walks

Endnotes*

¹ Salmon, Horace A. A geological freak, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 April 1933

² The National Park, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 January 1886

³ Sketch guide map shewing rivers, creeks, roads, bridle paths &c. National Park Port Hacking River, County of Cumberland, New South Wales, January 1881. State Library of NSW collection

⁴ A visit to the National Park, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 February 1881

⁵ A visit to the National Park, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 February 1881

⁶ A visit to the National Park, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 February 1881

⁷ Vice-Regal excursion, *Evening News*, 1 October 1886

⁸ Correspondence, *St George Call*, 12 March 1904

⁹ Limestone cave at National Park, *Daily Telegraph*, 22 July 1905

¹⁰ Stalactites, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 September, 1925

¹¹ Outdoor Australia, *Sydney Mail*, 23 September, 1925

¹² CSIRO Media Release, June 2006, https://www.jenolancaves.org.au/imagesDB/wysiwyg/340millionyearold_1.pdf

¹³ Outdoor Australia, *Sydney Mail*, 23 September 1925

¹⁴ Stalactites at National Park, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 September 1925

¹⁵ Stalactites in National Park, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 October 1925

¹⁶ Geographical Names Act, 1966, *Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales*, 22 June 1973

¹⁷ Sketch map of south National Park & Garawarra by Myles J. Dunphy, 1919. State Library of NSW collection

¹⁸ Ways of the wild, *Daily Telegraph*, 17 July 1925

* Note: For those reading electronic versions of this Bulletin, each of the references in Further Reading and the Endnotes can be accessed in full via the underlined link.

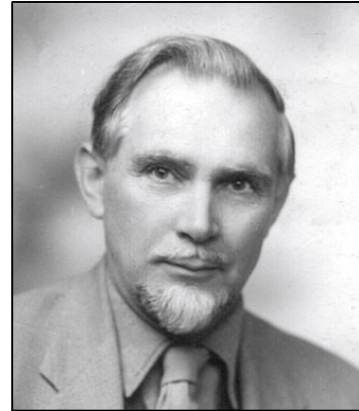
WORONORA'S POST-WAR ARTIST COLONY

CASSI PLATE

Editor's note: Carl Plate was born in Perth in 1909. He and his sister, Margo Lewers, attended art school in Sydney, before travelling extensively in Britain and Europe where he studied modern art. On his return to Sydney Carl married Jocelyn Zander, also from a family of artists.

Carl Plate was one of Australia's most important post-war modern artists, a pioneering advocate for modernism and a member of the influential Contemporary Art Society.¹ He lived and worked at his home by the Woronora River from 1945 until his death in 1977.

Carl Plate, 1959 [en_wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Plate]



Sydney was a different place before the Second World War. Returning to the city in August 1939, graphic artist Al Morrison wrote to my artist father Carl Plate, then still in London:

I can't get used to being stared at in trams and streets. That is one of the joys of London, that no one cares what you do or who you are and you can get lost in the place and the hell with everyone. Over here, if I should wear, for example, a yellow tie, I would be an object of derision wherever I went, I would be followed by sniggers and leers. But all small towns are smug I suppose.²

Morrison wrote that the best thing about Sydney was the bush. A year later, his friend Carl Plate walked down the gangplank at Circular Quay, determined to open a modern art gallery in a bohemian laneway in Sydney called Rowe Street. Flat-footed and with a debilitating ulcer, he was considered unfit for the army.

Money was tight and Carl slept in an alcove above his small *Notanda Gallery*. One of his first exhibitions was a unique collection of modern British art that he brought back with him. He paid the British artists for any sales with boxes of Australian dried fruits – their preferred method of payment in war-time Great Britain. The *Notanda* had previously been a modern home wares boutique, run by his sister, Margo Lewers. Carl described the rats that disturbed his sleep, and washing in a tiny sink at the back of the shop. Fellow artist, New Zealand-born Godfrey Miller, then living in a loft above stables in Young Street (near where the Museum of Sydney now stands), told Carl about adjacent rooms becoming vacant. The tenants' shared bathroom sported a black bath.

Like his friend Al Morrison, Carl was determined to live in the Australian bush. His chance came in the winter of 1942. A resident of Prices Avenue, Woronora River had fled to the Blue Mountains after three Japanese midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour. Carl bought the resident's five-acre bush block with a one-bedroom fibro cottage, and gradually moved to the Sutherland Shire, initially spending weekends in Woronora, walking down the hill from Sutherland station.

During the 1940s and 1950s a newly-formed organisation, the Contemporary Art Society (CAS), was the 'crucial engine of modernism' in Australia'.³ Carl was prominent as both a board member and an exhibitor. During a period when modern art was rarely exhibited on State Gallery walls,

the Contemporary Art Society was an important source of collegiate support for artists experimenting with new forms and ideas. Friendships were formed and sustained. From 1940 until 1976, Carl Plate exhibited annually in many solo or group shows, along with internationally-touring exhibitions of contemporary Australian art.⁴

Within a decade, an official war artist, art critic, one-time curator at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, art teacher at the National Art School and Carl's close friend, James (Jimmy) Cook, moved into a shack at the back of neighbouring land. He and his wife Ruth, a cousin of Paris-based artist Moya Dyring, built a house on the steep bush block next to ours. Jimmy Cook became a prominent art critic at a time when every Sydney newspaper reviewed art exhibitions. Like Carl, Cook lived and painted in the bush. They made wine, crushing the grapes by stomping on them in a large metal basin otherwise used for bathing babies. They called each other 'Snake' and 'Rat' and enjoyed many bottles of their 'fine Bordeaux'. Tragically, Jimmy Cook died unexpectedly during a trip to Florence in late 1959, and his wife several years later.



*Ivan & Colleen McMeekin (seated),
Jocelyn Plate (standing),
Woronora, late 1970s [courtesy:
Trish McMeekin and Cassi Plate]*

Another family of artist friends moved into the next door house – renowned potter Ivan McMeekin and Sydney Symphony Orchestra cellist Colleen McMeekin and their daughters – the elder became a cellist, and the younger a potter. A researcher and teacher at the University of NSW, Ivan McMeekin wrote the first comprehensive book about Australian clays and is considered one of Australia's finest potters. His work is held by the NSW and Victorian Art Galleries.

During the early years, when Woronora was still an isolated, river-side community, artists Douglas Dundas and Dorothy Thornhill, and their (later photographer) son Kerry Dundas, also moved into Prices Avenue (now called Prices Circuit). It was their artist's retreat, across the road from the Woronora Public School. The Art Gallery of NSW holds a beautiful watercolour 'Rocks and Trees, Woronora', painted by Doug Dundas in about 1970.

The late 1950s and early 1960s were party years for the Woronora artists' enclave. As friends and artists arrived at our house from all over greater Sydney, they were each given a hand-painted glass at the front door. Close friends, Gordon Andrews, designer of Australia's new decimal currency, and his designer wife and gallery manager Mary Andrews, came early. They had a shack on the hill above Garie Beach in the Royal National Park, where we often slept in bunks under grey army blankets.

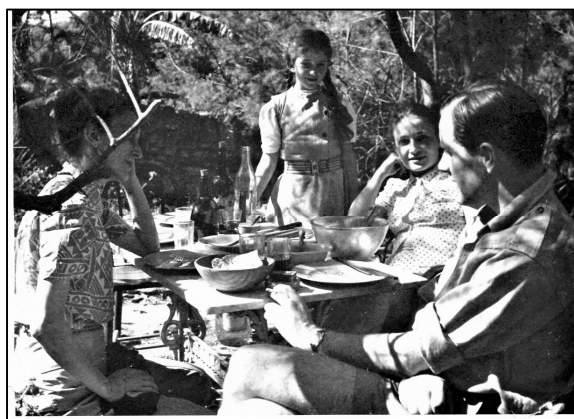
The party music began with Segovia's Spanish guitar, moving onto Duke Ellington's '55' and Django Reinhardt as the crowd, spilling out onto the veranda and decks, became rowdier. The next morning the grass was strewn with sleeping artists and we children were sent to the corner shop for milk, bread and eggs for hangovers.

One artist who always turned up alone was Carl Plate's erstwhile companion from the Young Street studios. The reclusive artist, Godfrey Miller, would arrive unannounced, striding down through the angophoras and hakea behind our house. We called him 'Paw Paw', because

once the hessian bag slung over his shoulder contained a gift of that then-rare fruit. His painting of the bridge at Woronora was recently sold at auction.

Other visitors to Woronora included the artist and writer Sidney and Cynthia Nolan, artists, Frank and Van Hodgkinson, Mona and Leonard Hessing, Billy and Sharn Rose, Guy and Joy Warren, John Olsen, Clifton Pugh, Rosalie and Syd Gascoigne, sculptor Margel Hinder and artist Frank Hinder, Carl's sister artist Margo Lewers and her sculptor husband Gerald Lewers and many other members of the Contemporary Art Society.

Cynthia, Syd and Jinx Nolan with Jocelyn Plate at Woronora 1951 [courtesy: Cassi Plate]



In the same lively period, Costas Taktis⁵, who wrote the most important post-war, modern Greek novel, was welcomed into our lives and home. Like Carl Plate, the younger writer was a passionate modernist and the two became immediate, life-long friends and sparring partners. In 1962, when Costas Taktis was jailed and banished from Australian soil, it was Sydney's modern artists and architects who came to his assistance.⁶ He wrote his great novel *The Third Wedding*, largely in Australia, and dedicated it to Carl and Jocelyn Plate. Taktis never gave up trying to return to Australia, and his years at Woronora River remained his happiest and most productive. The support artists gave to each other during the decades when modernism in Australia was considered a threat was crucial to their survival and development. Their embrace of the Australian bush, birds and animals to the north, south and west of Sydney, played a major role in their development of Australian non-figurative art.

Cassi Plate is a curator, writer and former ABC broadcaster. Her previous book Restless Spirits (Picador, 2005) traced the life and times of a wandering artist throughout the Pacific and Australasia. Exhibitions include Carl Plate Collage 1938-1976 (Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, 2009) and Sydney 6 (Newcastle Art Gallery, 2015). Her new book Monster and Colossus, to be published in March by Australian Scholarly Publishing, reveals the cosmopolitan world of post-war Sydney, through 100 letters between Carl Plate and Costas Taktis, both inveterate travellers.

¹ [Abcmedia.akamaized.net/m.podcast/2011/11/vim_20111121_mp3](http://abcmedia.akamaized.net/m.podcast/2011/11/vim_20111121_mp3); https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Plate

² Carl Plate archive, Art Gallery of NSW

³ A.D.S. Donaldson, 'The Visible Coming to the Aid of the Non-Visible: the Collage of Carl Plate', *Carl Plate Collage 1938-1976*, p. 63, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, 2009.

⁴ Carl Plate's work is held in the National Gallery of Australia and all state and many regional gallery and private collections.

⁵ Apart from the difference between Greek spellings and English-language spellings, Costas Taktis used several different spellings of his names across his lifetime. In 1968 he changed from 'Tachtsis' to 'Taktis' and Costas is also spelled Kostas.

⁶ The reason for Taktis's expulsion is a mystery, although it is at the heart of Cassi Plate's forthcoming book, *Monster and Colossus*.

Remembering life with Carl Plate



Carl Plate in his Woronora studio, 1964

My father was a serious artist. Early each morning he disappeared up to his studio built amongst the angophoras and banksias on a slope behind our small fibro house in the hills behind the Woronora River. He reappeared to make himself a messy coffee, grinding beans in a hand grinder and pouring hot water through a paper filter. There were no coffee makers in 1950s Sydney and this ritual, along with red wine in the evenings, rewrote daily the thread of connection to a wider, cosmopolitan world. As children we weren't allowed in the studio, to disturb the hallowed space of creation. It was a large square wooden room, with tall windows along the northern wall and a window to the south where his easel stood. A workbench ran under this southern window, holding shelves of painting material, jars of vividly coloured powders and paintbrushes, high stacks of *Paris Match*, *Lilliput*, *Cahiers D'Art*, *Art International*, *Art News* and other magazines.

...Unless our father was working in his possum-proofed, fenced-in vegetable garden, picking beans or Warrigal spinach, we'd ring a bell to summon him down from the studio to dinner. No talking during the ABC seven o'clock news; he was not fond of Robert Menzies. There was no television, but there were often guests.... Many were still there the next morning, sprawled asleep on the grass when we woke early to be sent to the corner shop for bread and eggs to feed the hangovers. It was an odd, Bohemian existence, veering from extreme isolation for both my parents, to bursts of conviviality and intense discussion, intercut with music collected by my father from all over the world: Cameroon, Paraguay, Django Reinhardt and Duke Ellington.

(Extract from: Cassi Plate, *Carl Plate: Within and Without*, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre's 2009 exhibition catalogue, *Carl Plate: Collage 1938-1976*, p.10, <http://carlplate.blogspot.com/2009.05/carl-plate-within-and-without.html> [accessed 19.1.2020])



This 1952 oil painting of the view from the Plate family's Woronora home was by Alleyne Clarice Zander, Carl's mother-in-law, also an artist. She brought the first exhibition of modern art to Australia in 1932. The photo opposite, taken in 1970 is of the same view, showing a much older angophora tree in the foreground.

Clarice Zander and Carl at 'Bird's Rise', Woronora in 1946



[Images courtesy of Cassi Plate]



Carl Plate, Graph Segments No. 6, 1964

In her *Sydney Morning Herald* review (1 Sept 1979), Nancy Borlase described this earthy painting as recalling the Woronora bush where the artist lived.

[Courtesy: Australian National University Collection, Gift of the Gascoigne family, 2013]

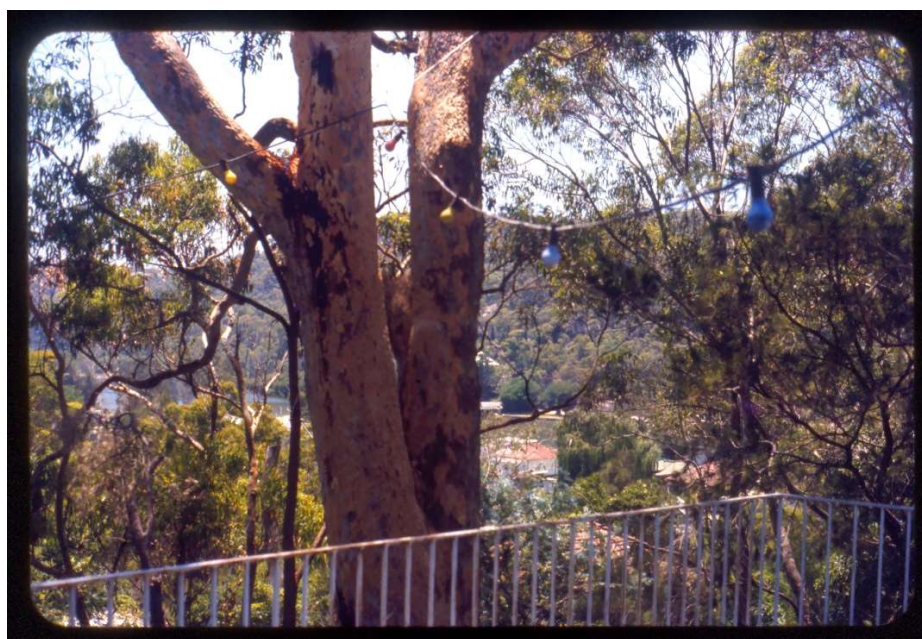
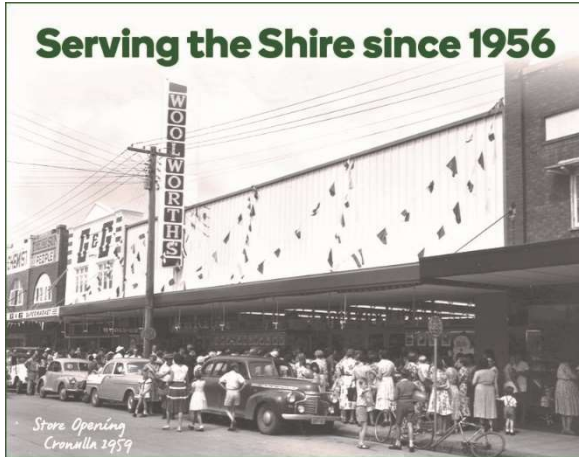


Photo taken from Carl Plate's house in Price's Circuit, Woronora, 1970

[Courtesy: Cassi Plate]

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