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'Grandview', Gymea Bay, c.1920s [courtesy: Shorter family]  
See article: 'House by the River', p.8

*MINDFUL OF THE PAST – FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE*

**EMAIL:** [shirehistory@gmail.com](mailto:shirehistory@gmail.com) **SSHS WEBSITE:** [www.shirehistory.org](http://www.shirehistory.org)

**FACEBOOK:** Sutherland Shire Historical Society

## FIGHTING AGAINST THE DEMOLITION OF HOTHAM HOUSE

(See article, page 19)

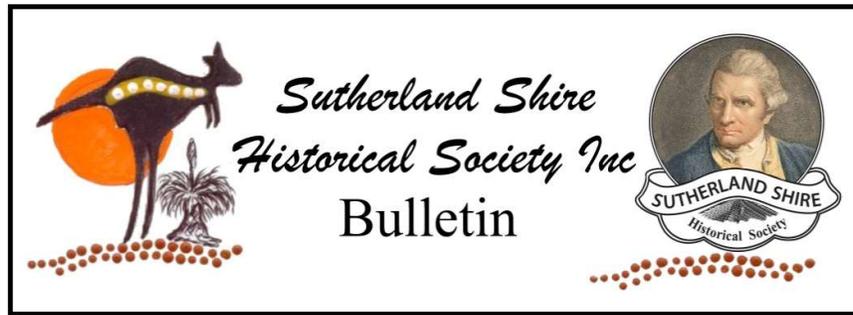


*GyMEA residents and Society members outside Hotham House on Saturday, 23<sup>rd</sup> January to protest against its demolition. [Photo: E. Craig]*

*Hotham House as it looks now at well over 100 years old. [SSHS]*



*Hotham Poultry Farm, when owned by Frederick Turner, 1930s  
[Photo: Larry Humphrey, descendant of Frederick Turner, supplied by Kim Hatherly]*



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**Extra printed copies of the *Bulletin* will be available at meetings for \$5.**

***East Coast Encounters 1770* will also be available for sale at meetings for \$30 (members) and \$35 (non-members)**

## **SUTHERLAND SHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

### **THE SOCIETY**

The SSHS has a proud tradition stretching back more than half a century 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 and on our website: [www.shirehistory.org](http://www.shirehistory.org). 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](mailto: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 without 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](http://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. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, meetings have been suspended until further notice.

## **SUTHERLAND SHIRE MUSEUM**

Our museum is currently closed. We have been relocated from the Sutherland Memorial School of Arts in East Parade Sutherland to a venue in Venetia Street, Sylvania, which, after COVID-19 crisis is over, will be renovated to accommodate our Museum. More information on access, opening times etc will be released in due course.

**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. Donations will be stored safely while we wait for renovations of our new venue to be finished.

## **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](mailto:shirehistory@gmail.com)

## SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: 2020-2021

### ELECTED MEMBERS

<b>PATRON:</b>	Shire Mayor, Steve Simpson		
<b>PRESIDENT</b>	Pauline Curby	0427 527 721	pcurby@iprimus.com.au
<b>VICE PRESIDENT</b>	Bruce Watt	0405 493 187	watto1951@tpg.com.au
<b>SECRETARY/PUBLIC OFFICER</b>	John Doherty	0402 848 344	johndoherty55@gmail.com
<b>TREASURER</b>	John Doherty	0402 848 344	johndoherty55@gmail.com
<b>COMMITTEE MEMBERS:</b>			
<b>ASSISTANT SECRETARY/TREASURER</b>	Creo Moore	0425 226 405	creoaus@gmail.com
	Carol McDonald	0403 877 397	jmcdonald@optusnet.com.au
	Elizabeth Craig	0491 096 642	elizabeth.craig@y7mail.com
	Frank Zumbo	0417 213 768	mr.frank.zumbo@gmail.com

### APPOINTED POSITIONS

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<b>EXCURSIONS BOOKING CLERK</b>			
<b>HERITAGE WEEK LIAISON OFFICER</b>	Frank Zumbo	0417 213 768	mr.frank.zumbo@gmail.com
<b>WELFARE OFFICER</b>	Gloria Hans	9589 0251	
<b>AFTERNOON TEA</b>	Anne Steward Beryl Davis Mary Small		
<b>HONORARY SOLICITOR</b>	Michael Solari		

**SSHS CALENDAR: MARCH – MAY 2021**  
(See website: [www.shirehistory.org](http://www.shirehistory.org) for updates)

**SSHS MEETING** - normally held at 1.30pm, 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday in the month  
at the **Stapleton Centre, Sutherland**

**THE MUSEUM IS CLOSED**

**DATE**

<b>FEBRUARY 2021</b>	<b>Thurs 25<sup>th</sup></b>	<p><b>EXCURSION:</b> To Royal National Park, including Gogerly's Cottage and Rathane Camp</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meet at Waratah Park, Sutherland 9:00 for 9:30 start. We will be carpooling. The road is bumpy, so a 4wd vehicle preferable.</li> <li>- Drive to Audley. Cost is \$12.00 per vehicle. Turn left at Warambul Rd.</li> <li>- <b>To be confirmed by NPWS</b> as permission to visit Gogerly's Cottage only if nearby Hilltops Cottage is not being leased. Joe Hales will advise.</li> <li>- Lunch: By the shores of Port Hacking. Please BYO.</li> <li>- Wear comfortable walking shoes and be of reasonable fitness.</li> <li>- Contact Joe Hales 0418 270 744 to confirm numbers attending.</li> </ul>
<b>MARCH 2021</b>	<b>Thurs. 18<sup>th</sup></b>	<p><b>EXCURSION:</b> To Kurnell. Starting at Kamay Visitor Centre 10:30am</p> <p>Bruce Howell will be conducting this excursion of Kurnell, including many places of interest.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lunch at Cafe 1770 or BYO</li> <li>- Transport - Meet at Stapleton St Centre at 10:00am to arrange transport</li> <li>- Contact Joe Hales 0418 270 744 so as we can confirm numbers</li> </ul>
<b>MARCH 2021</b>	<b>Sat. 20<sup>th</sup></b>	<p><b>SPEAKER:</b> Liz Adams will speak on James Cook - regarded as a villain by some, while to others he is a hero. Liz will examine the Cook 'blame game' and the implications of this debate for national unity and reconciliation.</p> <p align="center"><b>Don't forget to register your attendance</b>  (Phone or email Creo Moore)</p>
<b>APRIL 2021</b>	<b>Sat. 17<sup>th</sup></b>	<p align="center"><b>MEETING VENUE to be confirmed</b></p> <p>If ready we will be opening the new museum at 88 Venetia Street, Sylvania, and possibly meeting there</p> <p align="center">More information at Meetings and via <i>Reaching Out</i></p>
<b>MAY 2021</b>	<b>Sat 15<sup>th</sup></b>	<p><b>SPEAKER:</b> Jenny MacRitchie will be speaking on The Daredevil Dairyman. Rockdale farmer, Reginald Annabel built his own plane, flew around Australia, under the harbour bridge, and was killed in 1934 doing a loop the loop at Mascot Aerodrome.</p>

# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

PAULINE CURBY



As we move out of holiday mode, it promises to be a very busy year of change for Sutherland Shire Historical Society. We are all hopeful that – unlike last year – 2021 will see a return to something approaching normalcy.

## **Venetia Street lease signed**

The most significant change for the Society will be the move of our museum from Sutherland Memorial School of Arts to a Council-owned building in Venetia Street, Sylvania Heights. Our active museum committee has been working at a frantic pace to pack up exhibitions and items in storage ready for the February move. As this has been proceeding the deaccessioning of items not relevant to Shire history has been undertaken, in accordance with the Society's deaccession policy. Some items have been sold, while others will be donated to relevant organisations such as other historical societies.

A final inspection of the Venetia Street property was held on 29 January and I – and secretary/treasurer John Doherty – signed a five-year lease with Sutherland Shire Council on the same day. Assistant secretary/treasurer Creo Moore witnessed our signatures and museum manager Peter Moore checked that all was in order.

We are pleased to note that the Council has gone to considerable effort to renovate the building to ensure it is suitable for our use, as well as making some lease concessions that will assist us in our transition period. It is hoped the museum will re-open in the new premises in time for the Heritage Festival in late April.

While the museum committee is working hard to ensure this happens, extra hands are needed to help. Contact Peter Moore (0427 213 575) or email [shirehistory@gmail.com](mailto:shirehistory@gmail.com) if you can offer any assistance.

## **SSHS Meetings**

Unfortunately, the executive felt it was prudent to cancel the January meeting because of COVID concerns. Hopefully the February meeting will proceed with the president of the Royal Australian Historical Society Christine Yeats speaking on 'Crime, misdemeanours and more in Sutherland Shire'. Our advertised January speaker Liz Adams will deliver her talk on 'The Cook Controversy' in March.

## **Fight for Hotham House**

At times Sutherland Shire Historical Society executive decides to take a stand on issues of importance relating to Shire history and heritage. This was the case on Saturday 23 January when a number of our members joined residents of Gynea and Kirrawee to protest about the planned demolition of heritage-listed Hotham House. At very short notice about 30 people assembled outside the house to have a photo taken for the *Leader*. This appeared in the edition of 27 January, to accompany an article on the issue, as well as a letter from me as president, outlining our objections to this proposed demolition (see article on p. 19). I have also sent a submission to the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment protesting about this proposed demolition. We will keep members informed of the outcome.

Best wishes to all our members for a productive 2021 and special thanks to SSHS's hard working executive whose efforts make my job as president manageable.

## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

ELIZABETH CRAIG

Thank you to this month's contributors, who provided a range of great stories, from convicts to retail history to insights into the occupants of an old heritage house in Gympie Bay, and even an intriguing story involving *Waltzing Matilda*.

### **Finding *Bulletin* articles**

In addition to our newly merged index, there is now a complete list of *Bulletin* articles and authors, 1966-2020 on our website.

### **Excursions reports**

We also welcome Joe Hales' reports about our revitalised excursions (p.7). You can see from the Calendar that we have another two booked for the next month, and Joe has many more planned for the year. He and his wife, Sandra, always do a practice run a couple of weeks ahead to iron out any potential hurdles, and as those who visited the

Australian Museum and Hyde Park last week will attest, Joe researches the history thoroughly. Excursionists were full of enthusiasm about the day.

### **Printed *Bulletin***

While everyone with an email address will receive a digital copy of the *Bulletin*, those who have paid \$20 for printed copies can either pick it up at the next meeting or it will be posted to you. There will be a few extra copies on hand for sale at \$5 if anyone else would like a copy.

### **More contributions please**

Please keep those articles rolling in. The more writers we have, the more varied and interesting the content. Also, don't forget to send in your snippets and personal memories/stories for our newsletter *Reaching Out*.

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## *Letter to the Editor*

*Dear Editor,*

*I was all set to attend the Sutherland Shire Historical Society meeting in January and when I booked in with Creo she advised me that the meeting had been cancelled. It was disappointing as I had planned to write an article for the Bulletin and submit it at the meeting.*

*My brother suggested a book for me to read on the Cooks River – River Dreams by Ian Tyrell - and it has been taking a lot of my attention.*

*In the November 2020 Bulletin there were two articles pertaining to the subject of the Cooks River: The 'Drogher My Idea' by Greg Jackson (p.18) and '100 Years of Family History', by Ian Annabel (p.20). I thought members who found them interesting might also be interested in reading about the history of the river that flows through so many of our suburbs.*

*River Dreams is about the various local and government bodies' attempts to deal with the outcomes of trying to manage and develop this water source and land surrounding it - be it for industrial, leisure facilities, market gardens or residential development. The book is fascinating, taking me a lot of time and interest. And when I read the two articles in the Bulletin relating to the human and social development of the times it made the book more relevant.*

*River Dreams by Ian Tyrell is available from Sutherland Library. Publisher: University of NSW Press Limited, Sydney 2052, published in 2018.*

*Johanna Ashburn*

# EXCURSION REPORT

## A DAY OUT AT THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM

JOE HALES

Our first outing for 2021 was on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> February to the Australian Museum.....all aboard, face masks on and off we go on the 9.15 train toward Museum station.

The Australian Museum is the oldest Museum in Australia and the fifth oldest in the world, specialising in Natural History and Anthropology. The Museum was named in 1836. In 2020, 57 million dollars was spent on refurbishment and expansion of the Museum.

We arrived at Museum station about 10.30 am, following a relaxing stroll through Hyde Park. We arrive and have two hours of free time in the Museum.

Some of the highlights were: the Long Gallery, Treasures of Australia, extinct animal fossils, a 2,200 year old Mummy. Also, on Level 2, the Hall on Climate Change, understanding the causes and impacts of our most urgent challenge. Discover solutions to turn these changes around?

At the next exhibition called 'Surviving Australia', we explored the secrets of the weird and wonderful wild life of Australia.

We all met at 12.30 for lunch at the Billabong Water Café. Lunch over, we crossed over to Hyde Park, where we had a historic adventure into the various statues, fountains and monuments which make up the history of Hyde Park.

Set aside as a public park by Governor Macquarie in 1810, Hyde Park was an empty space – treeless and no grass, and was used for horseracing and later as a cricket field. In 1832

Francis Greenway designed the gardens. Paths were built, and grass and trees planted, resulting in what you see today. Hyde Park is the oldest park in Australia. In 1854 the cricket pitch was moved to the Domain.



SSHS Excursionists at Hyde Park [Photo: Creo Moore]

Some items of interest we discussed included: The Obelisk, built in 1857; a statue erected in 1879 of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband; a bronze statue of Captain James Cook, also erected in 1879; the ANZAC memorial and reflection pool built in 1934; and the Archibald Fountain built in 1932.

Unfortunately, due to Covid, the ANZAC memorial was closed, but we appreciated the beauty and the meaning of the reflection pool built in 1934.

Overall, we enjoyed a great day. We said our goodbyes until our next excursion which is planned for Gogerly's Cottage, in the Royal National Park on Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> February. See Calendar (p.4) for details.

## THE HOUSE BY THE RIVER: TWO FAMILIES AT *GRANDVIEW*

KIM HATHERLY

Late in 1911 a survey was made of the bushland along Ellesmere Road, Gymea Bay, overlooking Port Hacking and North West Arm. Thirty-four-year-old single woman Mary Norton secured leases from the Holt-Sutherland Estate Company of nine prime waterfront acres with a magnificent panoramic outlook on the eastern point.<sup>1</sup> With the high portion of the land cleared, Mary built the aptly-named *Grandview*, an eight-roomed weatherboard homestead at what is now 182 Ellesmere Road, facing east to capture the expansive water views. Under its hipped iron roof and two tall chimneys, the house featured bay windows, French doors opening onto a wide wrap-around verandah with decoratively bracketed timber posts, and sandstone steps leading down to the grounds. A concrete well and tanks were installed, a tennis court, timber boat house and 'out-offices' built and gardens and fruit trees established.



'Grandview', 182 Ellesmere Rd, Gymea Bay, c.1920s [courtesy: Shorter family]

Mary Norton was a toddler when she arrived in Brisbane from England on the *Devon* early in 1879 with parents, John and Susannah and elder brothers John Thomas and Arthur. She would become one of Australia's — and the world's — first female film industry executives and for most of her career, 'home base' was Ellesmere Road, firstly at the landmark *Grandview* (which still stands)<sup>2</sup> and later, a few doors away at *Chiswick* and finally next door at *Tamar* (both since demolished).

Following their emigration the Nortons continued almost immediately from Brisbane to Sydney. Susannah Norton gave birth to twin boys in 1880 and another son in 1881, all of whom tragically died as babies, before Susannah herself died at Newtown the following year. John Norton was left to raise his three surviving children alone. Both John Thomas and Arthur took jobs on the railways, and after John Thomas' 1892 marriage he was appointed to Sutherland station as night porter. Though promoted to station master at Cowan by the time Mary Norton purchased her leases at Gymea, perhaps it was through her brother's years at Sutherland that she became familiar with the area.

Around 1907 Mary began her association with Englishman Clement Mason, whose initial visit to Australia had been as a bioscope operator for J.C. Williamson's at the turn of the century. Mason returned to Sydney around this time and renovated the Queen's Hall theatre in Pitt Street to show his 'London Bio-Tableaux', short films which he imported for a regularly-changing program. It was said that Mason had been the first to exhibit 'moving pictures' for King Edward VII<sup>3</sup> and imported the first

actual 'silver' screen to Australia on which to project his films.<sup>4</sup> The innovative screen resulted in a greatly improved picture quality and his use of the latest projectors eliminated much of the irritating flicker of earlier machines. In 1908 Mason gave up exhibiting to establish one of the country's earliest film exchanges, hiring films and projection equipment to suburban and travelling picture showmen, thus becoming one of Australia's first independent film distributors. Mary played an active role in the business, gaining experience and contacts she would draw on in years to come.

When he wasn't sailing to England and America on buying trips, Clement lived with Mary and her father John at *Grandview*. In 1914 John Norton died at the age of 73 and was buried at Woronora Cemetery. It was a bitter blow for Mary, for whom John had been sole parent since she was five. On the back of a photo taken just months before his death, Mary wrote: 'His equal as a father is seldom found and his good deeds live after him'.<sup>5</sup>

In 1916 Mary Norton and Clement Mason married but the following winter came a second blow, when Clement died of pneumonia, aged 45. Perhaps *Grandview* held too many memories for Mary, because she sold the house and six of her original nine acres soon after Clement's death, and relocated to *Chiswick*, a new two-bedroom brick bungalow built on the remaining three acres just north of *Grandview*.

Though known to family and friends as Madge, professionally Mary began styling herself 'Mary Clement Mason' and plunged back into the film distribution business. Her own first company, Mason Super Films, was registered in 1918, making her the only woman in the world managing a film exchange.<sup>6</sup> She travelled as widely as had her husband, and the international contacts they'd built up now stood her in good stead. Filmmaking had come a long way from the three-minute novelty 'bio-tableaux' Clement first imported to screen during vaudeville stage shows. Though she and Clement had secured exclusive rights to distribute Essanay's output (the company which produced Charlie Chaplin's films from 1915), Mary now increasingly specialised in British and European features. When a royal commission into the Australian motion picture industry was held between 1926-28 to examine, amongst other things, the dominance of American films distributed here and questioned a potential monopoly, Mary's long experience as 'one of the best-known members of the industry'<sup>7</sup> and 'recognised throughout Australia as having a unique knowledge of the picture business',<sup>8</sup> saw her called as a witness.



Mary Norton, c. 1910s  
[*The Lone Hand, Nat. Aust. Monthly*, 1 Oct 1918]

Mary appears to have taken a less active role in the industry following the advent of sound films, though her step-son Cecil Mason became a highly successful film executive himself, eventually heading up Columbia Pictures in Australia and New Zealand. As a small boy in London Cecil had assisted his father by winding the film onto take-up reels after it passed through the projector; on arrival in Australia around 1912 he lived with Clement and Mary at *Grandview* and early in his management career worked with his step-mother at Mason Super Films.

When Mary died in 1951, she left £200 to a nephew and the remainder of her estate, valued at over £16,500, to the building fund for the proposed Sutherland District Hospital,<sup>9</sup> which the board acknowledged was a 'substantial bequest'.<sup>10</sup> Her will proposed that when the facility was built, a ward be named the 'Mary Norton Ward'. Instead, in 1961 the hospital honoured Mary's generosity in naming its newly opened training facility, the 'Mary Norton Nurses' Training School'.<sup>11</sup>

In 1917 *Grandview* and six of Mary Norton's original nine acres were bought by Arthur and Flora Shorter of Strathfield.<sup>12</sup> Arthur Shorter suffered from asthma and it was hoped that the move to the

fresh air and bushland setting of Gymea Bay would improve his health. Arthur and Flora, with their little boys John and George (known as Bill) arrived at *Grandview* just before the birth of daughter Lulu. Two more sons, Austin and Stuart, would follow.

Flora Shorter's transition to her new home may not have been as dramatic as that of some other pioneer women who began their lives at Gymea in primitive bush shacks. *Grandview* was certainly a comfortable home, but it did not have the electricity, gas or running water that Flora had been accustomed to at Strathfield. What it did have was glorious Port Hacking views and, to the delight of the growing Shorter children, acres of bush and paddocks to explore, a tennis court and, at the foot of a steep stone staircase, a river for fishing, swimming and 'messaging about in boats'.

Arthur's father headed the well-known firm of John Shorter & Co, the exclusive Australasian agent for Doulton's art ceramics, pottery and architectural and sanitary ware. Staffordshire-born John Shorter had emigrated to Sydney and set up as a manufacturers' agent in the city; he married his Australian-born wife Emily Butler in 1883 and eldest son Arthur was born the following year. Though John acted as agent for a number of British firms, it was for his representation of Doulton & Co (later Royal Doulton) that the Shorter name is best known. Both Arthur and his brother John Austin Shorter worked in the family firm, while sister Lucie, a gifted artist, created Australian designs for Royal Doulton tableware, including a popular flannel flower motif, native rose and fuchsia designs and a distinctive stylised waratah pattern. Nicknamed 'Lulu' by her father, Lucie's Australian floral designs for bone china and earthenware table settings became known as the 'Lulu Series'.<sup>13</sup>

Flora Shorter's father was engineer and politician George McCredie, who built the heritage-listed *Linnwood* at Guildford where Flora spent most of her childhood. In 1900, at the outbreak of bubonic plague in Sydney, George McCredie was appointed by the government to oversee investigations into affected locations and to instigate quarantine and clean-up operations in the plague's aftermath. Like those of Victorian London reformers in the wake of devastating cholera outbreaks, McCredie's reports exposed the extent of poverty and unsanitary living conditions in Sydney's slums, particularly since he engaged Public Works photographer John Degotardi Jnr to record their house-to-house inspections around the plague-infested Rocks.<sup>14</sup>

George McCredie had died by the time daughter Flora married Arthur Shorter in the drawing room at *Linnwood* in 1911. Coming from two prominent families, the wedding 'created a good deal of interest, not only in the Parramatta and Guildford districts but in metropolitan social circles'.<sup>15</sup> Flora, in her 'handsome wedding gown of ivory white embroidered net over satin charmeuse, with pearl trimmings'<sup>16</sup> was given away by her brother, and the newlyweds honeymooned in New Zealand, no doubt incorporating some business activities for Arthur.

In moving to the comparatively remote Gymea Bay six years later, Arthur and Flora regarded *Grandview* as a permanent residence, rather than as a weekender or holiday home. The children received their early education at Miranda and Sutherland schools, riding their pushbikes or catching Ern Warman's horse bus. (Youngest son Stuart, attending school during the 1930s depression, kicked off his shoes and hid them in a tree near the bus depot before joining his less well-off mates who wore none, and retrieved the shoes on his way home).<sup>17</sup> The boys, particularly John and Stuart, became active members of the Scouting movement. Lulu and her brothers were frequent contributors to the children's pages of the Sunday papers, winning prizes for their stories, sketches, jokes and puzzle entries. The extensive grounds of *Grandview*, the Port Hacking River and the surrounding bushland made for a playground of endless possibilities for the children and their friends. They played in the bottlebrush grove at the present Gymea Bay school site, held cricket games in the paddock near the house and tennis matches on their own court. Arthur replaced Mary Norton's original weatherboard

boatshed with a stone-built one, complete with a boar's head figurehead (a landmark for local fishermen) and the youngsters took their row boats out on regular paddles around the river and bays. They gathered fruit from the *Grandview* orchard, scrambled down a rickety wooden ladder at the foot of Cooperbrook Avenue to collect shell grit for the fowls, and picked wildflowers in the bush for their mother (although little Stuart's flannel flower gift was quickly removed from the house when it set off his father's asthma). At Kurnell they picked prickly pear which Flora brewed into a syrup to help Arthur's respiratory problems.<sup>18</sup>

Arthur travelled widely on Shorter company business and, like his father, was conscious of the historic and aesthetic value of the Royal Doulton output they represented. Arthur was a trustee of the Museum of Technology and Applied Science (now the Powerhouse), to which the family donated valuable collections of Royal Doulton pieces, including the John Slater Collection originally acquired in 1919 and, after his death in 1942, John Shorter's superb personal collection of over 400 items. Arthur became managing director of the firm by the terms of his father's will. By then the company occupied the Art Deco *Shorter House* in Clarence Street, comprising showrooms, office space and warehouse, custom-designed by the prolific architectural partnership of Robertson, Marks & McCredie (the latter partner was Flora's cousin Leith McCredie).

In 1927 Arthur subdivided the two three-acre blocks he had purchased from Mary Norton and began to sell the newly-created building lots. He and Flora remained in the *Grandview* house until Arthur's death in 1957, when it was sold to the Pettit-Young family, and Flora moved to the north shore. Youngest son Stuart and his wife Ev raised their family in Manchester Road, Gynea, and both were well-known leaders in the Scouting and Guiding movements. Stuart was made a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) in 1986 for his services to Scouting. Eldest son John Shorter, the third generation to run the family business, was honoured with a Companion of the British Empire (CBE) in 1977 for his services to British commercial interests in Australia.

*Grandview*, now 108 years old and despite some renovations in later years, is listed as an item of local significance in the Sutherland Shire Local Environmental Plan (LEP) 2015 in Schedule 5, Environmental Heritage.

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<sup>1</sup> NSW Land Registry Services leases 661153, 661154, 661155

<sup>2</sup> Sutherland Shire Local Environmental Plan 2015 Schedule 5 item 1606. The address is shown in the LEP as 180 Ellesmere Rd but has since been renumbered to 182 Ellesmere Rd due to a subsequent subdivision of the double block

<sup>3</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 31 Jul 1907 p 2

<sup>4</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 31 Jul 1907 p 7

<sup>5</sup> Photograph in possession of Norton family

<sup>6</sup> *Smith's Weekly*, 3 Apr 1920 p 11

<sup>7</sup> *Everyones* 12 Oct 1927 p 4

<sup>8</sup> *The Labour Daily*, 1 Jun 1929 p 6

<sup>9</sup> NSW Will Books 1800-1952 will number 380135

<sup>10</sup> *The Propellor*, 8 Mar 1951 p 1

<sup>11</sup> *St George & Sutherland Shire Leader*, 6 Sept 1961, p 25

<sup>12</sup> NSW Land Registry Services Vol 2796 Fol 158

<sup>13</sup> Arianne Rourke, 'Shorter, Lucie Emilie (Lulu) (1887–1989)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/shorter-lucie-emilie-lulu-15489/text26704>, published first in hardcopy 2012, accessed online 19 October 2020

<sup>14</sup> Six albums of Degotardi's famous photographs are now held by the Mitchell Library.

<sup>15</sup> *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate*, 4 Feb 1911 p 2

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

<sup>17</sup> Stuart Shorter, interview with author, 10 Apr 1995

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

# THE BIRTH OF WOOLWORTHS AND ITS PLACE IN THE SHIRE.

STEPHEN WARD

At 9am on Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> December 1924, 'Woolworths Stupendous Bargain Basement' opened for business in Sydney's Imperial Arcade. A wild rush of bargain-seekers converged on the premises and met in a violent collision, many fainting as a consequence. The staff room was quickly converted into an emergency casualty station.

A full-page advertisement in the previous night's papers, promised Sydney shoppers a handy place where good things are cheap. Really cheap. The cheapest possible. *Come and see. You'll want to live at Woolworths. From 9 in the morning till 9 at night, Woolworths will sell what you want and sell it cheap.*

For the founders of Woolworths Limited that Friday was the culmination of weeks of round-the-clock work . . . building counters and fixtures, hiring and training staff, receiving stock and pricing it. Would the new type of trading catch on with Sydneysiders?

Let us go back beyond 5<sup>th</sup> December 1924 and see just how 'Woolworths Stupendous Bargain Basement' came into being. Who were the people responsible for this venture? How exactly did it all happen?

## FOUNDERS

The founders of Woolworths Limited were Harold Percival Christmas, Stanley Edward Chatterton, George William Percival Creed, Ernest Robert Williams and Scott Cecil Waine.

Percy Christmas, a commercial traveller with the haberdashery firm of Isherwood and Bartlett, York Street, Sydney, decided to start his own business. He mentioned this to a friend asking whether he knew anyone with £100 who might care to join him. Consequently, he met Stanley Chatterton, and together they commenced a Mail Order Dress Business.

This venture did not do as well as planned, so they opened a first-floor Frock Salon in the Queen Victoria Markets building at the corner of Market and George Street, Sydney. It was immediately successful, and before long was making a handsome profit. The business was then formed into a company, SE Chatterton Ltd. One of the members, Mr Scott Waine, a partner in the chartered accountancy firm of C. Scott Waine & Mitchell, attended to the financial side.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF WOOLWORTHS LTD AND THE FIRST STORE

By 1924 it was obvious that the premises of SE Chatterton were too small, and that a branch store should be established. The firm was offered a portion of the basement of the Imperial Arcade, which extended from Pitt to Castlereagh Streets. At that time the basement was occupied by a printing

business, *Smith's Weekly* and a billiard saloon. The floor had several levels, and the atmosphere seemed unsuitable for a retail business.

The property was offered for a four-and-a-half-year lease at a weekly rent of £42/10/- (\$85) free of rates and taxes, with an option for another five years at a reappraised rent. The total area was approximately 14,000 sq. ft. so the rental was equivalent to 3/2d per sq. ft. per annum. This seemed so reasonable that despite its unsuitability Christmas and Chatterton decided to lease the basement.

Mr Chatterton mentioned the deal to one of his suppliers, Mr GWP Creed of Melbourne, and Mr Creed suggested a cash-and-carry store similar to one operating in Adelaide and selling 'variety novelties' along the lines of the overseas FW Woolworth Company. Cash and Carry Ltd were the tenants of a building owned by Mr Creed in Rundle Street Adelaide.

After inspecting the Adelaide company's cash-and-carry open-display method of selling, Messrs Christmas and Chatterton convinced one of its business operators, Mr ER Williams to join the new Sydney venture and to act under a two-and-a-half- year contract as buyer.

The company was then incorporated with a nominal capital of 25,000 shares of £1 (\$2) each. The original prospectus showed the proposed name of the company as 'Wallworths Bazaar Ltd'.



Woolworths first store located in Pitt Street, Sydney.

### **THE NAME**

This name was discussed at great length and finally Wallworth's Bazaar was considered too cumbersome. Eventually, after it was established that the overseas F. W. Woolworth Company had no plans to open in Australia, the Company was registered as 'Woolworths Limited' on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1924.

Although 15,000 shares were offered to the public, it was evident that there was little confidence in the venture. Only 12,225 shares were bought by 29 people, mostly friends of the promoters. This lack of confidence was chiefly due to the 'Basement' site and the fact that this form of trading was new to Sydney.

The first day's sales were £688/4/- the equivalent of \$56,500 today. In its first year, the Company paid a dividend of five percent, in the second year 40% and in the third 50%. The founder's policy of selling goods in popular demand, on a cash-and-carry basis had been vindicated.

In 1926, receipt-printing cash registers were installed by the National Cash Register Company, who stated that Woolworths Limited was the world's first variety store to employ such machines to record sales.

### **RAPID GROWTH**

A second Woolworths store opened in Brisbane in 1927 with additional stores opening in Sydney, Perth and Brisbane in 1928. The Company became an international retailer with the opening of its first New Zealand store and a London Buying Office in 1929. The operating model of value for money, affordable goods enabled Woolworths to continue the growth in store numbers despite the onset of the Great Depression. Interstate expansion continued with stores opened in Melbourne in 1933, Adelaide in 1936, Hobart in 1940 and Canberra in 1941.

### **THE WAR YEARS**

The onset of World War II quickly led to a halt in expansion of stores with the last store opening in 1941 and, due to shortages in building materials and stock, the first post-war store not opening until 1948.

The first purpose-built Woolworths Warehouse opened in Glebe in 1940 with half of the building being given over to the Australian Army after the first week for the duration of the war. And the then Woolworths CEO Theo Kelly (later Sir Theo) was seconded to the Australian Airforce to manage their canteen and catering service for the duration. In addition, the Woolworths Arcade store located in the Brisbane CBD was closed and given over by Woolworths as a rest and recreation centre for the American armed forces from 1943-45.

The war also resulted in a large number of male employees joining the armed forces including many store managers. This created the first cracks in the glass ceiling for women with many now managing stores for the first time. One notable female store manager was Phyllis Evans (mother of former Australian Attorney General and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Gareth Evans), who managed the Collingwood store from 1940-44.



Ambulances at Victoria Barracks donated to the Australian Army in 1941 by Woolworths. Rapid post war expansion saw the Company's 200<sup>th</sup> store open in Canberra in 1955 and the 300<sup>th</sup> store opened in Wentworthville in 1959.

## WOOLWORTHS OPENS IN SUTHERLAND SHIRE

Woolworths opened its first Shire store in Sutherland on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1956. Large crowds eagerly awaited the store opening, with people jostling shoulder to shoulder in the store keen to get at the bargains.



*In Sutherland the crowd awaiting the opening of the first Woolworths in the Shire in 1956*

## FORAY INTO FOOD

Woolworths commenced selling groceries and fresh foods for the first time in 1957. Many existing Variety stores expanded to include grocery departments as well as opening new freestanding Woolworths Food Fair stores selling groceries and fresh foods such as the Gymea Woolworths Food Fair opened on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1962.

A notable example was the opening of the Sutherland Woolworths Super Store on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1958 (on the corner of Princes Highway and Flora Street). This was one of the earliest Woolworths stores specifically opened to sell food. The combined Woolworths Variety and Food Stores had begun to be referred to as Super Stores and the additional Sutherland store was opened with much fanfare as a Super Store. What was unusual about this store was that it was not attached to the existing Variety store but constructed across the laneway. However, the two stores were now operated together by the one store manager. The store opening was a very big event with the Princes Highway being closed for a street parade featuring Santa Claus and the Sutherland Shire Silver Band.



*The opening celebration street parade passing the new Sutherland Super Store*

The store was officially opened by radio and television personality Bob Dyer.

## EXPANSION THROUGH ACQUISITION AND EVOLUTION

Woolworths opened in the Shire during a time of growing residential development replacing what had been small village suburbs, farmland and native bushland. The company provided affordable household goods locally where previously people often had to travel to major centres such as Hurstville or the City. With the Shire's continued growth in population and housing development Woolworths continued its expansion progressively opening more and more stores (see Chronology next page) .

From 1960 Woolworths also began to acquire other brand names such as Flemings Food Store, McIlrath Grocery Stores, Dick Smith Electronics and Australian Safeway Supermarket stores, all of which were in the Shire. When it acquired the Centralian Traders store in Alice Springs in 1960 Woolworths become the first retailer in Australia to have branches in every state and territory.

In the early 1990's the Caringbah and Cronulla Woolworths Variety Stores which had opened in the 1950's changed to the Crazy Prices brand as part of adapting to a changing retail environment. Crazy Prices and Dick Smith Electronics were later sold off, as Woolworths consolidated its core businesses of food, Big W and liquor (BWS, and later, Dan Murphy). In 2002 the first Woolworths Petrol sites opened in the Shire at Menai and Miranda, providing discounted petrol prices along with reward points from purchases in the Woolworths Supermarket or Big W providing further discounts. In 2019 these were sold to the Euro Garage Group, with Woolworths remaining a long-term business partner and supplier of groceries and fresh food to the petrol sites and reward discounts continue for customers.

Woolworths continues to increase its presence in the Shire, with a new Supermarket currently under construction as part of the redevelopment of Cronulla Sutherland Leagues Club and scheduled to open in 2022, and they are negotiating with Council to develop Woolworths stores in Barden Ridge and in Jannali.

*About the Author: Stephen Ward's career with Woolworths in Australia and New Zealand spanned many roles including Store Manager, Training Manager, Human Resources Manager and Senior Business Analyst, retiring as an Executive after completing 45 years' service. His career had begun as a casual employee in the Caringbah Woolworths Variety Store in 1973 at the age of 15 years. Stephen has continued at Woolworths on a part-time basis after retirement, managing the Woolworths Heritage Centre. The Heritage Centre is the archive and museum of the history of the Woolworths Group since 1924.*



*Stephen Ward (third from right) with some Society members after addressing a SSHS meeting on the history of Woolworths in September 2019 [SSHS]*

[All unsourced images courtesy of Stephen Ward, Woolworths Heritage Centre]

## **CRONOLOGICAL LIST OF ALL THE WOOLWORTHS GROUP STORE OPENINGS AND ACQUISITIONS IN THE SHIRE SINCE 1956**

**1956** - Sutherland Variety store opened on 23/05/1956.

**1957** - Caringbah Variety Store opened on 15/08/1957. The store converted to a Crazy Prices store in the 1990's.

**1958** - Sutherland Super Store opened on 6/12/1958. The store later rebranded to a Woolworths Supermarket in the 1960's and later a Flemings store in 1979.

**1959** - Cronulla Variety Store opened on 26/11/1959. The store converted to a Crazy Prices store in the 1990's.

**1960** - Acquisition of the Flemings Food Stores on 26/09/1960 in Cronulla, Caringbah, Miranda, Sutherland and Jannali. These stores closed progressively over the 1960's and 1970's with the Jannali store finally closing on 19/05/2020 as the last Flemings branded store in Australia.

- Acquisition of the McIlrath Grocery Stores on 1/11/1960 in Gymea and Sutherland. Both stores closed in 1961 while the other stores across NSW were rebranded to either a Flemings or Woolworths Food Fair.

**1961** – Sylvania Woolworths Composite store opened comprising a Variety Store with serviced counters and a Food Fair with checkouts. The store later converted to a full Woolworths Supermarket.

**1962** - Acquisition of the Chic Salon Lingerie Stores on the 1/02/1962 in Cronulla, Caringbah, Gymea, Sutherland and Jannali. The Chic Salon stores were sold to Susans fashion chain in 1969.

- Engadine Woolworths Food Fair opened on 7/03/1962. The store converted to a Flemings store in 1966 after the opening of the new Engadine Supermarket

**1963** - Cronulla Rockmans fashion store opened on 1/02/1963.

- Cronulla Woolworths Food Fair opened on 1/09/1963, the store later converted to a Flemings store.

**1964** - Miranda Fair Woolworths Composite store opened comprising a Variety Store with serviced counters and a Food Fair with checkouts opened on 17/03/1964. The store later converted to a full Woolworths Supermarket before being replaced by a Woolworths Family Centre.

- Miranda Flemings opened in July 1964.

**1966** – Engadine Supermarket opened on 14/07/1966 and is still in the same location.

- The previous Woolworths Food Fair store in Engadine converted to a Flemings Food Store on 14/07/1966.

**1971** – Woolworths Family Centre opened in Miranda Fair on 1/09/1971 with a Snack Bar included.

- The previous Miranda Flemings store converted to a Safeway Food store on 14/09/1971.
- A new Flemings store opened on Kiora Road in Miranda on 18/09/1971

**1978** – The Woolworths Supermarket in Sylvania converted to a Flemings Food store.

**1979** – Sutherland Woolworths Supermarket converted to a Flemings Food Store on 1/02/1979.

**1984** – The new Woolworths Supermarket opened in Miranda Fair one level above the previous Woolworths Family Centre on 28/08/1984. This store included a Woolworths Liquor department.

**1985** – The new Big W store opened in the same location as the previous Woolworths Family Centre on 30/09/1985.

- The Red S (Safeway) supermarkets was acquired as part of the acquisition of the Australian Safeway store on 30/09/1985.

**1986** – A Dick Smith Electronics store opened in Miranda on 1/05/1986.

**1994** – The Menai Market Place Shopping Centre opened on 27/09/1994 with a new Big W, Woolworths Supermarket and Rockmans fashion store.

**2001** – The Sylvania Franklins store was acquired and converted to a Woolworths Supermarket on 6/08/2001.

- The Bangor BWS Liquor store opened on 5/10/2001 after being acquired from Liberty Liquor.

**2002** – The Menai Woolworths Petrol site opened in the Menai Market Place car park on 29/01/2002.

- The Miranda Woolworths Petrol site opened on the corner of The Kingsway and Port Hacking Road on 19/02/2002.

**2003** – The previous Dick Smith Electronics store closed and reopened in Miranda Fair on 11/06/2003.

- The Dan Murphy store in Menai opened on 28/06/2003.

**2007** – The Tandy Electronics store in Miranda Fair was acquired on 23/03/2007.

- A Dick Smith Electronics store opened in Menai Marketplace on 29/03/2007.

**2008** – A Dick Smith Electronics store opened adjacent to the Dan Murphy store in Menai on 17/11/2008.

- The Woollooware Woolworths Petrol site opened on 23/09/2008.

**2010** – Cronulla Woolworths Metro store opened on 11/03/2010

- Acquisition of liquor stores in the Shire located in South Cronulla, Kurnell, Woollooware and Kirrawee and converted to BWS stores on 27/09/2010
- Sutherland BWS store opened on 29/03/2010

**2012** – An additional Engadine BWS store opened on the Pacific Highway on 1/06/2012.

**2012** – Acquisition of the Gynea Hotel on 9/07/2012

- Acquisition of the Gynea Hotel bottle shop rebranded to a BWS on 9/07/2012.
- Acquisition of the Caringbah Inn Hotel on 3/09/2012
- Acquisition of the Bayfield Liquor store located adjacent to the Caringbah Inn on 3/09/2012 and rebranded to a Dan Murphy store.

**2014** – Acquisition of Hudsons Building Supplies on 12/08/2014 (later sold as part of the Danks Hardware Group).

- Opening of the new Woolworths Supermarket in the Westfield Shopping Centre on 16/10/2014.
- The BWS store reopened adjacent to the new Supermarket on level 1 of the Westfield Shopping centre on 16/10/2014 after closing on level 3 along with the previous supermarket.

**2020** – The new Woolworths Metro Supermarket opened in Box Road, Jannali on 20/05/2020.

- The existing BWS store previously attached to the Jannali Flemings store remains open after the closing of Flemings (19/05/2020) as a free-standing store on the same site.

#### **2021 and Beyond**

- A new Woolworths Supermarket and Dan Murphy's store are currently under construction in Kirrawee and scheduled to open in 2021.
- A new Woolworths Supermarket is under construction as part of the redevelopment of the Cronulla Sutherland Leagues Club and carpark area and is scheduled to open in 2022.
- A potential Woolworths store has also been slated for Barden Ridge along with the redevelopment of the council car park in Jannali and construction of a new Jannali Woolworths, both of which are subject to council approval.

# FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL OF HOTHAM HOUSE

KIM HATHERLY

Despite a successful fight by the Society and local residents to have Hotham House listed as an item of local heritage significance in Sutherland Shire Council's 2015 LEP, the future of this Federation-era gem is far from assured.

Late in 2020 Macquarie Health Corporation, owner of the property on which Hotham House has stood since 1913, took its own fight to demolish the much-loved Gymea landmark to the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE). As part of its proposed upgrade of President Private Hospital, Macquarie submitted a Development Application to



the Department on the basis that the work qualifies as a 'State Significant Development'. Macquarie claimed it is impossible to incorporate the house in a new hospital design and that it should not be retained. Macquarie further asserted, in a commissioned Heritage Impact Statement submitted with the application, that Hotham House fails to meet the criteria for listing as assessed (at Council request) in 2019 by Jennifer Hill of Architectural Projects.

Members will remember that in 2018, when the house was first threatened with destruction in Macquarie's original development application to Council, our Society sprang into action and submitted formal objections to the DA, participated in local press interviews, harnessed social media attention and appealed to local and state government members. Then-president Bruce Watt, along with Pauline Curby and Kim Hatherly, made presentations at a Council meeting and spoke personally with several councillors, outlining carefully-reasoned arguments to support the retention of Hotham House in any new hospital development plans. The work by our Society as a body, and by individual members, resulted in a long-overdue heritage assessment of the house being prepared by Architectural Projects. It remains a mystery that previous Councils failed to heed decades-old recommendations for such an assessment to be made, but this dangerous oversight was at last corrected with the production of Jennifer Hill's thoroughly-researched report.

Macquarie's latest move seeks to take the development decision out of local government hands and move it to state government level. The DPIE exhibited the DA until 3 February 2021 and, as with the first Council application, the process includes opening it to public comment. President Pauline Curby prepared a detailed objection submission on behalf of the Society, as did I as an individual community member. Our chief focus was the Heritage Impact Statement which we found to be, in numerous points, flawed, inaccurate, and ignorant of the complex history of land tenure and usage in Sutherland Shire, as far back as Holt-Sutherland Estate days. The HIS was dismissive of the aesthetic, historic and social values attached to Hotham House, as identified in Architectural Projects' assessment. We highlighted and reiterated those values in our objection submissions and challenged the tenuous grounds on which the author of the HIS based his case for the house's demolition.

It is understood that local residents have also registered objections with the Department relating to matters other than the heritage value of the house. The DPIE will now consider all objection submissions lodged and give the applicant an opportunity to respond to them before making its final assessment.

On Saturday, 23<sup>rd</sup> January, local residents and society members gathered outside Hotham House to object to its demolition (see photo inside front cover). The story appeared in the *Leader* on 27 January, page 2.

# THE LAST ROAD GANG: PART 1

GREG JACKSON AND PAM FORBES

*The last convict road gang in NSW was the road clearing party on the Illawarra Road from Cooks River to Wollongong. This account of the road gang is based on letters from Assistant Surveyors Roderick Mitchell and William Darke to the NSW Surveyor General, Sir Thomas Mitchell (father of Roderick) available from the NSW State Archives. These letters shed considerable light on the workings of this Road Gang and the names of 46 men known to have worked in the gang. The convict records of 40 of these men have been able to be largely reconstructed and are available online<sup>1</sup>.*

Part 1 of this account tells the story of the road and its construction. Part 2 looks at how the convicts lived while part of this gang.

The Cooks River Dam was completed in 1839 and this paved the way for a direct road to the Illawarra region, south of Sydney. The previous road to the Illawarra had travelled a long circuitous route, out west through Liverpool, Camperdown and Appin. Assistant Surveyor, Roderick Mitchell, completed the survey<sup>2</sup> and in 1843 construction of 'Mitchells New Line of Road from the Cooks River Dam (Image 1) to the Illawarra' began with a small convict Road Party of 25 men from the Hyde Park Barracks<sup>2,17</sup>. The small size of this road party is a reflection of the world-wide depression in the early 1840s.

This Road Party was under the direction of Assistant Surveyor Roderick Mitchell until July 1843, probably as the road crossed the Georges River. Sir Thomas decided that his 21-year-old son, Roderick Mitchell, was unable to control the hardened convicts in the gang and he was replaced by the older more experienced William Darke who took the road to its completion around January 1845.<sup>3</sup>

After February 1829 all convicts returned as unsatisfactory by settlers were to be sent to a Road Party to work for six months.<sup>2</sup> As soon as this six-month period had passed they were to be reassigned. Convicts in the colony who had been sentenced for some crime (other than murder or manslaughter) were sentenced to an Iron Gang<sup>4</sup>. This was an alternative to the lash. The sentence period may have been weeks, months or even years in leg irons in some remote area. Their job was to carry out the more labour-intensive part of the road building operations. Transportation to NSW had ceased in 1840 and by 1843, when the Illawarra Road's construction commenced, the convicts in the Road Party had been in the colony for several years and had been returned to the barracks as unsatisfactory from private assignment. The men in the Illawarra Road gang were convicts from the bottom of the barrel but had committed no serious crime.



**Image 1:** Cooks River dam c1860 looking east, from the Sydney side of the river, Botany Bay in the distance. The modern Princes Highway at Tempe is on the line of this dam. Painting by Samuel Charles Brees, [State Library of Victoria [H83.50/8]]

### **The route:**

After crossing the Cooks River, via the dam, (Image 1) the 'New Line of Road to the Illawarra' crossed only one major river on its route to Wollongong, the Georges River at the modern Sydney suburb of Lugarno where a punt was to be used. The Woronora River, a perennial freshwater stream, was crossed by a causeway at the 'Pass of Sabugal', named by Sir Thomas after a locality in Portugal known to Mitchell from the Peninsula wars (1807 – 1814).



**Image 2:** *The 1843 ferry ramp*



**Image 3:** *Old road down to the ferry ramp*

**Image 2 and 3** show some of the best-preserved remains of Mitchell's 1843 Road to the Illawarra on the south banks at the Georges River in Delardes Reserve, Illawong

Roderick Mitchell's surveys for much of this road is available from the NSW State Archives. The survey of the central section from Georges River to Mt Westmacott is missing but follows Old Illawarra Road to Bardon Ridge, Sir Thomas Mitchell Drive to the Woronora River, then Woronora Road up to the Princes Highway at Engadine.

Roderick Mitchell had control of the road party until around the Georges River crossing before handing over the party to William Darke. Darke's brief from Sir Thomas<sup>3</sup> was to:

- Take over control of the road party from Roderick Mitchell
- Procure better rations for the deserving portion of the road gang
- Undertake other measures to keep the men at their work, checking their constant practice of returning to Sydney under the pretence of illness.
- Simultaneously survey lands along the road.

Darke immediately went to work: He recommended the removal of the overseer ('too timid') replacing him with O'Hara, and the demotion of the assistant overseer ('a man of the worst character'). He also recommended the restoring of 'indulgences' (tobacco, tea and sugar) so he could withhold them from the convicts for bad behaviour<sup>3</sup>. The convicts continually wished to return to the Hyde Park barracks where they could relax and make money by making and selling shoes and hats. Darke also requested that he have permission to punish the convicts on the spot, avoiding the delay of sending the men back to a magistrate in Sydney<sup>3</sup>. Darke's measures were put in place and six days after taking control Overseer O'Hara requested that indulgences be restored to 14 of the men in the party.<sup>5</sup> Darke's work in surveying arable land along the route and land in the town of Appin took him away from the work party on many occasions<sup>6</sup> and he relied on the overseer, former convict John O'Hara, to keep the men at work and under control.

The letters from Darke also contain some information about the road being cleared. In October 1843 the gang was working at the Woronora River crossing (The Pass of Sabugal) and Darke

requested 'a bullock and cart and a horse and cart if possible'<sup>7</sup> so he could move his camp equipment and tools easily. The road constructed must have been of sufficient quality to allow the passage of wheeled vehicles, not an easy thing to do in the rocky and steep Woronora Valley. While near the Woronora River headwaters, Darke make use of river transport. In October 1843 a boat under 'Captain Moriarty' and '5 steady men' was dispatched for Sydney.<sup>8</sup> (Captain Moriarty is almost certainly Merion Moriarty (R.N. but never a captain) who was appointed the Portmaster of the Colony in 1842.<sup>9</sup> The boat may well be the one belonging to the tidewaiter (customs officer) from Botany Bay, a person under Moriarty's control. Moriarty owned 190 acres of land adjacent to the road, and construction of this Illawarra Road would have provided access to this land and been to his financial benefit. Work at the Woronora River took a considerable time and a report in *The Sydney Morning Herald* Sat 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1844 tells of a convict death there:

**INQUEST.—On the 31st an inquest was held at Liverpool, by Mr. Bethel Lyons, upon view of the body of William Moore, a convict attached to the road party stationed at Waranora on the Illawarra Road. The circumstances of this case were peculiar and painful, and appeared to affect the feelings of even the man's fellow-convicts in the gang. It appeared that Mr. Darke, the surveyor of the line of road, had visited the station at Waranora, on Monday last; the deceased had requested permission to go, with a pass, to see his wife at Parramatta; this, Mr. Darke felt it his duty to refuse; and within an hour the poor fellow was found resting on his hip and hand, the other hand being on his breast, and he spitting blood; he was removed to bed and all care taken of him; many letters and locks of hair from his wife, of whom he was continually talking, were taken from under his head in his sleeping place. He had heard of some misconduct of his wife, and from the general tenor of the evidence, it is probable that the man died from the rupture of a vessel, caused by intense feeling and excitement. There was no medical evidence. Verdict, natural death.**

William Moore's errant wife has been identified as convict Julia McAdams and her criminal record is one of an habitual criminal. William Moore's crime seems to be that he loved well but not wisely (the record of both Moore and McAdams is available on line<sup>1</sup>).

The road gang had more trouble at the Woronora River in November 1843 with eight of the road gang taken away by constables for cattle duffing leaving overseer O'Hara with only three men in his work party<sup>9</sup>. Darke states that:

... it is quite impossible that any such occurrence as the killing and eating of four bullocks can have taken place in the road party without the knowledge and collusion of the overseer.<sup>10</sup>

The eight men implicated were not charged due to lack of evidence, but were dismissed from the party and returned to the Hyde Park Barracks.<sup>11</sup> Overseer O'Hara lost his ticket of leave but stayed on in the party, temporarily losing his job as overseer. More men were transferred to the party with 13 listed as being entitled to slop clothing from the government stores in May 1844.<sup>12</sup>

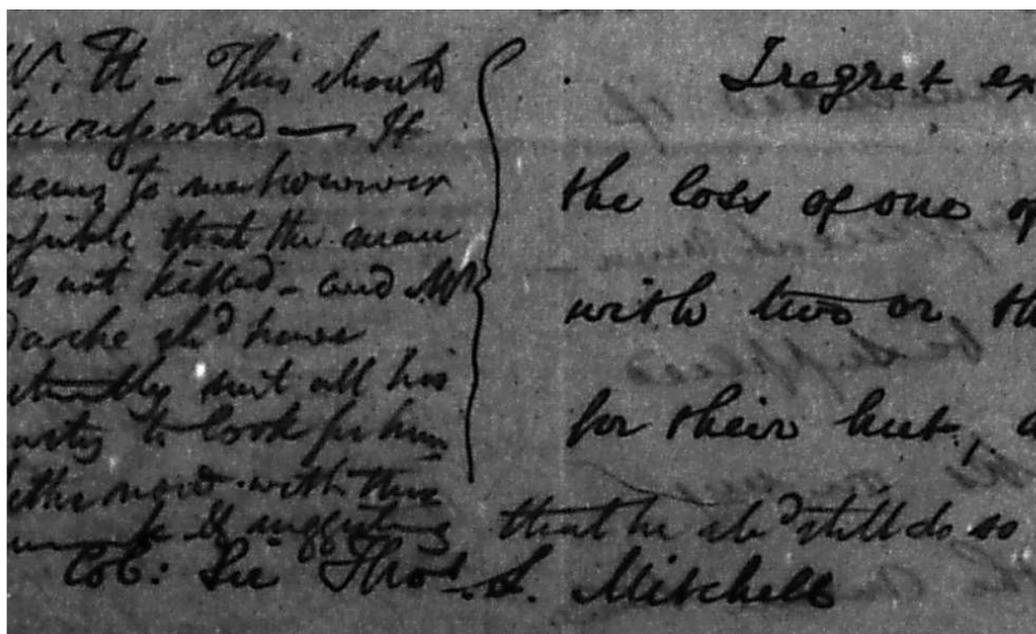
The road moved on and crosses Maddens Plains apparently without incident. But with the party working on the escarpment above Coalcliff another death was reported in late May 1844 - an Irish convict, Richard Davis.

He went yesterday with 2 or 3 others to get a hearth stone for their hut and aproaching too near the edge of the ciff he fell over...<sup>13</sup>

Both Darke and Sir Thomas Mitchell were suspicious. Surveyor General Mitchell instructed that an:

...instant search for the body and fullest inquiry [be made] into all surrounding circumstances, including relations of the man with his companions.<sup>14</sup>

In the margin of Darke's letter informing him of Davis' death, Sir Thomas makes the note shown in Image 4.<sup>13</sup>



**Image 4:** The note is hard to read but says:

W.H. - This should be reported – It seems to me however possible that the man is not killed and Mr Darke sh<sup>d</sup> have instantly put all his party to look for him in the moro with ??? suggesting that he sh<sup>d</sup> still do so....

Sir Tho<sup>s</sup>. L. Mitchell

His belief that Davis may not be dead may have been a genuine concern for the man's wellbeing or he may have suspected that Davis had not fallen at all but conspired with his mates in order to abscond.

Frank Cridland in his book had a different slant on the events. He summed up this event by stating:

The Surveyor-general evidently formed the same opinion as we do today, that it was a very thin story and that the missing man had been put out of the way by his convict mates.<sup>15</sup>

This death must be considered suspicious with several possible scenarios.

*Did he fall?*

*Was he pushed?*

*Did he abscond?*

The truth will never be known but there is no record of Davis' body ever being recovered.

In November 1844 William Darke wrote to the Principal Superintendent of Convicts with a list of the 20 men sent to the Illawarra road party and how they have been 'disposed of'. There was now but eight men working in the road party and O'Hara (who had been reinstated as overseer<sup>16</sup>) requested another 17 men to bring the party up to its full strength of 25 men<sup>17</sup>. By January 1845 a bridle road had been completed to the end of the line at Keira Neck (an unknown location but presumably near Mount Keira) and a cart road was now being constructed. In October 1845 Darke sent all plans of the completed Illawarra road to Mitchell.

Although the new road had reached its destination it was obviously still not fit for the general conveyance of goods by the public. *The Sydney Morning Herald* on the 21 August 1845 reported that prominent politician, Sir John Robinson, brought a motion before the NSW Legislative Council for the grant of 1000 pounds to 'repair and finish' the road. Joseph Davis reports that this proposal by Robinson was rejected although the road cleared by the last convict road gang was ultimately completed by contract.<sup>18</sup> It was not until 1871 that a wheeled vehicle was said to first complete the journey between Wollongong and Sydney on Mitchell's Illawarra Road.<sup>19</sup>

This road cleared by the last convict road gang in NSW was done with great difficulty. The work for the convicts was lonely and difficult with few comforts. Their behaviour however was poor and the road's completion was due to the diligence and perseverance of assistant surveyor William Webb Darke.

Part 2 of this article (in the next *Bulletin*) will examine the life of the convicts in this road party.

**Notes on the referencing of the Assistant Surveyor's letters:**

All official letters to and from the Surveyor General are marked with a unique number containing the year and a sequential number e.g. letter 43/72 from William Darke to The Surveyor General was written in 1843 and is Darke's 72<sup>nd</sup> letter of that year.

The letters from Assistant Surveyors Roderick Mitchell and William Darke to the NSW Surveyor General, Sir Thomas Mitchell (father of Roderick) are available from the NSW State Archives.

The letters from Roderick Mitchell are contained in Reel 3079, 2/1559, 2/15560.1-3.

The letter from William Webb Darke is contained in Reel 3060, 2/1526.1-2, 2/1527.

The end notes below will use this number system to reference letters

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson G. n.d. *Convict Data*. This document contains the reconstructed records of three groups of convicts including the convicts of the Illawarra Road Gang (1843 – 1845)  
[https://www.academia.edu/40269528/Convict\\_Data](https://www.academia.edu/40269528/Convict_Data).

<sup>2</sup> Letter 43/161 dated 30 May 1843, from Thomas Mitchell to the Colonial Secretary (i.e. to the Governor of NSW) suggests a road party of between 20 and 30 men.

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<sup>3</sup> Letter 43/59 dated 30 August, from Darke to T. Mitchell acknowledging his direction to take charge of the Illawarra Road clearing party.

<sup>4</sup> Convict Life in New South Wales 2019 – Government Work Convict Road Gangs and Iron Gangs  
<https://convicttrail.com.au/convict-life/convict-road-gangs-and-iron-gangs/>

<sup>5</sup> Letter dated 24 August 1843 from overseer John O'Hara recommending indulgences for 14 of the men in the road party.

<sup>6</sup> Letter 44/82 dated 30 March 1844 from Darke to T. Mitchell

<sup>7</sup> Letter 43/68 dated 4 October 1843 from Darke to T. Mitchell

<sup>8</sup> Letter 43/69 dated 4 October 1843 from Darke to T. Mitchell

<sup>9</sup> Powell A. Australian Dictionary of Biography *entry for Merion Moriarty*, accessed 21/09/2016,  
<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/moriarty-edward-orpen-4437>

<sup>10</sup> Letter 43/75 dated 19 November 1843 from Darke to T. Mitchell

<sup>11</sup> Letter 43/76 dated 29 November 1843 from Darke to T. Mitchell

<sup>12</sup> Letter dated 1 May 1844 from overseer John O'Hara requesting slops (clothing) for 13 men in the road gang

<sup>13</sup> Letter 44/13 dated 27 May 1844 from Dark to T. Mitchell

The convict record of Richard Davis has been reconstructed and is available together with the other reconstructed convict records<sup>1</sup>. An article on the death of Richard Davis by the authors: *Convicts in the Shire: Part 2* was published in the *SSHS Bulletin*, November 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Article by F. Cridland in *Propeller* (published in Hurstville) 30 December 1927 Page 6, Available from TROVE: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/234983990>

<sup>15</sup> Cridland F. 1950, p86, *The story of Port Hacking, Cronulla and Sutherland Shire*. Angus and Robertson, Sydney

<sup>16</sup> Letter 45/16 dated 17 May 1845 from Darke to T. Mitchell

<sup>17</sup> Letter 44/25 dated 18 November 1844 from Darke to T. Mitchell

<sup>18</sup> Davis J. 2018, *Death and Disillusion somewhere near Mount Westmacott on the impossible road to Illawarra from Sydney 1833 - 1844*.

[https://www.academia.edu/37325092/DEATH\\_AND\\_DISILLUSION\\_SOMEWHERE\\_NEAR\\_MOUNT\\_WESTMACOTT\\_ON\\_THE\\_IMPOSSIBLE\\_ROAD\\_TO\\_ILLAWARRA\\_FROM\\_SYDNEY\\_1833-1844](https://www.academia.edu/37325092/DEATH_AND_DISILLUSION_SOMEWHERE_NEAR_MOUNT_WESTMACOTT_ON_THE_IMPOSSIBLE_ROAD_TO_ILLAWARRA_FROM_SYDNEY_1833-1844)

<sup>19</sup> Jervis J 1942, *Illawarra: A Century of History*

<https://www.rahs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Illawarra-1788-1888-P5.pdf>

## **CONNECTING THE DOTS**

### **DAGWORTH STATION AND WALTZING MATILDA.**

**BRUCE WATT**

The following text and illustration form an important link to the later development of one of Australia's most iconic and best-known pieces of poetry. The link is Dagworth Station in far north Queensland. This is where *Waltzing Matilda* was later penned by Banjo Patterson. It has been described by some as the country's 'unofficial national anthem'.

The initial article and illustration are from a well-used foolscap sized 'scrapbook' compiled in the mid to late nineteenth century. These works form an important window into contemporary interests and practices. There are many well-sketched illustrations in black-and-white in keeping with newspaper practices of the time. No author or attributions are provided. The large book of 165 pages (24 by 38 cm), covers a wide range of Australian and international events from a variety of sources. Scrapbooking was a popular past time 'for the improvement of self and the delight of others'. Blank books could be purchased and newspaper cuttings, cards, illustrations and occasional compiler's comments added. In less universally literate times they were a form of education that could no doubt be shared with others as this well-used book testifies.

This scrapbook was located from within our museum archives when deaccessioning for impending museum relocation. Presumably having no local content or significance for a regional museum, its future was suspect. One article in particular attracted my attention. Knowing of the future connection of Dagworth Station with Banjo Patterson in the 1890s I was drawn to its European beginnings and the reference to the original Aboriginal occupants. The following text is from the scrapbook.

Original text from the *Illustrated Australian News* (Melbourne). Wednesday 23 January 1878

#### **THE BLACKS AT DAGWORTH STATION, QUEENSLAND**

The subject of our illustration is the arrival of the advance guard of a tribe of Aborigines at Dagworth, a pioneer cattle station in North-west Queensland. This station is the property of Messrs Hunter and Urquhart, situated on the Diamantina river, and has now been in occupation for about eighteen months, everything being still in a primitive state. The hut, as will be seen from the engraving, is constructed entirely of grass, being merely a large room with bunks ranged round the sides as in the fore-castle of a ship. Mr. Urquhart and his stockmen had frequently seen signs of blacks on his run, in the shape of old fires and camping places littered about with large numbers of mussel shells, the usual food of the natives, and which they obtain, in any quantity from the larger waterholes in the Diamantina River. The event which we are describing took place in the latter end of last October. During the night the dogs about the hut were in a very restless state, and several times the remark was made that "there must be a dingo (native dog) about somewhere." Early in the morning, just as day was breaking, the dogs became furious, and on looking out, the blacks, were seen approaching the hut as represented in the engraving [see p.24]. They had found a piece of old newspaper somewhere in the bush, and were carrying it high over their head, on sticks, to show white fellows, as one of them explained, that black fellows were "bel coola"- not hostile. Not at all a bad idea for savages of a flag of truce. First in order came 'Muckeye,' a black who had been in at a station before, and could speak fair English. The name has evidently been given him by some bushman who had been 'reading Fenni-more Copper's novels.'

Next in order came "Micky" — a "myall" or wild black — unable to speak a word of English. Where he obtained his name is a mystery. Behind and at a respectful distance from their lords and masters, are three gins, one the property of Muckeye and the other two belonging to Micky. Mr. Urquhart, on finding their peaceable intentions, allowed them to remain, gave them meat and tobacco, and showed them where to camp, about half a mile from the hut. That afternoon and for the next few days the blacks continued to arrive in large numbers, apparently with the most friendly intentions. Muckeye was installed as king of the blacks at Dagworth and Messrs. Wilson Bros., of Kynuna Station, higher up on the Diamantina, took Micky, greatly to his delight, to be king of the blacks on their run. While talking of the country near the head of the Diamantina River, we may mention, to the credit of Victorian enterprise, that most of the country is owned by Victorians. Within a day's ride of the head of the river are Messrs. Wilson Bros, Kynuna station, Mr. W. S. Manifold's Sesbania station, Messrs. McKenzie, Mitchell and Bostock's Werna station, Sir Samuel Wilson's Elderslie station, and several others in which Victorian gentlemen are interested. The country west of the Thompson River is almost all of the same description for several hundred miles — high rolling downs, with rich, dense pasture, and not a tree or shrub for miles except on the river or creek frontages. Occasionally the downs run back into high ranges, which take the most curious and fantastic shapes, relieving what might otherwise become a painfully monotonous landscape.

### **Dagworth's place in subsequent Australian history**

#### **Shearers' Strikes**

The 1890s witnessed a period of deep depression in Australia. Falling wool prices and widespread unemployment led to prolonged rural disputes. The first shearers' strike in Queensland in 1891 pitted pastoralist (squatters) against shearers over proposed reductions in shearers' wages. Shearers withdrew their labour and wealthy pastoralists introduced non-unionised labour who received the protection of police and troopers. Following a four-month strike, the shearers were ultimately defeated and several leaders were gaoled. These events led to a call for a political movement to represent working people, ultimately leading to the formation of the Australian Labor Party.

In 1894 another major strike occurred centring on Dagworth, a huge sheep station near Winton in outback Queensland. Dagworth Station's shearing shed was burned down along with seven others in the district as part of a protest by shearers over wages. The Macpherson family owned the station in the 1890s and early 1900s. Samuel Hoffmeister, was implicated in these events. The owner of the homestead and three policemen had given chase and rather than be captured, it is alleged that Hoffmeister shot and killed himself at the Combo Waterhole.

The following year Banjo Paterson visited the station and wrote the lyrics to *Waltzing Matilda*. Paterson was told the story of striking shearer, Samuel Hoffmeister's suicide beside the Diamantina - just a few kilometres upstream from the Combo Waterhole.

That story was merged with other tales that Paterson had been told and inspired him to write a light-hearted ditty that would in time become the much-loved tune of *Waltzing Matilda*.<sup>1</sup> It was Christina MacPherson, Paterson's then fiancé who adapted a popular Scottish tune, Craigslea, to become the original music for Paterson's lyrics.

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<sup>1</sup> The term is Australian slang for travelling on foot (waltzing) with one's belongings in a 'matilda' (swag) slung over one's back.





*SSHS Members enjoying our Christmas Lunch at Club on East in November 2020 [Photos: J. Doherty]*



# SUTHERLAND SHIRE MUSEUM

*From this...*



*Sutherland Memorial School of Arts, 1986 – 2020 [Photo: SLLS, 1970]*

*To this ...*



*88 Venetia Street (cnr Holt Rd), Sylvania from 2021 [Photo: E.Craig]*