



Sutherland Shire Historical Society Inc Bulletin



NUMBER: 226 — FEBRUARY 2023



Como Hotel, 1893 – photo taken during Charles Forwood's time as licensee

[Source: William Robert Easdown Photographic Collection, NLA]

See a re-examination of the history of Como Hotel, by Kim Hatherly on Page 24

MINDFUL OF THE PAST – FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE

EMAIL: shirehistory@gmail.com; **PHONE:** 0424 600 150 **SSHS WEBSITE:** www.shirehistory.org

FACEBOOK: Sutherland Shire Historical Society

SAVE THE DATE

Sat. 18th March 2023

1.30pm-4.00pm

*At the Sutherland Shire Museum,
Cnr Venetia & Holt Sts, Sylvania*

*When we will launch
the Matson Collection exhibit
and the accompanying publication:*



*The Matson
Collection -
Sutherland Shire
Museum*

*by
Bruce Howell*

The Matson Collection

of Aboriginal artefacts collected by Fred Matson from sites in the Shire.

This is a unique collection on loan to SSHS from the family entrusted by Fred Matson to be custodians of the artefacts after his death. Fred carefully collated the collection so that it would not be lost or dispersed as so many others have.

Bruce Howell has completed the job of preserving this collection for posterity by his high quality publication containing beautiful photography, and painstakingly detailed descriptions of each piece, allowing viewers to access the collection with more understanding and insight.

Watch this space for more details on this important event

Note: The launch of the Matson Collection replaces the usual March meeting.

There will be no SSHS meeting in March



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

***East Coast Encounters 1770, 2nd ed.*, will also be available for sale at meetings for \$30**

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 on our website: www.shirehistory.org or for issues up to end 2020, at Sutherland Library - Local Studies. 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 can be purchased at \$5.00 each. Digital copies are also emailed to all Shire council libraries, the Mayor, Shire General Manager, all Councillors, local politicians, the Royal Australian Historical Society, National Trust of NSW, NSW State Library, National Library of Australia, University of Sydney, University of NSW, neighbouring local history societies, Shire high school libraries and some local businesses. 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 2652-4000 (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. Although Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted, Covid is still a concern. Please do not attend a meeting if you are unwell, and wear a mask if unsure.

SUTHERLAND SHIRE MUSEUM

Our new Museum at 88 Venetia Street, Sylvania is now open for visitors. Opening hours are: Tuesdays, 12.00 – 4.00pm, Thursdays 9.30am – 1.30pm, Saturdays 9.00 – 1.00pm. Entry is \$5. To organise a group visit, please contact Museum Manager, Peter Moore: 0427 213 575 or email us at shirehistory@gmail.com.

DONATING MATERIAL: If you have items of historical significance to Sutherland Shire such as artefacts, documents or photographs, that you wish to donate or lend to the Museum, please contact us at shirehistory@gmail.com. While we welcome such items, we have very limited space and have to adhere to our acquisitions policy which dictates what sort of items we can accept. If you do not wish to part with original items, we would welcome copies of documents and photographs. Temporary loans for specific periods for suitable items 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; or phone us on 0424 600 150

SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: 2020-2021

ELECTED MEMBERS

PATRON:	Shire Mayor, Clr Carmelo Pesce		
PRESIDENT	Pauline Curby	0427 527 721	pcurby@iprimus.com.au
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SSHS CALENDAR: MARCH – MAY 2023
(See website: www.shirehistory.org for updates)

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

Sutherland Shire Museum at 88 Venetia St., Sylvania is open:
Tuesdays 12.00 – 4.00pm
Thursdays, 9.30am-1.30pm and **Saturdays**, 9.00am – 1.00pm

DATE

MARCH 2023	Fri 17th	EXCURSION – led by Greg Jackson & Pam Forbes to Parkesvale Pleasure Grounds, Georges River National Park, weather permitting (has been cancelled three times). One km walk involved. To be confirmed.
	Sat. 18th	LAUNCH OF THE MATSON COLLECTION & BOOK at Sutherland Shire Museum, 88 Venetia St, Sylvania (see inside front cover for details) NO GENERAL MEETING IN MARCH
APRIL 2023	Sun 2nd	‘End of Daylight Saving’ Market Day 88 Venetia Street, Sylvania For sale: Treasures in the form of household goods, paintings, etc More information at meetings and by email
	Sat 15th	GENERAL MEETING SPEAKER: Peter Lewis, a retired oyster farmer in the Georges River, will speak on oyster growing and living at Taren Point in the 1940s and 50s
MAY 2023	Sat. 18th	GENERAL MEETING SPEAKER: Rachel Franks, will tell us about an unusual colonial executioner, the subject of her book: <i>An Uncommon Hangman - the Life and Deaths of Robert ‘Nosey Bob’ Howard</i> .
EXCURSIONS: There are many more ideas for interesting excursions, and we would like to know which would interest you: A survey will shortly be distributed to members to ascertain your preferences. More information to come.		

EXCURSIONS: Please note that for insurance reasons only SSHS members can attend excursions.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

PAULINE CURBY



SSHS is pleased that two local heritage issues seem to have been resolved. Our campaign to save historic Hotham House has been successful, as in January the

Independent Planning Commission ruled against the proposed redevelopment of President Private Hospital, which included the demolition of Hotham House, an outcome which we opposed. I especially acknowledge the work of our member Kim Hatherly, whose research on GyMEA highlighted the historic importance of Hotham House.

The other heritage issue is in abeyance rather than resolved. A Section 60 application to Heritage NSW for extensive building at Hungry Point – the former Fisheries Research Centre – was withdrawn late last year. We are uncertain as to the final outcome, but are hopeful. The other good news is that the NSW government has provided a second round of funding enabling work to begin on the clifftop walk linking the Esplanade walk with Darook Park. This will be the fulfilment of a dream discussed in Cronulla as long as I can remember.

Meanwhile, at Venetia Street things are becoming busy with a number of groups making bookings. Group bookings are vital to our survival as drop-in visitors are sparse, as was the case with the former museum at Sutherland Memorial School of Arts. We're looking forward to trying out our new member Sue Burrell's 20-minute Snapshot Tour. The 'old hands' are keen to learn new skills from Sue as she brings extensive experience in

museum guiding to our exhibition. We're hoping for fine weather when these groups visit, but discussions on building extensions to shelter groups in wet weather continue.

Our Christmas party on 26 November was a great success. We were lucky to have a beautiful fine day, superb entertainment by John Doherty's Orana Ukulele Group and, as usual, outstanding catering by Deb Burton and her team.

Ian Kolln, Bruce Watt, Kevin Curby and I attended the official opening of the new look Sutherland Memorial School of Arts on 1 December. This historic building, where SSHS museum was located for 34 years, is now called Sutherland Arts Theatre. I believe Sutherland Shire Council has done an impressive refurbishment while providing the Shire with, in Council's words, 'the perfect home for comedy, music, film screenings and theatre productions requiring an intimate space'. Even though our museum at Venetia Street is not located in a historic building in a suburban hub, we are the sole occupants of the building which gives us greater scope for our activities than we had previously.

Finally, writing this report just after Australia Day I raise the question: what is SSHS's position on this increasingly controversial day? As we know, many Australians would prefer to call this Survival Day or Invasion Day. Should we have a national day on another date which the whole nation could value and respect? SSHS used to mount a photographic exhibition on this day at various venues in Cronulla, but this has not happened lately. Members may wish to discuss whether we continue to virtually ignore the day or take some other action. Let me know if you think as an organisation we should engage with this issue. (Email or write to us at the addresses on the front cover.)

MUSEUM REPORT

PETER MOORE

Well, it has been an eventful few months since the last report, and much has happened. We have had a number of social functions which have been well attended. In November we had our Christmas party at the Museum. It went off well as the weather was kind to us in between some rainy patches.

In December we again braved the weather and had a good roll up for our Museum Committee's end of year get together. We again tempted the weather gods in January when we had a function for the museum volunteers, and this time we were given a reminder of our fickle weather. We withdrew inside and still had a very pleasant time.

Along with our wonderful catering ladies our functions have been well supported by John from JD's at the Sylvania Bowling Club who has provided us with some great finger food.

These three functions have highlighted our rather cramped building and the need for a series of expansions to the building if we are to remain viable and be able to plan for functions regardless of the weather. We have some plans in the pipe line, but these will take some time before we can get approval to proceed. So in the mean time we will try to survive with the aid of our existing gazebo and the purchase of a larger one to have on standby for future functions.

We have one exciting event coming up soon: the launch of the Matson collection of Aboriginal artefacts. This collection, procured by Bruce Watt and curated by

Bruce Howell, is of great historic interest due to the local nature of the artefacts, and the fact that they have been carefully labelled and kept together. Bruce Howell has spent a great deal of his time curating and photographing the collection. And he has produced a wonderful book containing photographs and descriptions of the contents of our part of the Matson Collection. See front inside cover of this *Bulletin* for more details on the launch.

The business of the Museum continues to grind along with visitor numbers slowly increasing and the odd donation coming in for accession. We are beginning to draw attention as we are getting more and more group bookings.

Bruce Edney is still going along like a train and accessioning anything that is not moving. A special thanks to Bruce for all his devoted work.

Another member of the volunteers who deserves a special mention is Sue Burrell, who is using her experience working in Museums to give us a more professional outlook in our operation and how we conduct tours of our Museum. With Sue's great energy and ideas we will be lifting our game to another level.

Once again I must thank all our devoted volunteers who unselfishly give their time for the operation of the Museum. Without their participation the Museum would not exist. On this note, we always welcome new members to the crew to assist in the Museum's operation as there is still plenty of work to be done in sorting out our stored items.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

ELIZABETH CRAIG

Welcome to the first *Bulletin* for 2023!

Our cover story is Kim Hatherly's rigorously researched article re-examining the history of the Como Hotel (page 24). Using original sources she has untangled the rather confusing history of Como hotel and dispelled some myths about its early days.

On Saturday, 18 March we will be launching the unique Matson Collection of Aboriginal artefacts all found locally by third-generation Shire boat builder, Fred Matson. With the collection we will also be launching Bruce Howell's beautiful photo essay book cataloguing the artefacts, *The Matson Collection – Sutherland Shire Museum*. (See inside front cover of this *Bulletin* for details.)

The launch of the Matson Collection has coincided with the contribution of some of Fred

Matson's personal recollections transcribed from his handwritten notes by Aileen Levy and George Cotis. George has added explanatory commentary and submitted the work for publication in the *Bulletin* (see page 8).

We are also fortunate to have three research articles by archaeologists Greg Jackson and Pam Forbes on evidence of contact between Aboriginals and Europeans (pages 14-22).

It's unusual to publish multiple articles on related topics by the same writers in one issue of the *Bulletin*, but this time we have made an exception! Together, these articles complement and give social context to the Matson Collection – and, I think – add insight into the way the Shire's Aboriginals and Europeans viewed each other in the early days.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

It was with great interest that I read Greg Jackson and Pam Forbes' recent article on the so-called Bardens Creek murder (Bulletin 225, November 2022, pp. 22-27). I still remember reading the original article in the St George and Sutherland Shire Leader when I was Head Teacher (History) at Engadine High and looking for creative items to use in class or in exams. The Leader article and accompanying illustration seemed to fit the bill. At some point, I got to discuss the Leader article with Les Bursill (whose comments on the photo were included) and used it for several years in half-yearly exams for Year 11 Ancient History.

I met Les Bursill for the first time in 1988. Regarding his involvement with the Bicentenary project mentioned in the Leader article, Les had been tasked with creating a collection of slides of Aboriginal sites in the Shire. I cannot remember how many slides were in the collection, but it came well presented as an audio visual resource for schools. Each Shire school was to get one copy, presumably to be housed in the school library. There was a bit of an issue over the location of this resource at Engadine High, and thanks to Les' generosity, the school received two copies – one each for the History and Social Science Department.

My tenure at Engadine High School ended in 1999. Ironically, I do not remember the kit ever being used. Much like Les' interpretation of the rock carving, the kit had succumbed to developments in audio visual technology. Slides were out but video was in.

Garriock Duncan

FRED MATSON'S PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

Transcribed by AILEEN LEVY and GEORGE COTIS

Compilation and explanatory comments by GEORGE COTIS

Boating today has become a competition of speed and sound. This saddens me. Such a change from the silent rhythm of oars over still, shimmered water [Fred Matson]

Much has been written about the Matsons' lives and their work around Port Hacking. Sutherland Shire Libraries Local History website presents a brief biography of the youngest Fred (1899 – 1993) - I call him Jnr - together with some highly representative photographs, and an oral history by past Society notable, the late Jim Cutbush.¹

The history of the Matsons is of three men: Grandfather Frederick, father Fred and his twin sons, Fred and Oscar (Oc), who followed a passion for boats, the water, and Port Hacking. They typified the hard-working, down to earth pioneering people of their day. Much of this comes through in Fred Jnr's writing, which in essence is his 'autobiography'.

Just recently, a member of the Levy family (friends of the Matsons) passed on to me some notes written by Fred Matson Senior, and Fred Matson Junior. These notes had been held by Aileen Levy. I have transcribed the earliest note by Fred Snr, and for the obvious reason of authenticity I have made no attempt to edit it in any way. Aileen Levy transcribed the large manuscript.

All of the documents passed to me have been assembled in a folder and will be handed to the Sutherland Library for inclusion in their Local Studies section.

Fred Senior's note is of a particular day in his life and of these observations.

Year 1911 we went to see the races on Sydney Harbour between Horderns thirty six foot this a hydroplane Kangaroo and Mark Foys Rainbow at Rose bay, Hordern won the event – Speed about forty m.p.h. about this time the first Regatta was held at Yowie bay The fastest boat in Port Hacking at the time. The winner of the Motor boat race; - was won by an eighteen foot owner. A Mr Glover. Cigarette type of hull. Speed about Fifteen M.P.H. The single sculls out rigger was won by Alf. Feltor. A champion at this time. He beat Falh. Coley [illegible] first. A Southerly buster ...just as the race started for the slower launches.

We went out in a small river ferry owned by Mr Messenger a friend of my family.²

Fred Jnr's inspiration to get his recollections down are explicit in his opening paragraph, and must have come in such a hurry that they were written in pencil on great sheets of paper...apparently that is what was at hand. The year was 1984. The direct extracts are shown below in Italics.

Fred Jnr starts his 'autobiography' with:

Fred Matson, my lad the time has come. I'm eighty five years young, the water now runs too quickly under the proverbial bridge. Memories, memories, they rumble in and tumble out. Let me share them with you, while I reminisce as I look at the photographs.

The notes give the history of three generations of Matsons, and began in Australia with seaman Frederick Francis Matson of Helsinforce, Finland, jumping ship in Sydney in 1845. Among his early endeavours, Frederick, having married Rebecca [maiden name not known], managed the historic Woolloomooloo baths.

He moved into boats - hiring out boats on the Parramatta River followed by the purchase of a 54ft ketch transporting cargo between Sydney and Camden Haven.

His, ketch, Rebecca, carried the first consignment of tallow-wood blocks for Sussex street in 1874. Grandfather, with a crew of five and his son, Frederick, carried cargo on the Rebecca until 1901. On the last trip they sailed into Port Hacking, where Rebecca, because of breakdown had to be moored at the head of Yowie Bay. She was sold in 1904 and later wrecked at Cape York.

A coincidence of timing, or part of the mercantile trend? At the time that Matson had embarked on his trade with the Camden Haven, the ketch *Peacock* (owned and operated by John Frederick Gogerly) appears in the shipping movement records after the Gogerlys moved to Port Hacking, plying between Port Hacking and elsewhere. She was lost under the command of John Frederick Gogerly, off the Camden Haven entrance on 22 January 1876, on a voyage from the Manning River with a cargo of timber and a crew of three. The other Gogerly son, William, lost his vessel *Waldenses* by grounding on the Camden Haven bar.³

Frederick went on to another boat hiring business on Cooks River, and with 12 skiffs from the Cooks River shed, founded the Audley boat shed at the new (Royal) National Park. He cleverly capitalised on the growth in populations around Sutherland and the optimism for 'tourists' at the new Park.

Although I have accurately extracted the words, I have omitted some that don't add to the personal story, retained many which give important descriptions of the broader life and times of the area, and repositioned some to retain a location context.

PART 1. The Start: Audley and Boat Building

Audley and Grandfather:

...it was during the depression of the 1880's the weir was built dividing the salt water of Port Hacking from the fresh running water of the National Park...The area became a haven for boating enthusiasts...At Audley, an excellent guest house supervised by the Park trustees, and a large picnic pavilion could all be reached by tourists travelling by launch from Gunnamatta Bay, or by wagonettes for those who preferred to drive down the steep and winding incline.

...Grandfather's boats hired from the Audley shed enabled picnickers or fishermen access to the silvery stretches of fresh water along the picturesque Audley river. For a distance of 5 or 6 miles the waters backed up ...between wooded heights and dense vegetation. Luxuriant tree ferns, cabbage tree and bangalow palms...natural picnic spots including Lady Carrington's Bower...natural gardens of Christmas Bush, waratahs, giant lilies, flannel flowers...were viewed from the pleasantly slow movement of oared skiffs.

It was in this setting that Frederick made his significant mark on Audley and for two generations of Matsons to come in the boat and boatbuilding industry, However, his love of the beautiful setting of Port Hacking's waterways was an intrinsic part of the story which follows.

The National Park trust had two launches built: Phyliss , an eighteen footer, and Sphynx, the first to be built at Audley dock. Later, three more were built: Kiwi and the Cedar were also eighteen footers, the smallest craft, only ten foot, was the Simplex. Two larger launches, the Duchess and the Duke, were thirty-five and thirty-six footer...named following the Duke and Duchess of [? not named] Australian tour in 1899.⁴ These five launches, plus one hundred skiffs were all built from timbers cut with geared hand-powered circular saws. Planks were of full length. The marine engines imported from England. Victor, Simplex and Union were the first internal combustion oil engines with accumulators for generating current for ignition. Slow running, the fuel naphtha, later benzine was shipped from England in wooden cases, each case containing two four-gallon tins.

It was in 1915 the Audley shed was sold to George Press of Sydney Harbour, he paid £4,000 (\$8,000) which in those days was a large sum of money.

PART 2. Generations 2 and 3. Port Hacking, Yowie Bay and the Matson Pleasure Grounds

While 'grandfather' still operated the lucrative and popular Audley shed and the busy boatbuilding dock, Fred Snr was well on the way to establishing himself in Port Hacking:

On the northern side the main resorts were the North West Arm Gynea, Yowie bay and Lilli Pilli Point, all reached by coach from Sutherland Railway Station. South West arm abounded with oysters...it was navigable by rowing boat for some distance to a rocky obstruction, where nearby a natural rock basin offered safe swimming. Father built his first home and small boat-hiring service at the water's edge, Wonga road. With his bride, Ethel, they began with twelve skiffs, all sixteen footers...built at the Audley shed at the cost of £1 (\$2) each. Father operated a launch, Simplex, until it broke up on the sand flats...

Finally, I came into the story, twin sons, Frederick and Oscar (Oc) were born to Frederick and Ethel in July 1899...

Yowie Bay and The Pleasure Grounds

Our family moved to the head of Yowie Bay in 1903 where father established a new and larger shed with twenty-four skiffs, these were built at the Audley shed. Within the first year, one hundred and twenty acres were incorporated as a pleasure ground, named The Matson's Pleasure Grounds.

The Grounds soon became a famous resort...offering a variety of attractions: cricket pitches...children's playground...Summer guest house accommodation was rented to keen fishermen. A high class restaurant catered for large city staff parties, provided luncheons and luxury functions for many visiting celebrities, a fashionable dance hall where hundreds could dance to the music of the piano, either by daylight or on summer evenings with lighting provided by kerosene lanterns. After a long journey from the city...the horses rested in the stables at the hilltop. These stables housed the variety of buggies and horse-drawn buses. All of this was opened to the public in 1904 and was a delightful tourist attraction until 1914...Oc and I were now attending Miranda Central School, fortunately for us it opened in 1893. We

hurried home each afternoon to help in the shed, riveting planks and learning the art of boat building. We learned to appreciate the variety of timbers. Our favourite hobby was carving, from timber, toy boats.

We were all impressed by the delivery from England of a Robey 7 hp kerosene engine, a four stroke that operated a huge thirty-six inch circular saw...

The golden years of the Matson's Pleasure Grounds receded into memory when the steam tram, operating along the Kingsway and travellers answered the call of the Cronulla surf...

The Pleasure Grounds closed in 1914, the hire boats sent to Audley, the buildings demolished and the land finally auctioned in 1916...grandfather still operated the shed at Audley...The EG Waterhouse Camellia Gardens covers what was once the eastern section of Matson's Pleasure Grounds...Our family worked from the old converted dance hall. Father employed help: two brothers, the Goddards, both boat builders, who built numerous skiffs. Father alone made over 200 pairs of sculls.

We worked successfully with 24" planing machines driven by an English horizontal internal combustion, the engine driven at 250rpm. The flywheel with 5'6" diameter weighed 400 pounds. This was the method we used for thirty years.

It was my delight to introduce the very first outboard motor at Yowie bay and in 1915 powered the first small row boat with 2 horsepower... Grandfather died in 1920. Oc and I began working together in the old catering building...we started custom-building boats. The demand improved and we found more accessible premises in 1924 on the Kingsway Miranda...the old site which is now Kareena Private Hospital...Our boats became well-known and we were fully occupied until the Depression of the Thirties. The boat hiring shed at the head of Yowie Bay closed. In 1924 we built a new shed, with the idea of a boat club...Unfortunately the club too closed with the Depression.

Miranda at the time:

...it was at this point that the visitor to Yowie bay would alight from the tram, the distance to the bay a mile. Miranda, wedged between Sutherland and Cronulla, became an important little township. Three stores, a post office and a butcher's shop serviced the needs of the locals. The School of Arts building was in Kiora road and the Miranda Central School opposite, were the centre of Miranda's prosperous fruit-growing and poultry farming. A flourishing branch of the Agriculture Bureau was also established. Miranda was then considered the best of the poultry districts in the State.

The Twins – Fred, Oc and boat building.

I suppose being twins it was not surprising that we should fall in love with sisters. We married Gwen and Flo Cope.

Working into the forties, the business of boatbuilding was at a premium. Oc and I built numerous launches, sixteen to twenty foot, clinker and carvel, heavier hulls even up to thirty-one foot and fitted with all types of marine engines. The hulls were caulked with twisted cotton, up to 1" thick planks.

Skiffs...were ordered for the National Park, seventy-five for Lake Illawarra, twenty for Lakes Entrance. We were receiving orders even as far away as Tasmania...

World War II years:

Then came World War Two...the army took over our shed...and for a period of six months the entire property of five acres was used as a garrison. Soldiers dug themselves into sand-bagged trenches. An army detention barracks was built on the present site of the Sutherland District Hospital.

Oc and I were working for the Department of Defence as inspectors. Landing barges, lighters and work launches were under construction for defence...Plywood was introduced and now extensively used, a great change from the solid timbers...

Working fifty-six hours a week, we were cut off by our much-loved Port Hacking. The government took control of all powered craft. The issuer of receipts allowed owner access only for maintenance purposes. Boats of every type were commandeered and moored at the head of the rivers. In the event of an invasion all these craft would be destroyed...

Port Hacking was protected by a massive boom gate...from Salmon Haul Bay to a point west of Bundeena...

The Australian Shipping Board, Army, Navy, and United States services were all under our inspection control..."

It was now 1946...It was time for we Matsons to become involved again in boat-building...rationing of all commodities governed our daily lives. Aluminium and fibreglass were introduced, and used for hulls, but not before we had completed over 400 plywood dinghies...these were car-top models which we marketed in every Australian state. The average price for these little beauties was £27 (54 dollars).

Father died in 1958, just two weeks after our mother. We remembered father's expertise...the wonderful fragrance of red cedar from the workshop; our wonderful childhood in the picturesque environment of Yowie Bay; boating to Audley on a Sunday excursion...to visit our grandparents.

The largest hull Oc and I worked was a fifty-foot yacht, Scottish design, built for the Sydney Flour Company of Glebe.

Twilight years:

In our last shed at Kareena Road, Miranda we worked from 1946 to 1963...our system of building had considerably changed, although all plans were draughted on the floor. Full size moulds, length, beam draught, water lines, we cut all from Teatree, knees, stems, floors, with the new equipment.

The death of my brother, Oc, *was a loss I will never adjust to. It was 1963 when we were 69 years old. I found it impossible to work alone. We had been a lifetime together. It now meant completely changing from the unity of working. Without Oc I could not continue.*

The doors closed on our Kareena Road business. I found work with Owen's Craft...Eighteen months I worked there, but the heartache and illness saw my final retirement from the world of boats.

In his writings (Page 5 of Aileen Levy's transcript), Fred Matson talks of shipwrecks:

A southerly that reached gale force brought disaster to the steamship Nemesis, her 886 tons was no match for the Cronulla Bombora. It was July 1904 and she foundered with a loss of twenty one lives, only one survivor managed to swim ashore and walk to Sutherland where he survived two days after the tragedy. The expression, a Nemesis Gale, commemorated the disaster for years after whenever strong southerlies hit the Port There were many more ships wrecked or foundered in the Port Hacking area, with lives lost....

Fred goes on to list those from his memory. These are dealt with in a separate paper.

FRED JNR'S EPILOGUE

Having spent our lives working on the foreshores of Port Hacking, enriched by the tranquil beauty of this delightful area, a background of three generations of we Matson boatmen I have said my farewell to this scene. Today in 1984 I remember every year, from those early footsteps on the gangplanks of the Rebecca with grandfather by my side, the smell and taste of salt water and timber.

Fred died in 1993.

The area at Audley where grandfather Matson had his enterprises has been reconstructed. There are but a few signs of the dock area, and the hire boatshed now bears no resemblance to that of Matson's boatshed in the early days. Nonetheless, the natural settings so romantically described above, remain. It is now the few, carefully selecting their time, who can still enjoy: '*... the silent rhythm of oars over still, shimmered water.*'

Acknowledgements: Aileen Levy as the custodian of the Matson papers, for having transcribed Fred Jnr's great sheets of handwriting, and Sue Levy for passing the papers for the custody and use by the Sutherland Shire Historical Society,

¹ <https://localhistory.sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au/nodes/view/6056>

² The Messenger family were the founders of a Sydney Harbour boatyard, and well known as shipwrights and yachtsmen. A cousin, Dally Messenger, also a sailor, was famed as a Rugby Union player, and popularised the new code of Rugby League football, when he played in the inaugural game in Sydney in 1908. (<http://adb.anu.au/biography/messenger-herbert-henry-dally-7562>)

³ Ref: *The Gogerlys and Gogerly's Cottage*, G.Cotis, 2015

⁴ No recorded visit by royalty in 1899, but the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York toured NSW in 1901. http://exhibitions.senate.gov.au/pogg/opening/royal_visit.htm#:~:text=The%20visit%20to%20Australia%20by, and%20a%20range%20of%20ceremonies; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_tours_of_Australia

EVIDENCE OF CONTACT

GREG JACKSON and PAM FORBES

Introduction

In the remnant bush around Sydney there is substantial evidence of the Aboriginal people who once lived here. One of the most common features found are axe grinding grooves. These grooves are from the shaping and sharpening of Aboriginal stone axes but, following European settlement, grooves from European steel axes are occasionally seen. This article looks at several such grooves in the Royal National Park, south of Sydney.

Starting in 1770 Australia's Aboriginal people on the east coast were exposed to European culture. Much of this exposure was to their detriment, with disease, aggression and alcohol wreaking havoc on our First Nations people. When it came to tools the Aboriginal people did not want much from Europeans. Their lifestyle had been honed over thousands of years and was tuned to their environment and generally nomadic way of life. They were not interested in acquiring much in the way of material possessions. However, three items that Aboriginal people did covet in some parts of Australia were the steel tomahawk (or hatchet), steel knife and billycan.¹ In the far north fencing wire for making spears was also highly prized.² These items were obtained by various means from white men: good-will gifts, trade, payment for labor or by theft. There is not a lot of archaeological evidence of these acquired items, **Image 1** below shows a rare, hafted Aboriginal steel axe from Arnhem Land.³



Image 1: *An Aboriginal steel axe or hatchet from Arnhem Land.*³

In the Royal National Park, near Warumbul on flat rocks washed by a small creek, 19 axe grinding grooves are located. 15 of these are grooves for sharpening stone axes and such grooves are common in the Sydney area (see **Image 2**). These grooves are made by the forming or sharpening of traditional stone axes - either hafted or hand axes - and produce a dished cross section. Photographs of a typical hand axe is shown in **Image 3**.

Aboriginal axe sharpening grooves are enjoyable places to visit as they are always on freshwater creeks with expanses of flat rock and usually with an outlook over a gully. The grooves near Warumbul are no exception.

Image 2: *Traditional Aboriginal stone axe grinding grooves* [Photo P. Forbes]





Image 3: A blank and a finished traditional Aboriginal stone hand axe⁴

In this location, as well as the traditional axe grinding grooves, there are four grooves made by the sharpening of steel axes. These grooves are much rarer and quite distinctive.

Image 4: A snapshot from a photogrammetric image of a steel axe grinding groove on a small creek near Warumbul in the Royal National Park. [Photo: P. Forbes and G. Jackson]



All four grooves have been made by the sharpening of an iron axe blade estimated to be 90mm wide. Until recently this was the standard width for hatchet blades. If you visit

Bunnings today, you will find that modern tomahawk blades are narrower. Hawkesbury River sandstone is not a good stone for sharpening a steel blade but there are very few other options for sharpening stones in the Sydney basin.



Image 5: An Adjustable Template Former. Used to capture the profile of an object. [Photo G. Jackson]

In order to quantify these grooves an instrument used in metalwork and wood turning was employed. This implement, shown in **Image 5**, is called an 'Adjustable Template Former' and can capture the profile of an object that needs to be copied or recorded by pushing it firmly against the object. This old tool is itself almost an artefact. Modern plastic ones are readily available from a good tool store.

Using this tool, the profile of examples of both traditional stone and steel axe grinding grooves was recorded with the results shown in Image 6 A, B, C and D.

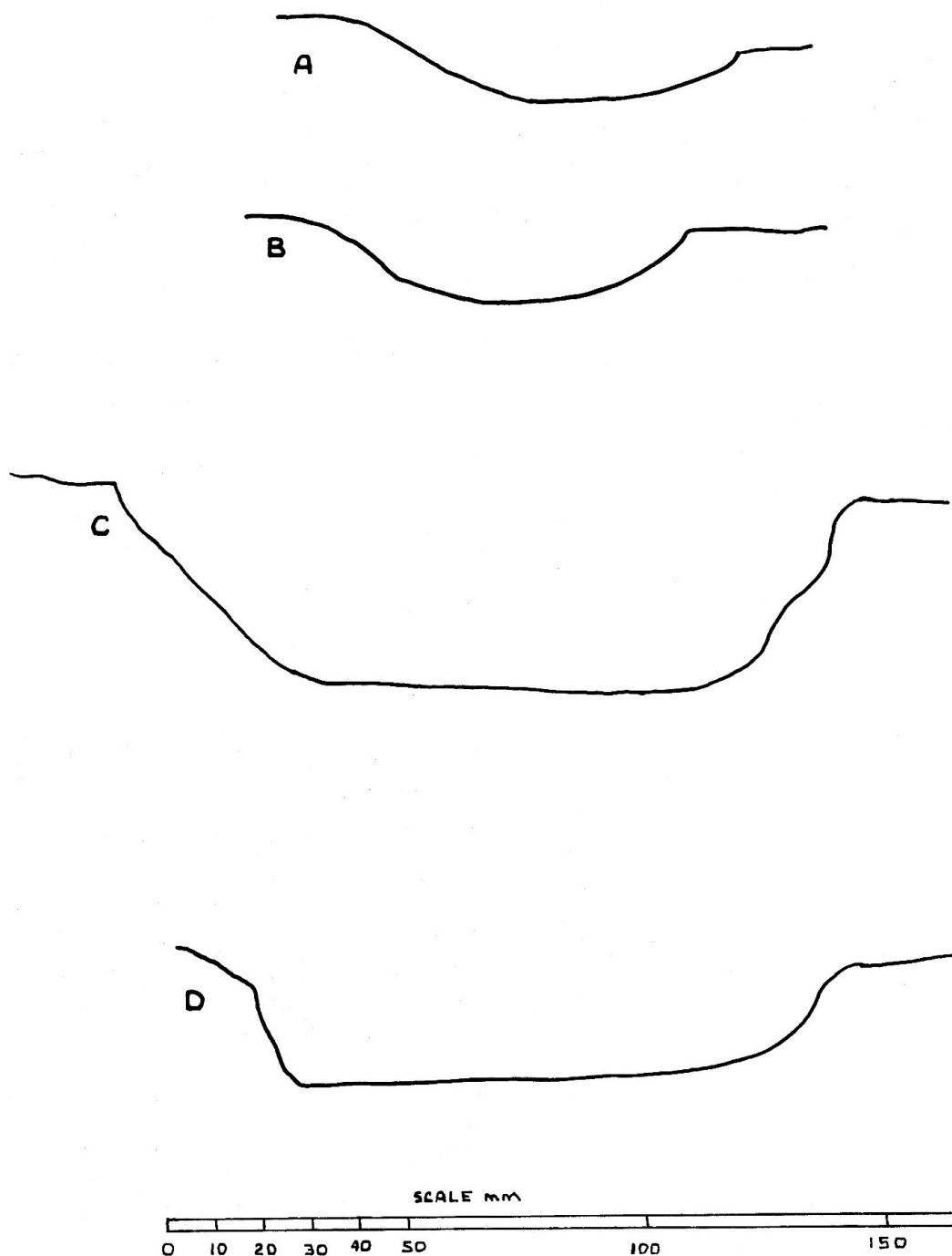


Image 6: Cross section profiles of stone (A & B) and steel axe grinding grooves (C & D)

The cross sections in **Image 6** labeled A and B are of traditional stone axe grinding grooves and sections C and D are from two of the four steel axe grinding grooves.

Note:

- The depth of the steel axe grinding grooves is deeper than the stone axe grooves. This probably reflects the hardness of the steel axes.
- The four steel axe grinding grooves have lengths of 130, 150, 170 and 300 mm. The 300mm long groove is shown in Image 6C. The maximum depth of this groove is 50mm.
- The bottom of the steel axe grinding grooves are largely flat and the stone axe grinding grooves have a curved profile. This corresponds to the shape of the axes shown in **Images 1 and 3**.

- The width of all four steel axe grinding grooves appear to be the same. They have been used to sharpen a steel axe with an estimated blade width of 90mm.
- The steel axes being sharpened have a considerably wider cutting edge than the stone axes.

Conclusion

That steel axes are vastly superior to stone axes is not in dispute, and as the weight of both types is comparable it is not surprising that Aboriginal people obtained steel axes whenever they could. We have no way of knowing if the stone and steel axe grinding grooves are contemporary. The stone grooves could in theory have been made at any time in the past few thousand years, but the steel grooves would have to have been made between 1788 and around 1850 when it is considered that the last of the traditional Aboriginal people lived in the Royal National Park. The four steel axe grooves could have been used to sharpen one axe only or four separate axes. If we assume that Aboriginal people tended to reuse the same familiar grooves for sharpening their axes, it is probable that the grooves were made by four different axes of the same size.

Given the considerable length and depth of all the steel axe grinding grooves it appears that these steel axes were not hafted. The handle would have made it impossible to hone a reasonable angle on the cutting edge. There are several explanations –

- Axe heads were removed from the handles for sharpening.
- The axes were obtained from European sources un-hafted.
- The handles were not replaced when broken.
- Their handles were deliberately removed or broken. Aboriginal people may have preferred the familiar hand axes.

The existence of these steel axes raises some interesting questions about who owned them and what social ramifications this new technology may have had. Owning a steel axe may have been a status symbol in an Aboriginal society. The ad-hock allocation of steel axes amongst Aboriginal tribal members by Europeans regardless of rank, age or sex could have had a disruptive effect on their traditional social values.⁵

The authors would like to acknowledge the valued contribution of Bruce Howell to this article.

¹ *Smith's Weekly* (Sydney) 18 March 1922, available from TROVE

² *World News* (Sydney) 9 May 1934, available from TROVE

³ A rare steel hafted axe from Arnhem Land. Image from <https://www.carters.com.au/index.cfm/index/11860-australian-aboriginal-artefacts-axe/>

⁴ Image of aboriginal stone blank and hand axe from: <https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/fact-sheet-aboriginal-ground-edge-axes>

⁵ Sharp L. 1952, *Steel Axes for Stone-Age Australians*, from Human Organization 1 /1952 scanned from 'The pleasures of anthropology', 1969. available from: <http://web.mnstate.edu/robertsb/380/steelAxes.pdf>

Modern technology uncovers evidence of contact

A few years ago, we were undergraduate, mature-age, archaeology students at Sydney University, and had come across a technique for studying textured surfaces - like coins, rock engravings old masters, etc. This technique is called Polynomial Texture Mapping or PTM for short, and involves taking a large number of photos of a surface under different lighting conditions. This often reveals significant, previously unknown surface details.

Mastering this technique requires a combination of computing, photographic and scientific knowledge, so was well suited to two retired engineers. Although still undergraduates we were offered contract employment as part of the Quarantine Station Project to produce PTMs of some of the more than 1500 early European inscriptions on the sandstone surfaces at the Sydney Quarantine Station, North Head. This job resulted in a delightful four-week stay at the Q Station, living in the four-star hotel that now occupies the old quarantine stations buildings.

Following this job we were interested to see if PTMs could be used to study lithics (stone tools), so we approached the friendly archaeology lab supervisor at Sydney University and asked if we could borrow a suitable lithic. She was happy to oblige and selected one at random from the large cupboard that housed the department's teaching collection. It was a fine example, a large spear point about 150mm long, that had once been hafted. This spear point is shown in **Image 1**.



Image 1: A PTM snapshot of the stone spear point, originally hafted. Plant resin has been used to connect the haft to the spear point.

The PTM image allows us to study the technique used to make this stone spear point, and as part of this study the spear point revealed a surprise. **Image 2** shows a close-up PTM snapshot of the hafted end.

Image 2: A close up PTM snapshot of the hafted end of the spear point showing, in the plant resin, an imprint of coarse woven cloth that appears to be machine made.



This woven material, which appears to be hessian, was used to connect the haft to the spear point with the plant resin reinforcing this bond - evidence of European contact. Its existence was unknown and was invisible to the unaided eye. The Aboriginal maker of this spear would have obtained a strip of European cloth and used it to help fasten this spear point to its haft.

This contact would probably have occurred between 1788 and around 1900 as Aboriginal people moved from a traditional to a more European way of life. Aboriginal people adopted European ways at different times in different parts of Australia.

This evidence of contact between traditional Aboriginals people and Europeans is certainly serendipitous but does not add much to our knowledge as this spear point has no known provenance (provenance?). Our first nations people have a track record of adopting the few European items that proved useful to their lifestyle. Steel axes, steel knives and billy cans were some of the items that Aboriginals were known to find useful. The use of this strip of material demonstrates another European item that Aboriginals found useful.

Greg Jackson and Pam Forbes

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND THE WORONORA WATER MILL

GREG JACKSON and PAM FORBES

There is no historical evidence about interactions between Aboriginal people and the convict workers at Lucas Woronora Mill, but we can assume there must have been. By the 1820's the number of Aboriginal people in these areas would have been reduced by introduced diseases, but there is still plenty of evidence of their presence in this area. The Aboriginal resistance leader, Pemulwuy, had roamed these valleys 20 years before the Lucas' two mills were built, and his associate Kogi moved around the area containing Lucas' Brisbane Mill on land that is now the suburb of Voyager Point, near where Harris and Williams Creeks join the Georges River.¹ The authors have located axe sharpening grooves approximately 400 metres upstream from the Woronora Mill, and there are several other axe sharpening sites in the Mill Creek catchment.

The number of Aboriginal people living near Lucas' Mills cannot have been great. Archaeologist, Dr Val Attenbrow, senior fellow of the Australian Museum, believes that there were about one to two thousand indigenous people in the greater Sydney region in 1788.² Historian and author, Peter Turbet estimates that there were about two hundred Aboriginal people living in the Georges River-Port Hacking area at that time.³ A request by the Colonial Secretary in 1827 for details of the number of Aboriginal people in each district returned only 20 for the Liverpool district (nine men, six women and five children).⁴ The Liverpool district contained both of John Lucas' watermills at that time. This figure may be inaccurate as indigenous persons would be very difficult to locate in the vast expanse of land that was then the Liverpool district. There were not, in total, many people at all in Sydney's southern districts, with Martin reporting that in 1836 a total of 101 European persons lived in the Parish of Holsworthy, where the Brisbane Mill was located and just nine resided in the Parish of Sutherland, where the Woronora Mill was located.⁵ This low population density may be because most of this area had a low agricultural value.



Image 1: Aboriginal people spearing fish in the Woronora River in about 1848 is possibly about 200 metres upstream the mill.⁶

The Woronora Mill was on Dharawal land and the presence of the mill building and convicts on their tribal land may have been resented by the local Aboriginal resulting in the burning of the Woronora Mill, following its closure in 1828.⁷

Archaeological evidence may also throw some light on the possibility of Aboriginal – convict interaction. Beside the Woronora Mill is a small river flat, with an area of approximately 650 square metres. This area has been cleared of field stones to make agricultural land, probably for the mill's convict workers. The stones collected were used to make a rubble wall approximately 25 metres long that would have originally stood approximately 1.2 metres high, running from the base of the steep escarpment to the riverside, blocking access along the riverbank. This wall, shown in **Images 2** and **3**, is not a serious defensive feature but may be a statement from the convicts to the local Aboriginals that this arable land and the crops on it belonged to the white man and not to them.



Image 2: *Part of the large rubble wall at the northern end of the site running from the escarpment base down towards the riverbank. Scale divisions on the ranging pole are 0.5m. [Photo G. Jackson]*

The layout of this agricultural area of the Woronora Mill could be seen as adopting a defensive stance with a hut at either end of the field, a rock wall at one end, the river to the east and a steep escarpment to the west. **Image 3** shows a scale drawing of the site with the agricultural land outlined in green. The small scale of operation and the limited number of people at the Woronora Mill, however would have tended to reduce the possibility of conflict. Although Lucas' Woronora Mill grant was 150 acres, the actual area of occupation was very small, totalling less than one acre.

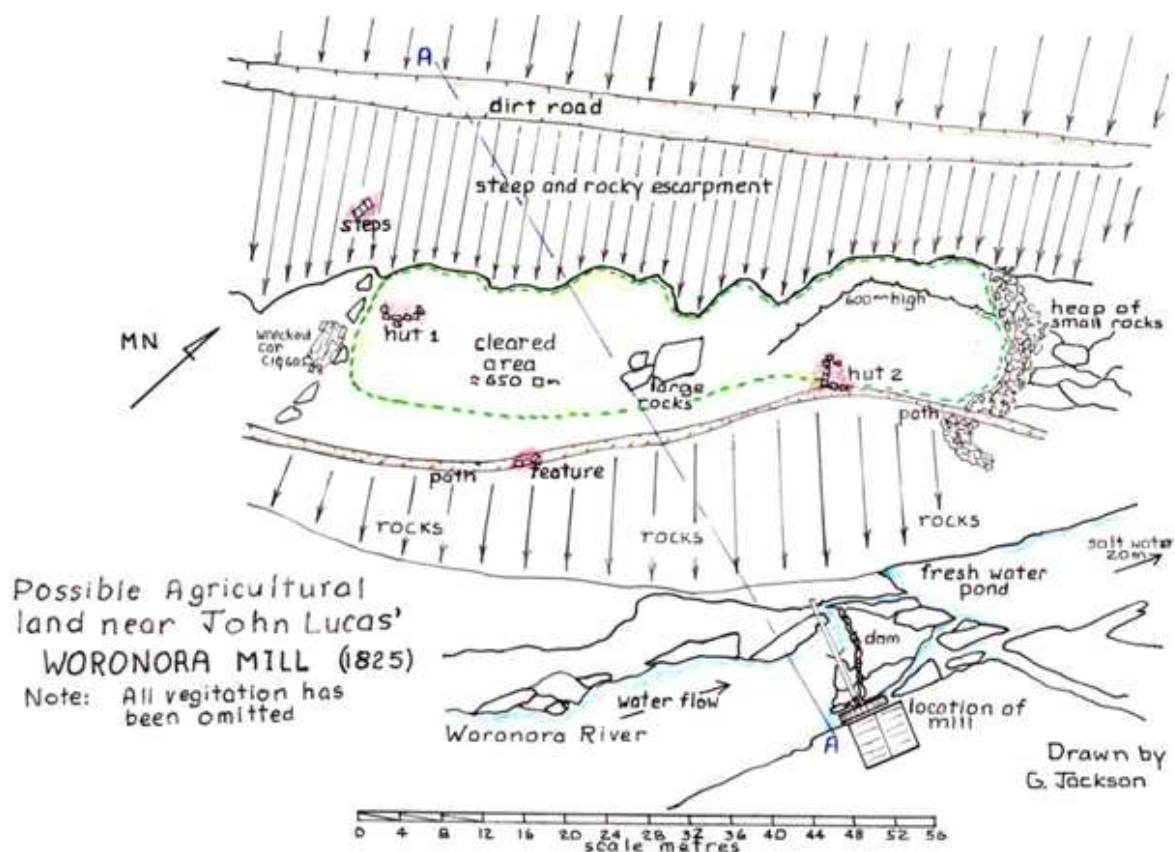


Image 3: Plan of Woronora Mill and nearby archaeological features. It shows an area of approximately 650sq meters 45metres west of the Woronora Mill site cleared of field stones but containing some bedrock and large floaters. The bases of 2 small huts are in this area. The stone wall is shown on the right of the plan.

If there were hostile interactions between the local Aboriginal people and the Europeans at the Woronora Mill, the lack of any written history describing this interaction is indicative of much of our colonial history. Aboriginal people are very often simply ignored in the records, with no mention of the injustices they suffered. In this vast underpopulated area relationships between convicts and the local Aboriginal people, hostile or otherwise, would quite possibly go unobserved and unreported. The silence tells of apathy bordering on a cover-up by officials who should have been concerned with the welfare of the Indigenous people.

The authors would like to acknowledge the valuable contribution of Bruce Howell to this article.

¹ Goodhall H. Cadzow A. 2014 a, *Aboriginal People on Sydney's Georges River from 1820*, *Dictionary of Sydney*, accessed 3.02.2023
http://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/aboriginal_people_on_sydney's_georges_river_from_1820

² Robinson D. *History of Woronora to 1940* pp 5-6. Self-published by David Robinson, Woronora, NSW

³ Robinson, p. 5 (cites Maryanne Larkin who quotes Peter Turbet in *Sutherland Shire – a history to 1939*, 1998, Sutherland History Press)

⁴ Biographical Database of Australia, accessed 21/06/2015, <http://www.bda-online.org.au/>

⁵ Martin R. M. 1839, *History of Austral-Asia: comprising New South Wales, Van Diemens Island. Swan River, South Australia, &c*, Whittaker and Co, London.

⁶ From the Joseph Lebovic Gallery, drawings by Capt. R. M. Westmacott c1848. The original is held in the NLA (<https://www.joseflebovicgallery.com/pages/books/CL187-23/after-robert-westmacott-brit-aust/group-of-four-lithographs-from-sketches-in-australia-from-drawings-by-capt-n-r-m-westmacott>)

⁷ *The Sydney Morning Herald* 14 March 1843



The site of the Lucas Mill 1825 was visited by SSHS excursionists led by Greg Jackson and Pam Forbes in October 2021 [Photo: E.Craig]



THE REAL TOM UGLY

There have been several theories about the origin of the name 'Tom Ugly', after whom Tom Uglys Bridge is named. But one that has now been accepted by respected historians is this:

Tom Ugly was an Aboriginal man (whose name was pronounced 'Eugally', misspelt by early white settlers as 'Ugly'), said to be a warrior of splendid physique, tall and athletic, and he was in contact with white people as early as 1810. His portrait, painted by colonial artist John William Lewin, hangs in the British Museum. He was also known by the Aboriginal names 'Towaa' and 'Tom Weiry'. He lived his last years at the point on Georges River which now bears his name, died there about 1846 and was buried under a 'gibber gunyah'.¹ (Courtesy: Kogarah Historical Society)

¹ Heather Goodall and Alison Cadzow, *Rivers and Resilience: Aboriginal people in Sydney's Georges River*, (2009, UNSW Press), p. 9; *Carss Park*, by Beverley Earnshaw, Kogarah (2009 Historical Society), p.3

'A CAPITAL HOTEL'

COMO HOTEL'S HISTORY: RE-EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

KIM HATHERLY

When the long-debated route for the Illawarra Railway was finally decided, the announcement caught the attention of the Try Again Hotel's publican at McDonald's Hole.¹

Thomas Hanley was accustomed to catering to railway construction workers, McDonald's Hole being a base between Capertee and Rylstone for labourers on the Mudgee extension line. Hanley knew the Illawarra contractors would establish similar camps along their route; workers and site visitors would require accommodation, refreshments, general store and postal facilities. In 1882 Hanley selected six acres on Double (Carina) Bay² close to where Georges River Railway Bridge would be constructed, purchased a five-year leasehold from the Holt-Sutherland Estate Land Company for £35 per annum,³ then applied to transfer his Try Again Hotel licence to the new location.⁴ (See image of the plan of Hanley's land that accompanied the lease on inside back cover.)

At the October quarterly licensing meeting Hanley reported that about 30 tents were already pitched near his building site, with more navvies due shortly. He was commended as a sober, respectable man with no complaints lodged against him. The only question was whether a hotel was really necessary at the location, but it was thought that its presence might repress any undesirable sly grog shanties. The Try Again licence was not transferred but Hanley was granted a new licence in January 1883, conditional on completing his house of seven rooms plus family living quarters.⁵

Irish-born Thomas Hanley and brother William had emigrated to Hobart as boys in 1854. Some early Shire histories erroneously named William Hanley as the first publican at what, from 1883, became known as Como. While William was indeed a hotelkeeper, running the Heathcote Hotel at Waterfall and the Centennial at Helensburgh,⁶ records uncovered since confirm that Thomas Hanley, not William, established Como's first hotel, variously spelled Woronora, Worinora or Woniora Hotel in its early years and erected on the southern side of today's Genoa Street/Novara Crescent corner. (See on inside back cover, plan of Thomas Hanley's land.)

Como's first hotel – the 'Woronora'

In April 1883 the Holt-Sutherland Estate Land Company directors requested the newly-approved post office at Georges River Railway Crossing be named 'Como'. At the same time, Thomas Hanley advised he would accept the office of post master, now having suitable premises from which to operate, and would shortly tender to convey mails along the river from Woniora (Tom Ugly's) to the railway crossing.⁷ The first hotel was constructed from weatherboard and the little post office from corrugated iron.⁸ By July the 'genial host' could promise 'the best of accommodation to those who may visit his hostelry'.⁹ Albert Emerson ran the *Young Mat* steamer from Botany four times a week to transport visitors,¹⁰ the river constituting Como's only access until the railway opened almost three years later. In mid-1884 a guest deemed it 'a capital hotel ... affording snug accommodation'.¹¹ Soon after, Hanley enlarged an 'admirably adapted assembly room' suitable for theatrical performances.¹²

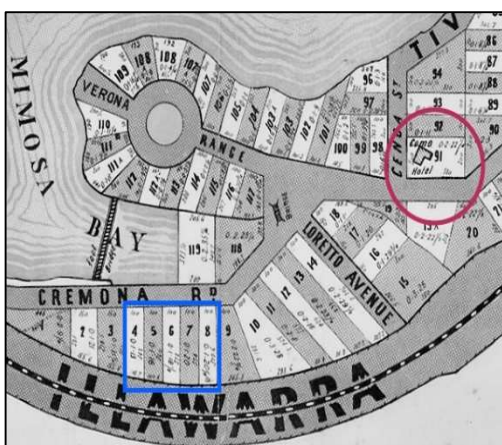
However, the Woronora Hotel's early success was short-lived. In September 1884 Hanley's post office-cum-store, adjacent to the hotel, was destroyed in an overnight fire, including stocks of clothing, ironmongery, tinware and groceries, and drapery kept in boxes to safeguard it from rats. An inquest heard that vestas (wax matches) were stored in a tin-lined box under the counter and a case and a half of kerosene oil kept near the door. The coroner was unable to determine the fire's cause¹³ and although Hanley was insured, he was eventually paid only £320 of his £600 coverage.¹⁴ Then in November, after the railway reached Hurstville, Emerson took the *Young Mat* steamer off the Como run,¹⁵ considerably reducing visitor access. By May 1885 most railway labourers had moved to new camps down the line. Business was so poor that Hanley resigned as post master¹⁶ and his insolvent estate went to auction: the 'splendid' hotel building (now of galvanised iron) with lease, licence and goodwill; stables, post office shed, household furniture, dray, cart and whale boat for conveying mail.¹⁷

The hotel licence went to William Stephenson who, with wife Eliza, also inherited post office duties.¹⁸ Stephenson, almost 70, had just relinquished his licence for a hotel at Petersham, but appeared keen to throw himself into the Como business.¹⁹ He set about having four of the hotel rooms whitewashed.²⁰ Meanwhile Eliza demonstrated her community spirit when a social group's outing to Como was interrupted by a torrential downpour. She opened the family's private rooms to the ladies of the picnic party for shelter.²¹ William's health began to suffer and by late 1886 he was 'very ill away at Castlereagh River' staying with family, too unwell for demanding hotel and postal work.²²

The Holt-Sutherland Company seized the opportunity of the Stephensons' departure to undertake renovations before calling for tenders for the hotel's next lease in April 1887. 'The buildings have just had extensive alterations and additions made, and a NEW LICENSE [sic] HAS BEEN GRANTED. This is the only Hotel in that ROMANTIC and BEAUTIFUL LOCALITY. There is at present no accommodation of any kind for the large numbers who visit COMO ... A suitable person should do a GOOD BUSINESS from the first day,' promised the Company's advertisement.²³

Woronora Hotel renamed 'Como Hotel'

New publican George Agnew, 45 and his wife Jane, were émigrés from New Zealand. Perhaps to avoid confusion with Emerson's Sea Breeze Hotel at Tom Ugly's, sometimes referred to as Woniora Hotel, Agnew re-named his establishment Como Hotel. The post office, closed on the Stephensons' departure, re-opened with Agnew as post master. Mail was now delivered by train and George also undertook portorage between station and hotel.²⁴



Lot 91 (circled in red) is the site of the original Woronora Hotel (renamed Como Hotel by January 1888). The second Como Hotel would be built on Lots 4-8 (boxed in blue) in 1890. [Como Subdivision Plans, State Library of NSW]

The Agnews obviously settled happily at Como because when the Holt-Sutherland Company subdivided land east of the railway line they purchased eight blocks at the January 1888 auction,²⁵ including two on Genoa Street adjoining their hotel site, and five on Cremona Road. Here, George revealed plans to build a large new hotel of

16 rooms, plus family quarters.²⁶ Holt-Sutherland Company manager James Murphy quickly objected to the Licensing Board, pointing out that Agnew already held a publican's licence for the hotel at Como; that his lease from the Company for the premises was conditional on a licensed house being kept there throughout the lease; and that the existing hotel already adequately served the neighbourhood's needs.²⁷

Agnew simply waited until the old hotel licence expired the following year, then applied for — and gained — a fresh conditional licence for his proposed new hotel on Cremona Road.²⁸ He and Jane then purchased the recently-subdivided Genoa Street block incorporating their residence (the original hotel), plus the adjoining lot, neatly releasing themselves from restrictive contractual obligations to the Company.²⁹

New Como Hotel

Architects Albert Myers and William Hendry of Pitt Street designed the new Cremona Road hotel, and Newtown builder Robert Fielding won the tender to erect it.³⁰ By late 1889 Fielding was hiring tradesmen and labourers to quarry local stone and cart bricks and building materials from Como Station to the building site; in January 1890 stonemasons and carpenters were at work, and in February Fielding advertised for plumbers, plasterers and suppliers of iron columns, balcony railings and ornamental castings.³¹

Then, in February 1890, George and Jane Agnew sold the land, and the new hotel under construction, to Manly businessman Augustus Stevens.³² Having allowed the licence to sell liquor from their Genoa Street home to expire, the Agnews continued letting rooms and serving non-alcoholic refreshments there,³³ while George extended his conditional licence for the new hotel until Stevens found a tenant.³⁴

Stevens' July advertisement touted Como as a great holiday resort with 'grand shooting and fishing'. The forthcoming duplication of the railway line would bring in 800 men for 18 months, making the new hotel a 'splendid opportunity for first-class caterer and sporting men'.³⁵

Another ad in October claimed the hotel, just finished, boasted 'every convenience, grand rooms, public and private bars, cellar unsurpassed'. It was offered on lease, furnished or unfurnished, or for outright sale, a 'grand opportunity for sporting men with good connection'.³⁶

Despite these inducements, it was another year before George Agnew finally replaced his conditional publican's licence with an unconditional one to transfer to the next landlord, a recently discharged bankrupt named Daniel Sullivan.³⁷ 'The hotel is a new one, and has been handsomely furnished throughout' the press reported. 'Splendid fishing and shooting can be had at Como, and Mr. Sullivan will provide every facility for a good day's sport.'³⁸

However, both owner Augustus Stevens and licensee Daniel Sullivan fell victim to the deepening economic depression — in June 1892 Sullivan faced bankruptcy for the second time in two years,³⁹ while Stevens, who had heavily mortgaged the property, saw its title formally transferred to a building society in December.⁴⁰ The society's secretary had briefly held the licence before transferring it to the next publican, George Cubbon, in July. In October Cubbon transferred it to John Gregory, whose incumbency was similarly brief — in February 1893 Charles Forwood became the seventh publican in ten years.⁴¹

George Agnew continued operating the post office from his home, the former hotel on Genoa Street, but landowners at now-Illawong found the location inconvenient and petitioned to relocate the office to the railway station. 'The present post master's place is half a mile from the station over a bad road,' reported a postal inspector, supporting the request. Despite objections from Agnew personally and James Murphy on behalf of the Holt-Sutherland Company, the relocation was approved and station master Albert Cuneo appointed post master in July 1894.⁴²

Charles Nicholson took over the publican's licence from Forwood, followed by Henry Brett (1895), Sydney Staples (1897), Dominic Trim (1903)⁴³ and almost immediately, Joseph Pauchon, who also bought the land from the then-mortgagee.⁴⁴ In 1905 German-born Paul Buchholz and wife Louisa arrived from Bendigo, purchased the land from Pauchon, took over the hotel licence⁴⁵ and settled into a stable and successful eight-year tenure.

Correcting the history

Previously published claims of the hotel on Cremona Road being built as early as 1878, having been a 'German Club', then a brothel, before being owned by the Catholic Church and occupied by Carmelite nuns,⁴⁶ are unsupported by evidence. On the contrary, Holt-Sutherland Estate leases, Post Office records, contemporary advertising, land titles, sale posters and official correspondence, combine to confirm that Como's first hotel, the Woronora, was built in 1883 on what became Genoa Street; under George Agnew in 1887 it became known as Como Hotel, so depicted on the first Como subdivision poster in January 1888.

The records further establish that the second hotel, constructed on Cremona Road in 1890, adopted the Como Hotel name with George Agnew's transfer of licence, and only ever functioned as a licensed public house. Nor could it have replaced any earlier establishment on the site. Thomas Holt owned the land from 1862, leasing it in mid-1879 to a mining syndicate,⁴⁷ then in 1881 to the Holt-Sutherland Estate Land Company, which surveyed, subdivided and sold Holt's land on leasehold.⁴⁸ The earliest title for the Cremona Road site found in the Holt Family papers (Mitchell Library) or at NSW Land Registry Services is George Agnew's lease of 1888.⁴⁹

Throughout 1884-85 *Town and Country Journal* published a regular column chronicling progress at Como during railway construction; in none of this comprehensive coverage is any establishment described that could be a second hotel or accommodation premises. A November 1886 Postal Inspector's report recorded that Como comprised Stephenson's public house, the boatman's residence, the then-empty school building and the railway ticket office and waiting room, nearing completion.⁵⁰ Had a building as substantial as the Como Hotel existed it would certainly appear in this report. James Murphy was firm in his 1887 advertisement and 1888 letter that the *only* public house or accommodation at Como was the hotel on Genoa Street. Newspaper advertisements state unequivocally that the Cremona Road building was 'new'/'just built'/'just finished' in 1890/91. An unbroken run of hotel licensees for both sites, readily traceable through Government Gazette and newspaper notices, is detailed here.

The notion that a 'German Club' occupied the Cremona Road site contemporaneously with the Woronora Hotel on Genoa Street and that such club somehow 'became' the Como Hotel in 1890, runs contrary to all documentary evidence.

Unfortunately, the mythology which has grown up around the hotel has resulted in an erroneous 1878 date being affixed to the façade of the present building, constructed to replace the original

after its destruction by fire in 1996. Photographs taken during Charles Forwood's incumbency display the stylised '1890' construction date should a future publican wish to rectify the error. (See inside back page for image.)

¹ *The Sydney Morning Herald* (hereafter *SMH*), 4 Feb 1882, p16

² "Double Bay" referred to what became Carina and Mimosa (later Scylla) Bays. Scylla Bay was reclaimed during the 1930s Depression

³ Unnumbered lease held in Holt Family Further Papers MLMSS 2170 ADD-ON 2030/14, Mitchell Library

⁴ *SMH*, 25 Oct 1882, p5

⁵ *SMH*, 6 Jan 1883, p5; 1 Feb 1883, p8

⁶ Laurie Burgess, 'A Tale of Two Hanleys', supplement to *Sutherland Shire Historical Society Quarterly Bulletin*, Feb 2013

⁷ Como Post Office File [Box 176] National Archives of Australia; *Town and Country Journal* (hereafter *TCJ*), 17 May 1884, p42

⁸ *SMH*, 10 Jul 1883, p7

⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 7 Jul 1883, p16

¹⁰ *Freeman's Journal*, 8 Sep 1883, p2

¹¹ *TCJ*, 17 May 1884, p42

¹² *TCJ*, 14 Jun 1884, p41

¹³ *Cumberland Mercury*, 8 Oct 1884, p1

¹⁴ *SMH*, 8 Dec 1885, p6

¹⁵ *TCJ*, 8 Nov 1884, p16

¹⁶ Como PO file, op cit

¹⁷ *SMH*, 27 Jun 1885, p17

¹⁸ *Government Gazette*, 9 Mar 1886, p1662; Como PO file, op cit

¹⁹ *Evening News*, 21 Jan 1885, p3

²⁰ *SMH*, 6 Apr 1886, p11

²¹ *Evening News*, 6 Nov 1886, p4

²² Como PO file, op cit

²³ *SMH*, 26 Apr 1887, p9. James Murphy temporarily held the hotel lease between Stephenson and Agnew

²⁴ Como PO file, op cit

²⁵ Lots 4-8, 19, 93, 94, Lease 138673, NSW Land Registry Services

²⁶ *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 Mar 1888, p1

²⁷ Holt Family Further Papers, MLMSS 2170 ADD-ON 2030/13, Mitchell Library

²⁸ *SMH*, 19 Apr 1889, p7

²⁹ Lots 91, 92, Lease 157539, NSW Land Registry Services

³⁰ *SMH*, 23 Mar 1889, p4; 17 Dec 1889, p12

³¹ *SMH* 17 Dec 1889, p12; 4 Jan 1890, p5; 11 Jan 1890, p12; 12 Feb 1890, p14

³² Lease 138673 op cit

³³ *SMH* 25 Jan 1890, p20

³⁴ *SMH*, 4 Apr 1890, p10

³⁵ *SMH* 9 Jul 1890, p3

³⁶ *SMH*, 14 Oct 1890, p3

³⁷ *SMH*, 18 Sep 1891, p7; 25 Sep 1891, p8

³⁸ *The Referee*, 28 Oct 1891, p7

³⁹ *SMH* 21 May 1892, p3

⁴⁰ Lease 138673 op cit

⁴¹ *SMH*, 22 Jul 1892, p2; *Evening News*, 21 Oct 1892, p6; *SMH*, 17 Feb 1893, p7

⁴² Como PO file, op cit

⁴³ *SMH*, 1 Feb 1894, p6; *Australian Star*, 24 Oct 1895, p7; *SMH*, 25 Mar 1897, p4; *Australian Star*, 2 Jul 1903, p6

⁴⁴ Lease 138673 op cit

⁴⁵ Lease 138673 op cit; *SMH*, 16 Feb 1905, p7

⁴⁶ Carmelite nuns first arrived in Australia in July 1885, purchasing The Warren at Marrickville, Thomas Holt's former home, in 1886. An enclosed, contemplative order strictly confined to the house, they would not/could not have used a Como Hotel building as a retreat, as has been claimed

⁴⁷ Agreement for lease Book 212 No 705, NSW Land Registry Services

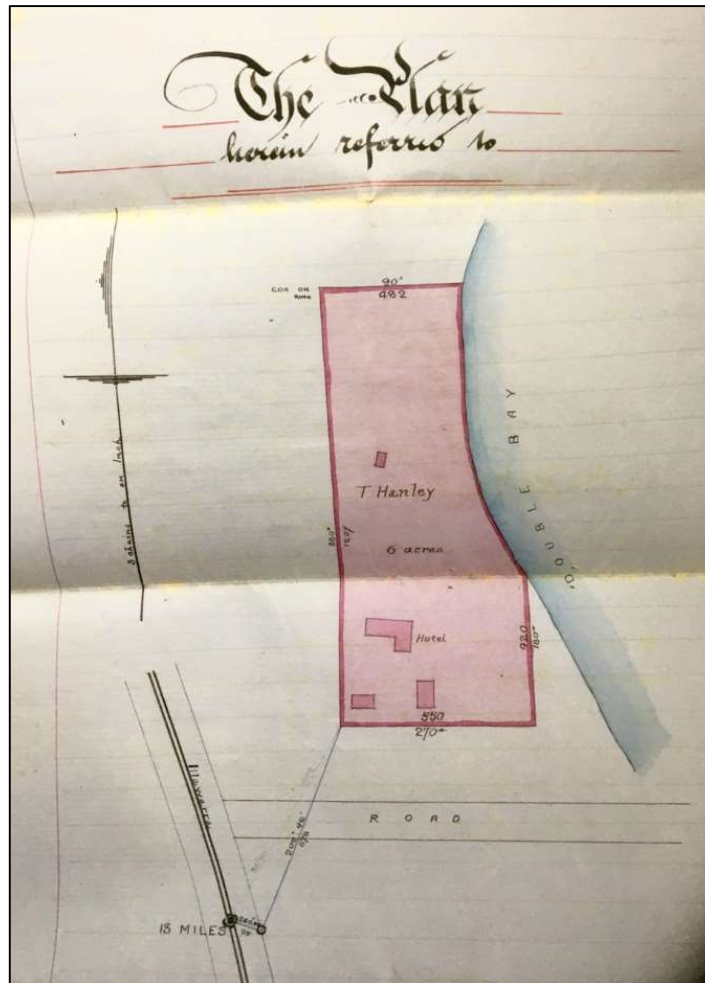
⁴⁸ Lease 50990, NSW Land Registry Services

⁴⁹ Lease 138673 op cit

⁵⁰ Como PO file, op cit

Images for

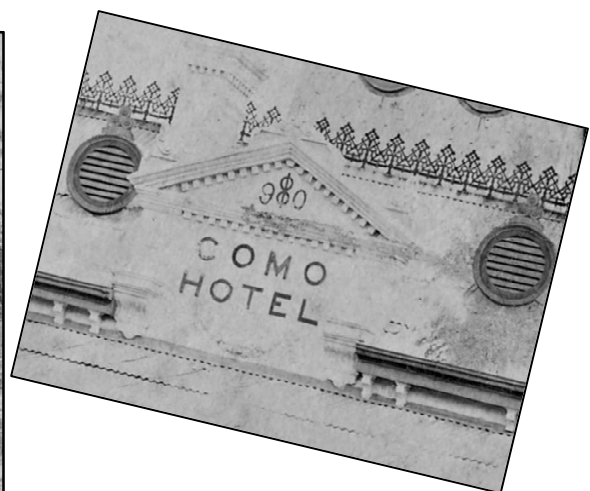
'Como Hotel's history: re-examining the evidence', by Kim Hatherly (page 24)



Plan of Thomas Hanley's land accompanying the Memorandum of Lease in Holt Family Papers, [Mitchell Library]



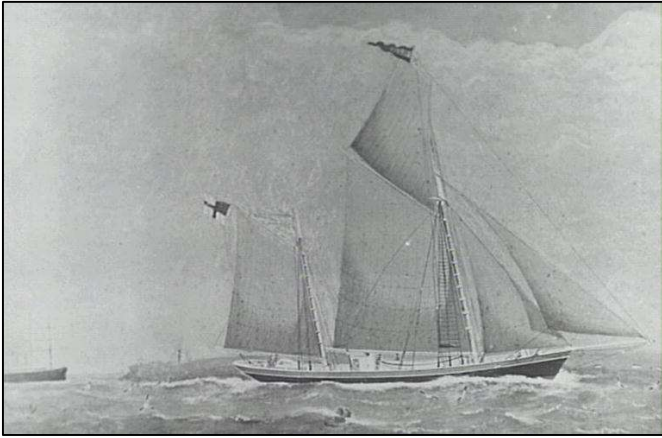
Como Hotel, as on front cover.



Close-up of stylised 1890 construction date.

Images connected with
FRED MATSON'S PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

(See story by George Cotis, page 8)



'Rebecca', ca 1895, photo of painting [SSL]

Fred Matson, 1899-199, SSL



*Matson Pleasure Grounds on Port Hacking River,
ca early 1900s [SSL]*



*Matsons Boatshed with causeway crowded
with boats for hire, ca 1912 [SSL]*



Fred's Boatshed, Yowie Bay, w/colour, Fred Matson 1987 [SSHS]