



# Peninsula Historian

Newsletter of the Manly, Warringah &  
Pittwater Historical Society Inc.

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## FROM THE EDITOR

With Frenchs Forest very much in the news because of the construction of the new hospital, in this issue there is a substantial article on the history of the French's Forest Cemetery. Please don't read anything sinister into it. I am sure the medical treatment that the new hospital provides will be wonderful.

Thank you to Beth Robertson for this interesting and comprehensive contribution. If, after reading it, you would like a guided tour of the cemetery, Beth runs them semi-regularly, working to various themes. For more details see p.3.

Last issue we had a similarly-comprehensive illustrated article from Bob Pauling on Bathampton in England, the town where Arthur Phillip spent his last years. I apparently stuffed up one of the captions to Bob's photos. I labelled one of them as the chapel whereas it was actually taken in the base of the church's tower. The offending photo, now with the correct caption, is on p.8.

Speaking of pages, one of our members, Sandra Blamey, has written to point out that the electronic version of this

Newsletter, being simply a reproduction of the hardcopy printed version, is not convenient to read. Because much of it is laid out in two column format, when accessing it on a computer the reader has to scroll up and down each page twice. This is a consequence of computer screens being in landscape layout - wider than they are high - whereas the printed page is in portrait format.

The problem could be solved by dropping the two column format. I am reluctant to do this in its entirety as it renders the printed version a little harder to read, makes short items into literally one or two-liners and also makes it more boring to look at in hardcopy. However the march of technology is relentless and so in this issue I have made some changes in the layout that will hopefully look after both forms of media - print and electronic. I would welcome comments and suggestions and thank Sandra for hers.

Finally, on p.3, there is a brief "review" of a book on William Bede Dalley, he of Dalley's Castle fame. I would welcome similar contributions from readers, drawing attention to any books, history related, that they feel could be of interest.

*Richard Michell*

## DIARY and a REMINDER

### Monthly meeting at the Curl Curl Community Centre, cnr. Griffin and Abbott Roads

11 February, 2017                      2.00 pm

#### *Radio astronomy, Wi Fi and Collaroy Plateau*

Hastings Pawsey will explain the connection between Collaroy Plateau and the pioneering radio astronomy work done by his physicist father Joe and others in the latter stages of World War 2 and beyond.

#### **ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP**

A reminder that membership renewal time is here again. Details are on the last page. Thank you for your interest and support over the past 12 months.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The January meeting had been deliberately left open to allow discussion from the floor about what could be done to generate greater interest in the Society. Unfortunately it was a very hot day and many members were absent, and this did not help.

However, a suggestion from the floor that we try to introduce ourselves more widely through the Manly Daily will certainly be pursued. We need such an article to talk of our age (93+), our vast amount of hidden resources in the way of printed matter, articles, maps, photos, material objects such as cups and memory boards etc., and perhaps most importantly our lack of a home to call our own, to have our meetings etc.

At the moment, as you will know, the Society signature is scattered over a wide area; from a room tucked away behind Manly Library, to a Council-owned small room at Cromer full of mainly paper records and other ephemera. It would be lovely to have a place we called HOME, where we can meet,

where we can organise our scattered belongings into a real museum where volunteers can help out at the door or help curate the collections, where students can work. Perhaps this is a dream, but let's look at it as a potential reality.

Phil Colman

## NEWS AND VIEWS

### MONTHLY MEETING REPORT

The monthly meeting in January took the form of an open discussion forum, as described in the President's report above.

### NEXT MEETING, FEBRUARY

#### **Why is Collaroy Plateau important to our Wi-Fi world?**

Plateau Park is virtually unknown, except to those who live on Collaroy Plateau or attend a sporting event in the Park. Virtually no-one is aware that an activity occurred there in 1945 which played a major part in today's world-wide Wi-Fi system of communication.

Joseph Lade Pawsey was an Australian radio physicist who was instrumental in the design of WW2 radar systems and then lead CSIRO's Radio Astronomy Division till his death in 1962. Early English TV, radar, Plateau Park, Radio Astronomy and Wi-Fi all have a common thread.

Joe Pawsey often visited Collaroy Plateau during the war and his son Hastings will provide a brief history, linking these elements together, which has resulted in today's smartphone communication system.

Phil Colman



Joseph Lade Pawsey

### MEMBERS

Some more sad news I'm afraid.

From Judy Waterer: *"Older members might remember Hubert Burrows who attended meetings in Manly regularly with his wife Lucie until they moved to Killara some years ago. Hubert died on 28 November 2016".* Our sympathy to Lucie who remains a member.

In the last issue I noted the passing of Gloria Carroll. Several members subsequently contacted me with praise and reminiscences re Gloria. John Illingsworth wrote:

*"Gloria's long and full life experienced the Great Depression, saw duty at North Head Fortress the night Sydney was attacked by Japanese submarines, knew sadness and struggle. Stoic and capable in all ways, yet gentle, friendly and loving to all who knew her, she was class personified. She will be missed by many, not least her swimming mates 'The Buckettes'".*

He also provided this link is to a marvellous celebration of her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2013 organised by the aforesaid Buckettes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qGLZXeAHG8>.

Beth Robertson wrote:

*"Gloria was a distant cousin of my husband and in the 1980s she researched the family history, together with her sister. It was based on a convict ancestor and together they published two editions of a book on the family. She has been very active in preservation activities with various family cemetery headstones and was very knowledgeable about historic research before the use of the online databases and internet. She travelled the world studying archival material for her projects. Gloria and I worked together on one chapter in her second edition on my branch of the family and we also assisted in the research for the Mona Vale cemetery book published by the society."*

### 50 YEAR CELEBRATION OF WARRINGAH LIBRARY

As reported last issue, Northern Beaches Council held a substantial celebration on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> November to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the construction and opening of the library which sits adjacent to the Civic Centre at Dee Why. Michelle Richmaond, the Council's Local Studies Historian who organised the event, has sent me a photo. She has also given some more specific instructions on where you can

obtain a free copy of the short history that one of our members, Keith Amos, researched and wrote covering the Library's genesis and construction. They are available at the Library.

### CEMETERY TOURS

From Beth Robertson:

We have free guided tours of the Frenchs Forest Bushland Cemetery through the year. The highlight for your readers would probably be in Seniors Week (3 March 2016) when we are offering a free (we are volunteers) guided tour and the cemetery is providing a free lunch with a Jazz band playing!

Thank you for your interest in the U3A classes for the first semester in 2017. My health willing, the details of the two history courses I hope to conduct are:

'*Mysteries of History*' - Northern Beaches History from 1st February, alternate Wednesdays, 10am -12 noon, at the Frenchs Forest Bushland Cemetery, four weeks of classes. Usually for 'beginners' as it links our history to Australian events and Manly-Warringah-Pittwater biographies.

'*History Alive in the Cemetery*', from Wednesday 1st March, alternate Wednesdays for five weeks. Classes based on biographies of locals, Anzac heroes, Australian celebrities, European nobility, and some rascals buried in the cemetery. 9.30am-12 noon. One hour of chat and one hour of level walking. The stories are surprising and amazing! Also at the cemetery location.

Bookings for both and information (U3A brochure comes out online mid January) from BETH ROBERTSON, Ph: 9452 2396 (daytime only).



Celebration of 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Dee Why Library.  
Formal proceedings about to begin, 19/11/16

### **POT POURRI**

#### A "new" book

Members who live on the Peninsula will almost certainly have heard of "Dalley's Castle" at Manly. While some may have a good knowledge of the man behind the castle, William Bede Dalley, I imagine most of us do not. This is somewhat surprising. Dalley was a quite significant figure in the period where NSW moved from a penal colony to a largely self-governing free society. However, until very recently, he seems to have escaped the attention of historians.

This was certainly not the case while Dalley was alive, and for at least some years after his death. When, in 1897 - nine years after he died - a statue, which still stands today, was unveiled in Hyde Park to honour his life and contributions as a "Scholar, Patriot and Statesman", there were 10,000 people in attendance, including the Governors of both New South Wales and Victoria and the Archbishop of Sydney.

To try to rectify this lack of knowledge, in 2007 Robert Lehane produced a book called "*William Bede Dalley, Silver-tongued pride of old Sydney*". It has recently been reprinted by Gininderra Press and is a fascinating read. It can be purchased as a hard copy from the publisher or as an e-book from Kindle.



Statue of William Bede Dalley  
Hyde Park Sydney

## ARTICLE

### History Alive in the Frenchs Forest Bushland Cemetery

After moving into a new home with my family in 1982 in the leafy northern Sydney suburb of Davidson, I perused the surroundings from our balcony. The picturesque outlook to the skyline of the city and the Garigal National Park was not distracted, in my view, by the local cemetery unifying with the bushland panorama to the east.

It was not long before I investigated the memorial park on foot. I wandered amongst the tall elegant Sydney Blue Gum trees taking in the tranquillity and browsing the epitaphs. I was not to know that my career path would be enriched that day, as I by chance stumbled across an intriguing headstone which read, 'Ronald Alfred Ashworth, 1910-1983, Founder of the first organised Australian nudist movement whose headquarters were within a quarter mile of this spot'. Although not grasping the impact of that casual encounter immediately, I was smitten! What a research project! Although I had been intensively immersed in local history research until then, this serendipitous discovery enhanced my passion for cemetery research. The term, taphophile describes this non-morbid urge for the history of funerary practices and cemeteries (1) (*references are listed on p.7*).

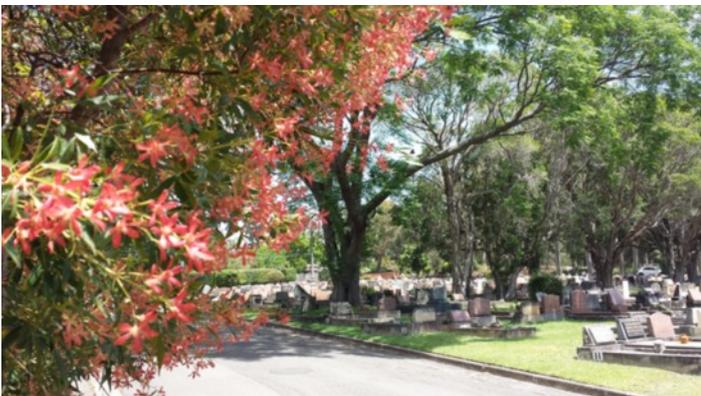
Although Ashworth's paradise has long gone, by professing his accomplishments on his headstone in this cemetery he has inspired many a visitor, student or researcher to explore the cemetery further. In the 1930s both the then entitled Frenchs Forest Cemetery and the naturalists' facility locations, were chosen for their extramural bushland setting beyond the infant township and the urban metropolis. This reflected the post-Victorian stance of separation of the dead and the living by disregarding churchyards and accommodating the newly designated parkland burial grounds(2).

The Forest, as it is now known, grew as a poultry farm and market garden district, isolated before the 1920s from the city of Sydney by the Middle and Sydney Harbours. When the first Roseville Bridge was opened in 1923, access was facilitated and farmlets assigned to returned soldiers during World War One were subdivided, which boosted the population of the locality and the area became more urbanised (3).

As the closest cemeteries had been at Manly since 1886 and Mona Vale since 1905, there arose a need for another Northern Beaches burial ground, as Manly by the 1940s was becoming crowded (4). So Frenchs Forest was chosen as a site despite its lack of soil depth on its Hawkesbury sandstone base. The first documented location for a cemetery was set apart in 1937 and was situated on the corner of Blackbutts Road and Prince Charles Road, Frenchs Forest. The decision to locate the present cemetery further from the residential areas met with the approval of many of the merely 500 Forest residents at the time (5).

The cemetery is located at 1 Hakea Avenue, Davidson and is 22 hectares [57 acres] in area. It is on a Hawkesbury sandstone hillside thickly scrubbed with native casuarinas, wattles and the rare but locally common, mallee gums. Half of this historic site is undeveloped and retains the natural bushland similar in character to the adjoining National Park. Set amongst the majestic towering gums are aesthetically calming zones for the interment of remains, lawn interments and traditional monuments together with a columbarium and a self-effacing chapel overlooking pristine garden plots.

Forest families and returned World War One soldiers residing at the Soldiers' Settlement, who managed poultry farms or market gardens, often walked down the dirt track to the cemetery site. After its first burial in 1940, the location was well-frequented on any family day off, as the views across the bushland to the north were spectacular. The native birds and prolific wildflowers in the spring were an attraction also, so the allocated burial ground became a picnic spot for families on a necessitous day trip (6).



Traditional Anglican section (with native Christmas Bush in foreground)



Roman Catholic traditional burial area



Dog walkers and mature gums in lawn section

On Arbor Days too, the children played leap frog over the headstones while their parents cleared the land, planted appropriate symbolic species and attended to the newly erected memorials (7).

Evergreen cypress pines, which have been for centuries symbols of mourning, were introduced together with other funerary vegetation such as yew trees, willows and holly. As these plants had always been associated with sacred sites in Europe, tall elegant Sydney Blue and Spotted Gums were also chosen to add an Australian flair to complement the indigenous Christmas Bush (8). These grand sentinels still line the lane-ways and shadow the well-ordered rows of memorials in the historically obligatory religion based sections (9). Orientation of graves in the traditional Victorian mode, except in the Jewish and Orthodox areas, was not symbolically adopted (10).

The tranquility was disturbed in the early 1950s when the bush track from Frenchs Forest was sealed to near the cemetery and soon after the new suburb of Davidson emerged on its untouched northern extremities (11). However, many of the early settlers are represented, not only with streets named after them, but are commemorated in the neighborhood burial ground. Members and descendants of the Harding, Pound, Wear-don, Hews, Dawes and Pringle families have chosen to rest locally in Frenchs Forest. George Hampton, an early worker at Hews Brickworks, was killed by 'a fall of earth and stones in a 30 foot open cut mine after a dynamite explosion' on the 11th June 1946 (12). He rests at the furthest point of the cemetery from his mother-in-law Jean Rendova Harding who died in 1995, whose family had managed 'a poultry farm of 10 acres at Belrose since 1938' (13).

Here Lieth the History of Australia

The cemetery now has examples of every level and phase of Australian society, from a sailor who died in the 1998 Sydney to Hobart race, to a gentleman who earned a knighthood as Governor of the Reserve Bank who was a devotee of euthanasia, to prominent bishops and celebrated circus performers. There are Anzac military heroes, prisoners of war of Changi and Burma Railway, well known politicians, Australian poet Douglas Stewart and the parents of a recent premier of New South Wales. Ida Standley, of Standley Chasm renown, lies amongst those who were murdered and even a drug lord murderer, with eminent actors and musicians lying at rest adjacent to unfortunate car accident fatalities.

Many locally based notables have also been interred there and it is acknowledged by historians that much can be learned historically from the examination of burial sites and the associated grave goods. However, this is not always so in Frenchs Forest. A significant example is an Australian hero Ben Lexcen, who, without any clue on his stone of his eminence while living, is surrounded by identical humble memorials. He rests amongst unremarkable locals and indistinguishable celebrities, also without elucidating epitaphs, such as a heroic WW2 bomber pilot who escaped a Nazi prisoner of war camp who lies with his salubrious actress wife. And nearby is a local family murdered by the 16-year-old son, and a young woman whose mutilated body was placed in a fridge, the loving inscriptions again veiling a vicious demise.

However, in contrast, and not too distant from them, lies a lady well known as the Cat Lady of Harbord, her notability proudly recorded in stone. As they say death is the great equaliser (14). So it is extraordinary that many legen-



Part of vault section

dary Australians rest unceremoniously in unexceptional graves, merging mutely into the silent city and in contrast to their public profile when living.

European noble families who were welcomed by Australia during and after the Second World War are well represented in the cemetery, albeit again in modest standard plots which belie their royal heritage. Counts, countesses, a baron and baroness detail their designation in stone, but without self-glorification and alongside commonplace Australians. And an unknown Heddington Jones, who as a child was present at the Ned Kelly siege in 1880, lay without a memorial until recently when the cemetery Trust supplied a very small but appropriate plaque detailing his linkage to Australia's history.

To the east of the traditional monumental sections is the grandest imported Italian marble mausoleum in the cemetery, which is the resting place of an impoverished Italian immigrant who later became one of the top ten rich in Australia. He was a prisoner of war of the British in Tobruk but travelled to Australia soon after the war and established a successful business empire (15).

Two Vietnam veterans who were killed in action and whose bodies were repatriated, also share the picturesque locale. Albeit, this funerary landscape in the Sydney metropolis belies the mass of military narratives veiled below the enigmatic stone memorials. Those interred from in the first burials could have been born predating the first gold rushes in Australia in the 1850s, so some were of an age to serve in the Sudan Campaign in 1885. The cemetery has militants who served in all significant Australian combatant operations from the colonial period to the present time.

The official memorials of returned service men and women stand tall amongst the truncated and modern tombstones and in the low light of dusk or cloud covered day, the white marble memorials to our diggers symphonically predominate in the funerary panorama. However, there are hundreds of military heroes not commemorated on their gravesite for their service to King and country.

So Frenchs Forest is a significant drawcard as a primary resource to educational institutions who utilise the site for research and history based investigations.



General view of traditional section

### The Architecture of Eternity

This garden of remembrance with its designated religious and cultural sections and all-encompassing diversity of interment, is also a closeted archive of immigration stories and cultures reflected in the styles and types of memorials, symbols and inscriptions. This is powerfully evident in the Italian, Chinese and Armenian sections, set aside for adherents to lay their loved ones to rest as they have done traditionally for centuries in their birth countries.

The largest sector in the cemetery encompasses over 600 Italian community crypts and vaults erected since the early 1960s. Many Northern Beaches families are epitomized such as the Curulli family who petitioned to acquire permission to erect the first vault in the early 1960s with an offer of finance to build the necessitous infrastructure (16). Other locals represented include the

Bombardiere, Macri, Caputo, Cavallaro and Tomaino families. Many of these emigrated from Gizzeria in Calabria, Southern Italy in the first half of the 20th century and established market gardens and successful businesses on the Northern Beaches.

The striking Italian monuments are predominantly Italian marble, with appropriate well-chosen plantings and funerary art work integrated. This produces a peaceful and visually enjoyable visiting experience, which forms the basis of the traditional cultural and religious funerary conduct. The Roman Catholic iconography is artistically pleasing with well-chosen sculptures of the saints, seraphs, angels, crucifixes, sacred hearts and crosses as well as a few incised Corinthian columns, draped urns and Georgian fan motifs. The rambling inscriptions on the vaults and crypts designate not only deaths, but places and dates of birth.

Although it is a comparatively small necropolis with only about 20,000 burials to date, there is much to interest the neighborhood residents, dog walkers and local historians alike. Interpretive signage assists detouring school children, tombstone tourists, tour attendees and genealogists to appreciate the pictorial history of the locale. The reality is that this site is a necrology of The Forest and beyond, with outstanding examples of graveyard verse and surprising tales reflecting many mysteries of history, and so delivers an educational and enlightening encounter.

It has continuously been a cemetery for the living since 1940, consistent with the mission statement of the Northern Cemeteries Trust, who have administered the site since 2012 (17). Unmistakably, the cemetery is a primary historical record of births, deaths and marriages set in stone, and so not just a setting for the celebration of death, and has been and will be a coming together of the disparate states of life and death, nature and culture, **always**.

*Beth Robertson*

The Friends of Frenchs Forest Bushland Cemetery

(Beth is the honorary historian/education officer at the Frenchs Forest Bushland Cemetery, *Ed.*)

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12. Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842 - 1954), Monday 23 May 1949, page 1
13. From Mrs Harding's headstone.
14. Ecclesiastes, *ch:9:2-3, 12-13*)
15. Cresciani, Gianfranco *Transfield, The first 50 years*, ABC Books, Sydney, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 2008, p.12.
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18. Ibid.

#### **CORRECTION OF CAPTION**

A caption was incorrect in the article on Arthur Phillip and Bathampton last issue. The photo is reproduced below with its correct description.



Exhibition area in the base of the tower - complete with chairs



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**Membership for 2017  
is now due**

# Manly Warringah & Pittwater Historical Society Inc.

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[Note: this information is required for insurance purposes; if two persons included in this application fall into different age bands please tick both boxes]

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