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MOSMAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER - April 2016

Our last speaker meeting on 9th March was a special double feature:

Gavin Souter told us about his current work – a biography of William Paterson and why the life of this multi-faceted personality intrigued Gavin so much. We will let you know when the book is completed and published.

Donna Braye gave us some insights into the development of the wonderful collection of local studies records preserved at the library and accessible to the people of Mosman.

NEXT SPEAKER MEETING

Wednesday 11th May 2016 at 7pm
Downstairs at Mosman Library

The very popular speaker, Dr Ian Hoskins, will give a talk entitled *Living on the Edge: A Short History of our Long Relationship with the NSW Coast*.

From today's perspective of massive real estate values, it seems odd that it took nearly a century for European immigrants here to consider a water view or waterfront home to be desirable. Dr Hoskins will illustrate the transition from his award-winning book. See attached flyer.

For your diary - the date for the next *History and Snags* daylight savings evening walk has been set at 16th November, the location being Alan Border Oval.

Archibald Mosman's signalling mast George Mosman's grave

The results of the latest Lions Club pole restoration project can now be viewed. It is the signalling mast near the site of Archibald Mosman's home in Badham Avenue, used to signal his ships in the bay.

John Dansie was inspired to follow up with some personal sleuthing into the final resting place of Archibald's twin brother, George. The twins were born in Scotland on 15th October 1799 and arrived in Australia in 1828 after planting sugarcane in the West Indies for a while. They set up a wool exporting business before Archibald turned to whaling about 1832 and George moved to country NSW and was involved in grazing and boat transport.

John discovered George's grave in the Raymond Terrace Pioneers' Cemetery. It has a distinctive tall pink marble stele. He died at Seaham in 1868 aged 68 and is buried with his wife Jane who died 1874 aged 42. Archibald died in 1863 and is buried at Randwick, John is now investigating the possibility of placing plaques at the two sites linking them.

Searching for PERIER descendants in Mosman

We have been given some early 20th century postcards in the hope of locating interested descendants. They are mainly travel cards to and from various members of the Perier family: Charles Perier, his father Edward, daughter Camille and other relatives. Some are in French.

Charles lived, at various times in Harbour, Want and Raglan Streets, Mosman. Also, a couple are addressed to a Capt. Spalding, at 43 Dalton Road. Are you a relative of, or know of descendants of these families? If so, please contact Mosman Historical Society if you are interested in the items.

MOSMAN LIBRARY - Local History exhibitions

Currently until 22nd May: *Faces in the Crowd: Mosman's Famous Forgotten*. Many Mosman residents and businesses were household names in their day – artists, artisans, architects, writers, performers etc, and this exhibition takes a look at their achievements.

Other functions in the pipeline include the launch of the next *Mosman Faces* in August featuring Leahy's Real Estate – the oldest local business. There will be two exhibitions celebrating the centenary of Taronga Zoo (10th October 1916) - *Taronga Zoo souvenirs and views* and a decorative arts exhibition featuring the koala and gum leaves later in the year.

Performances of 'PIONEERS IN PETTICOATS'

A play featuring the likes of Lola Montez, written by Wendy Blaxland and performed by Brigid O'Sullivan at heritage locations in May - Woollahra's Hughendon Hotel (28th), Brush Farm House (21st), Bathurst's Abercrombie House (7th). More information at Tickatek 13 28 49 or www.blaxlanddaughter.com

FRENCHS FOREST BUSHLAND CEMETERY

Frenchs Forest Bushland Cemetery is recommencing walking tours for community groups. The tour is offered without cost at the moment and is conducted by experienced volunteer historians.

It can be programmed to a group's needs and interests, such as Australian military, or local history, religious practices, symbolism, inscriptions or flora and fauna. A general tour of up to two hours, would cover aspects of all the above. The information revealed covers only interesting historical data without any unpleasant or inappropriate aspects.

Contact Beth Robertson on (02) 9452 2396, or robertsonbeth12@yahoo.com

MOSMAN'S QUIZ ROYALTY – BOB AND DOLLY DYER

By the time they retired in 1971 and moved to Queensland, Bob and Dolly Dyer had lived in Mosman for thirty years, firstly at 26 The Grove at Balmoral as newly-weds in 1940, then at *Koombahla*, 10-12 Bay Street Beauty Point, Mosman's largest waterfront block, which they purchased in 1950.

They were best known for their long running quiz show *Pick-a-Box*. Bob (Robert Neal Dies), originally a hillbilly singer from Tennessee, USA, was touring Australia on his third visit in 1940 when he met Dolly at Sydney's Tivoli Theatre and married her at St John's Darlinghurst after a whirlwind, 9 day courtship. She was 19 and he was 31. She had grown up in Bondi as Thelma Phoebe McLean but used the stage name Dolly Mack. Thereafter Bob and Dolly proceeded to become the best known couple in the Australian entertainment world.

In the early 1940s, Bob's radio career took off with a series of popular programs including *Pick-a-Box*, which began in 1948. During World War II the couple entertained troops in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Bob's booming voice and experience in vaudeville and acting, helped build rapport with audiences. His shows were carefully planned to the last detail, unlike his rival Jack Davey who relied much on unscripted repartee.

Dolly, apart from assisting on air, was invaluable behind the scenes, chatting to contestants to ease their nerves before introducing them to Bob and the audience. Encouraged by Bob, she completed a shorthand and typing course at Miss Hale's Business School in Margaret Street, helping him with the preparation of programs and scripts. Electoral rolls of the 1950s give her occupation as being a Radio Producer.

In 1957 *Pick-a-Box* made a successful transition to television, being shown on Channel 7 until 1971 – on radio and television it had run continuously in prime time for 23 years. The show earned Logies for Bob in 1961 and 1968, and a Gold Logie jointly with Dolly in 1971. "The money or the box?", Bob would ask contestants, who could choose the cash or an unknown prize in one of 40 boxes. This could be a booby prize or something of considerable value such as a car. Bob was often seen shopping around Mosman and Spit Junction, believed by locals to be buying items for the boxes.

Off air, Bob and Dolly lived a quiet life – they had no children but shared their house with various pets and Dolly's mother, "Mrs Mack". Their main passion was deep-sea fishing. Their waterfront house in Bay Street had a boatshed, slipway and deep water mooring for their boat *Tennessee II*. On this boat they entertained guests, visiting celebrities, and even winners of children's competitions, taking them outside the Heads for a day of fishing.

Mosman mayor Dom Lopez recalled, in an oral history interview, that Bob would sometimes drop into Dom's father's fruit shop at Mosman with a freshly caught fish for his mother who, in return, would cook for Bob and Dolly large helpings of spaghetti bolognese. Both Bob and Dolly were skilled at deep sea fishing, participating in competitions in Australia and overseas. In 1954 Dolly caught a 1052 pound white pointer shark, and in 1966 broke the women's world record with a 297 kilogram black marlin. Between them they broke 50 world and 150 Australian records.

Following their retirement, the Dyers moved to the Gold Coast in Queensland to spend more time fishing. The house in Bay Street, Mosman was sold – on the walls they had mounted a collection of stuffed marlin, and the jaws of Dolly's white pointer shark had hung above the fireplace. Bob, who never became an Australian citizen, was awarded an honorary OBE and Dolly an MBE. Thereafter they avoided publicity and Bob grew a beard to avoid recognition, but the unwanted attention of tourists caused them to move house several times. A planned move to Cairns was abandoned as Bob's eyesight and health began to fail, and he died at Southport in 1984 aged 75.

Dolly remained withdrawn for some years until, encouraged by friends, she began ballroom dancing, eventually winning gold medals in competitions. She entertained nursing home patients, took up marathon walking, and started fishing again. She died aged 83 on Christmas Day in 2004, while visiting friends at Gympie.

P. Morris



Inseparable...Bob and Dolly Dyer
(*Sydney Morning Herald*, Feb 15 2005, Obituary)