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MOSMAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER - June 2017

At our speaker meeting on 10th May, Paul Brunton's topic was **The Portraits of James Cook**. There are only six authentic extant portraits featuring Captain James Cook (1728-1779). Two of these are held in Australia and two in Wellington at New Zealand's national gallery.

While there are many other paintings of him in existence, some are actually of actors. General fame and admiration for Cook did not come about until after his second voyage (1772-5) which led to many public depictions of his exploits.

Paul Brunton introduced us to one of the group portraits and was able to identify all the figures depicted. It was interesting to note the lesser position given to Cook and more prominent position given to Sir Joseph Banks and wealthy voyage funders in accordance with Cook's lowly birth and the social dictates of the day.

NEXT SPEAKER MEETING
Wednesday 12th July at 7pm
Downstairs at Mosman Library

Although **The Sydney Amateur Sailing Club (SASC)** was formed in 1872, it was in operation for almost 100 years before it had its own clubhouse. It has now been part of Mosman/Cremorne for 55 years with its clubhouse at Mosman Bay.

John Jeremy AM is a naval architect and past Commodore of the SASC and the presenter of a talk on the club's history and the highlights of its functions such as Gaffers Day. See attached flyer.

SYDNEY HARBOUR FEDERATION TRUST
3RD Quarantine Cemetery tour

In addition to North Head's military significance, the headland is also a vital part of Sydney's quarantine history. The Trust has devised a brand new guided tour to explore this other aspect of its historical importance.

Visitors can delve in to the quarantine history of North Head culminating in the **3rd Quarantine Cemetery**, the only relatively intact quarantine cemetery still remaining on North Head.

Guides relate the stories of locals, soldiers, immigrants and dedicated quarantine nurses who could not survive the ravages of epidemics, including small pox and the plague, and invite you to experience the isolation of their final resting place, still with many touching dedications.

Tours held on the second Saturday of each month at 11.30am, meet at the North Fort visitor centre, Manly, cost \$7 adults. More information Ph.8969 2100.

The Pathfinders
- the History of NSW Aboriginal Trackers

The NSW Police Force employed Aboriginal trackers from 1862 when the current NSW Police Force was established, through to 1973 when the last tracker, Norman Walford, retired.

In November 2016, Commissioner Scipione launched a project to appear as a web site later in 2017. It will include a timeline and information on the lives of individual trackers, including details on the police stations where they worked and the traditional language groups to which the trackers belonged.

The developer is Michael Bennett, historian for Native Title Services Corp. who explains how 'a good tracker could pick up the smallest change in the landscape and quickly work out in which direction a person or animal was moving.' (RAHS enews)

NEW BOOK PUBLICATION
Shady Acres: Politicians, Developers and Sydney's Public Transport Scandals 1872-1895

This book was written by the late Dr Lesley Muir and was formally launched by Dr Robert Freestone, Professor of Planning (City Planning, Urban Typologies) at the University New South Wales on Friday 21st April 2017.

It investigates political corruption, developer donations and the impact of powerful lobby groups on the design and construction of Sydney's metropolitan railway and tramway network in the 19th century

With an introduction by Elizabeth Farrelly, *Shady Acres* foreshadows the transport shortcomings that the city and its suburbs endure today.

Copyright of the publication has been assigned to the RAHS whose Council has decided to use proceeds from the sales to support future publication projects, and to therefore have an ongoing facility to disseminate more Australian history. (FAHS eBulletin, no.163, May 2017)

GOING, GOING, GONE: SPIT JUNCTION'S CINEMA

On 24th February 2017, a Transport for NSW media release announced the demolition of the Greater Union cinema complex at Spit Junction. On the corner of Spit Road and Clifford Street, it will make way for a B-Line bus stop and pedestrian plaza. The cinema had closed long before, on Australia Day 2011, and unsuccessful attempts were made to lease the auditoriums, but the ground floor area attracted several furniture show rooms and a Christmas shop.

Since being opened by Greater Union in September 1987, things had not all gone well. Despite spending \$4.5 million on the completely rebuilt twin screen Mosman Cinema Complex, no provision had been made for a lift or wheelchair access. The cinemas were upstairs, reached only by a steep stairway, so protests by the elderly and disabled soon followed. Plans in 1999 for a lift and other improvements, hoping to bring back the crowds, were never implemented.

The 180 seat ground floor brasserie, occupied for 7 years by Sizzlers and then other eateries, eventually closed. By this time the cinema was under-utilised, less than 50% full even at prime times, and numbers never recovered. The underground parking area for cinema patrons was not policed so was taken advantage of by others. While the nearby Cremorne Orpheum grew more popular, the Greater Union went further into decline. Its eventual closure became inevitable.

There has been a cinema on this site for over a century. The Australian Theatre of Pictures was opened in 1912 by Mr A. R. Keeling, one of the first screenings being *With Capt. Scott RN to the South Pole*. The original building, able to seat 1300 people, was basic - it had a roof but no ceiling so was very hot, large fans being used to cool the audience, with uncomfortable seating. It was a multi-purpose auditorium, used for films, school concerts, Mosman Musical Society performances and, during World War I, fundraising activities for the Red Cross comforts fund. After the war it hosted Anzac Day commemorations, and receptions for local celebrities such as Kingsford-Smith and Ulm in 1928, and test cricketer Stan McCabe in 1930.

Improvements were gradually made, and in August 1929 the Mosman Daily reported the imminent arrival of the "full talking, singing and music equipment... which will arrive in 32 cases" for films with sound. Closed during installation, the Australian re-opened on 28 September 1928 with its first "talkie" film, *The Conquest*.

The theatre's interior was completely renovated in 1931,"the old barn-like building has been converted into a beautiful building" reported the Daily on 5/11/31, with new padded seats, improved lighting, ventilation, fans and acoustics. However, compared to the magnificent new Kinema in Military Road (now the site of Mosman RSL) it was still old fashioned.

Under new management by Rex Theatres, the Australian was totally redeveloped during 1936-37. It re-opened in October 1937 as the New Kings, replacing an earlier Kings Theatre in the Anzac Hall (now Country Road), which briefly became the Rex before closing in 1939. The New Kings, with seating for 1350, was built in a modern art deco style and soon attracted the favourable attention of architects. Journals such as *Building*, and *Decoration and Glass*, included articles in 1937 praising its plain but attractive design, imaginative use of lighting, good acoustics, ventilation and spacious foyers. Shops occupied the street frontage, a wide opening in the centre of these providing access to the theatre.

The Kings was sold in 1953 to the Greater Union group, and for some time continued successfully until the 1960s when competition from television, videos and clubs began to hurt cinemas. In 1976 it was refurbished and renamed the Village. During the widening of Spit Road in the early 1970s a large part of the Spit Road frontage and its art deco facade was lost, but re-painted to resemble the old design.

In September 1986 the Greater Union Village was closed for redevelopment. The graceful art deco building was demolished and the modern twin cinema complex, with a seating capacity of 895, was constructed, opening for business in September but officially opened by Mayor Barry O'Keefe on 5th November 1987.

Thirty years on, demolition of this building is almost complete, marking the end of an era.

Cinema's anniversary. North Shore Times, 7 September, 1988, p.34
CORK, Kevin J. A history of cinemas of Mosman Municipality. Sydney, K. Cork, c1988
Mosman Daily – many articles
Mosman Library – Theatres and Cinemas vertical file
STEWART, Tracylee. PR Manager, Mosman Cinema Centre, 1987
Sydney Morning Herald on Trove – various articles

P. Morris, Mosman Historical Society



Village Cinema, Spit Junction 1986 (Mosman Library)