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MOSMAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER - August 2017

On 12th July, John Jeremy AM, naval architect and past Commodore of the SASC, presented a talk on **The Sydney Amateur Sailing Club (SASC)**.

The club is one of Australia's oldest existing sporting clubs, formed in 1872. The inclusion of 'Amateur' in the name reflects the ban on anyone gaining membership who was involved in the boat-building industry – a significant distinction in 1872. Almost 100 years lapsed before it had a clubhouse, but has now been part of Mosman/Cremorne for 55 years with its clubhouse at Mosman Bay.

NEXT SPEAKER MEETING

**Wednesday 13th September at 7pm
Downstairs at Mosman Library**

Our speaker is Dr Craig Wilcox, renowned military historian and author of several books from *Australia's Boer War* (2002), to his latest *Badge Boot Button* (2017).

Mosman was home to six cannon in the early 1840s, mounted at Bradleys Head to deter an American or French attack. Perhaps they were the six stripped from Sydney's defences in the winter of 1845 and shipped to New Zealand to what was the first campaign waged across the sea by a military force from Australia. It was also a maritime extension of frontier conflicts that began in Sydney fifty years earlier. Dr Wilcox poses the suggestion that New Zealand's Northern War of 1845-46, could be considered **Australia's Eastern War?**
See attached flyer.

The talk will be preceded by the **Annual General Meeting** to commence at 6.45pm. All members very welcome to attend.

Nominations to join the committee are particularly appreciated especially an assistant to the Secretary or Treasurer - Please phone David on 0418 857 182. Attached are 4 AGM related files - Agenda, Minutes of the 2016 AGM, Revised New Constitution, Proxy form.

Advance notice - keep Wednesday 15th November free for a daylight saving evening walk and sausage sizzle at Georges Heights. A downhill route is being planned.

TROVE Project

Our \$2000 Mosman Council Community Grant

The good news has been announced of the success of an application prepared by committee member, Anne Fernandez, for a Mosman Council Community Grant. It will go towards the long-term goal of adding early Mosman newspapers to the online facility, Trove.

In 2007 the National Library started the Australian Newspaper Digitization Plan to make old newspapers more accessible to the public. Some of these are unique copies and very brittle with age, some exist only on microfilm. The Library has now processed an estimated

20 million pages for Trove, mostly from 1803 (earliest publication) to 1954.

Copies of most of Mosman's earliest newspapers are preserved in the Local Studies section of the library and for several years the MHS has been earmarking any donated funds towards processing them for Trove. Most of these donations are the result of research requested on Mosman homes and people carried out by committee members, some from the sale of donated memorabilia.

As the cost of Trove processing is \$2.31 per page it was going to be a slow process without the grant. A start can be made now with copies of the earliest newspaper, *Mosman Mail*, which Mosman Library holds on microfilm from September 1898 to 1906.

Local Studies at BARRY O'KEEFE LIBRARY History Week 2-10 September

The theme of this year's History Week is '**Pop!**' - a look at the role of popular culture, and Mosman's special History Week exhibition is **News by locals!**

Some of Australia's infamous newspapers and magazines were established and managed by local residents. This exhibition re-introduces some Mosman names synonymous with the popular culture of news in publications such as *The Bulletin* and *OZ* magazine.

HMAS PLATYPUS

From gas, to torpedos, to submarines, to parkland

Many of us can recall seeing glimpses of submarines moored at Neutral Bay, specifically at 118 High Street. That memory is at least 19 years old and you may have wondered about the work currently in progress there.

In an earlier life, the *North Shore Gas Company* operated on the site from 1876 to 1930s, providing gas for street lighting as well as homes and businesses. In wartime 1942, the Commonwealth Government resumed part of the site for torpedo manufacturing and servicing of naval vessels in the Pacific fleet. In 1967 that it was given the name HMAS Platypus when it was commissioned as the eastern seaboard base for the Navy's six Oberon class submarines. The facility closed in 1998 and in 2005 the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust took over management of what we still know as HMAS Platypus.

In November 2015, the Federal Government assigned funding of \$20 million towards converting it to a public park with some of the existing buildings adapted for mixed use. The Department of Defence is funding the extensive remediation works, which include groundwater management as well as stabilization of 30,000 tonnes of contaminated fill created by Gasworks activity. The new public space will soon begin opening in stages as remedial works, landscaping etc are completed.

CHINAMANS BEACH

The first known European resident of Shell Cove, as Chinamans Beach was then known, was Barney Kearns. From 1829 to 1836 he ran a ferry service from his 2 acre land grant at Shell Cove, across Middle Harbour to Clontarf. There were several other small landholders in this enclave, including John McLean who eventually bought out the others, acquiring a total of 16 acres by 1836. He and his descendants rented the land to various tenants, building their own cottage there in 1893 and continuing to live on and own parts of this land until the 1970s.

THE NAME

Shell Cove is the name of the bay in which the area is located, and still used by some residents into the 1950s.

From the 1860s onwards the area was also known as Rosherville, as favoured by Richard Harnett who owned the surrounding hillside land, and by 1890 Chinamans Beach was in use. These names remained interchangeable and alternated in use for many years. In 1923 the Lands Department refused a request made to Mosman Council to alter the name to Cyprian Beach, resolving that the name Rosherville should be retained. In March 1934 the debate was still not settled, The Sun reporting that it was "officially designated Rosherville Beach, known to the public as Chinaman's, and insisted upon as Shelly Beach by its residents". Today the Geographic Names Board officially designates the beach as Chinamans (no apostrophe), and the reserve as Rosherville.

ROSHERVILLE PLEASURE GARDENS

In 1862 John Hamilton began operating the Rosherville Pleasure Gardens at Shell Cove, Mosman, the name Rosherville being taken from a similar well known enterprise in Kent, UK. Freeman's Journal describes an excursion in December 1862 by a large group from the Sacred Heart Society to the "newly opened gardens on the shore of Middle Harbour". Facilities and activities appear to have been limited to exploring the beauties of the region, playing football and athletics, and picnicking. Unfortunately on this occasion the rain set in. Cover consisted of only a large shed and 2 small cottages which was insufficient shelter for the large group. Problems also arose when, for the return journey, there was "not sufficient water beside the pier at Rosherville to float a heavily laden steamer when the tide is low". Improvements were made and the enterprise continued until the late 1860s, but without a dance hall or hotel like others in Mosman, its popularity waned.

The Hamiltons became insolvent in 1864 and C.H. Hensley took over, advertising the Shell Cove Picnic Grounds to picnic and fishing parties. Nevertheless the enterprise continued to struggle, from 1866 being regularly advertised for let, with a cottage and kitchen, dining pavilion of 70 feet, fenced gardens, stabling and poultry shed and 12 acres of shaded grassed land. "Best place in Sydney for a picnic" – near the Spit, accessible by land and water. However by the end of the 1860s the Shell Cove Picnic Ground appears to have ceased operation.

THE CHINESE

The discovery of gold brought a large number of Chinese to Australia. As the gold diminished they sought other opportunities, market gardening being one of these. Perhaps the above advertisement attracted a group of them to Shell Cove. Rev. Isaac Armitage, a descendant of the original landowner John McLean, records that the first Chinese lessee was named Cho Hi Tick. Exactly when the Chinese arrived and how many is unknown, but they usually worked in groups of five to ten. The small community built a joss house and other structures, and celebrated Chinese New Year with displays of fireworks. Life did not always run smoothly for these men. The Daily Telegraph reported in October 1882 that "the body of Ah Sing, a market gardener... was found dead on a bush track, near Mosman's Bay. The body was underneath a cart full of vegetables which had been overturned" probably by a nearby stump. "He had a garden at Shell Cove, Middle Harbour, and

hawked about the district with his produce". Market gardeners were not categorised in Sands Directory until 1880, when among a large number of Chinese was listed Ah Chow, Gardener, at Shell Cove, Middle Harbour.

The last Shell Cove listing was in 1889 when the Chinese seem to have left the area, though their legacy lingers in the name Chinamans Beach, already in use by 1890. The next tenant was a poultryman who paid a rent of six dozen eggs per week, then a Mr Weaver who attempted, but failed, to establish a salt industry there, leaving just the landowners, the Armitage family (descendants of John McLean), at Chinamans Beach for some years.

THE CAMPS

In order to help pay their rates the owners, for a small charge, allowed visitors to camp on their land. By the 1930s and 40s there was growing local concern at the number and condition of the shacks, or "camps", at Chinamans Beach. Some originated during the Depression, but others had been used as weekenders for decades. In 1934 there were 14 buildings on land rented from the owner, some made of just bush timber and hessian, but others having been replaced with more sturdy structures housing permanent residents. By the 1940s some local residents felt the area was developing into a slum, asking Mosman Council to resume the land for public use, while others argued that the campers' presence acted as a deterrent to vandals. However the lack of suitable sewage and rubbish disposal arrangements, and the release of waste water into an already swampy area, led to concerns for public health. Recommended improvements were not carried out. Council made, then rescinded on several occasions, decisions to close the camps but eventually, in 1941, the area was vacated. The way was now open for the long hoped for acquisition of the land for public recreation – though this was to take much longer than expected at the time.

ROSHERVILLE RESERVE

The first step toward creating a reserve occurred when, in June 1890, St Leonards Council (of which Mosman was then a part) made a request to the Minister for Lands for "Chinaman's Beach, on the east side of the Spit, Middle Harbour, to be proclaimed a reserve for public recreation". This was approved and the beach was dedicated the following year. By 1906 there were growing calls for more of the harbour foreshores to be kept for the people, and in that year another two acres fronting the beach were added to the reserve. Over the following years small parcels were added. The NSW Town Planning Association urged resumption of the land owned by the McLean descendants and in 1941 provided plans for a park, offering funds to assist Mosman Council to this end. However to the Planners' dismay, the offer was allowed to lapse and the then owner, Capt. W.J. Armitage sold some but retained several beachfront blocks for future sale and subdivision, gifting one acre for the park.

By the 1960s the reserve was around 10 acres in size. Plans for the beachfront subdivision and sale got under way, with Council approval, but brought condemnation from many residents, town planners and also the state government. The plan was withdrawn, but the land was by now beyond Mosman's capacity to purchase at market value. In November 1960 they applied conditions of the foreshore restriction code to enable resumption of the allotments in question, which would form a natural extension to the adjoining park. Following Capt. Armitage's death in 1968 his house "Shell Cove" was demolished, and the final parcels of land acquired, the reserve, in its final form, now totalling approximately 15 acres. From the 1960s onwards drainage, landscaping, planting, building of better access roads and facilities for visitors has continued, monitored by the Chinamans Beach Resident Association.