



## MOSMAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER - April 2020

**Dr James Dunk** discussed his book *Bedlam at Botany Bay*, at our last speaker meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> March.

The harshness of law enforcement contributed to many cases of insanity in the fledgling colony, but isolation from community affected all. The wealthier pioneers were hurt by loss of family fortunes when business ventures failed or ships sank. Initially no official asylum for treating mental illness existed in the colony and the insane, or 'lunatics', were jailed. Dr Dunk's research through court transcripts, diaries and letters reveals many sad stories and an occasional amusing one.

### NEXT SPEAKER MEETING - POSTPONED

Due to the COVID-19 situation it is no longer possible for the planned members' meeting on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> May to proceed. It is hoped that the talk on the *Dunbar* disaster, to be given by John Lanser, can be postponed to another date.

The *Dunbar* was of special relevance to Mosman because some of the wreckage, including 40 feet of keel, was found washed up on Edwards Beach by Captain John Edwards on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> August 1857. The ship was wrecked on the night of 20<sup>th</sup> August off Port Jackson at the foot of the Gap. All 63 of its passengers and all but one of the 59 crewmen, perished. Speaker John Lanser is an historian, lawyer and economist and a past president of the Australasian Pioneers' Club which owns a table made of oak salvaged from the *Dunbar* wreck.

### HMS SIRIUS, flagship of the First Fleet 230th anniversary of its wreck off NORFOLK ISLAND

The feature article in our February issue, *HMS SIRIUS – The Mosman Connection*, described events leading up to the fatal voyage of the Sirius. Last month, Noela Gill and Perry McIntyre attended the festivities on Norfolk Island, held to commemorate the loss and were able to add some details.....

The area of coastline where the Sirius sank is very craggy and treacherous and the water deep, prohibiting salvage efforts for many years. Parts of the wreck still lie at the bottom of the sea. Three of the anchors are thought to remain on the wreck, but three have been recovered from the site. The first was blown off the reef in a storm in 1905 and sits in Macquarie Place Sydney. Another was retrieved by locals in 1975 and the third was recovered during official expeditions between 1983 and 2002, together with approximately 6,000 artefacts such as cannons and nails. Many of these are displayed in the island's museum. Retrieved artefacts were firstly sent to a specialist laboratory in Western Australia for cleaning and treatment, a process perfected there for work on the Batavia.

One retrieved item was a very unusual and rarely salvaged one. A watertight maple tampion was found rammed into the muzzle of one of six 18-pounder carronades. Still attached were 2 lengths of twisted twine spliced to a ball of string wadding for cleaning the muzzles. It is possibly the only intact tampion still in existence more than 200 years old.

*Perry has written a letter for members about their island experiences. It is attached as the April feature article.*

### ANOTHER PANDEMIC - Bubonic Plague in Sydney 1900

The bubonic plague pandemic of 1347-1351 killed 25% of all Europeans. The disease is transmitted by fleas, commonly hosted by infected rats. The infection in humans moves to the lymph nodes which become inflamed and break down. The toxins released cause massive internal haemorrhaging, which discolours the skin. Hence the name 'Black Death'.

The plague recurred several times through history but it was not until 19<sup>th</sup> January 1900 that the first case of bubonic plague was diagnosed in Australia. Arthur Payne lived at Millers Point and worked as a delivery man at Sydney's wharves, the entry point for infected rats. He survived but in the 8 months to August, 103 others died.

There were relatively few Australian fatalities in 1900, thanks to the coordinated response between health authorities and government. Quarantine at the North Head quarantine station at Manly was the first of three measures instituted to control the disease. Infected individuals and anyone they may have had contact with were sent there, initially for 10 days, later reduced to 5. In the first nine months of 1900, 1759 people were quarantined. Of these only 263 were confirmed cases.

In February, intensive disinfecting and cleaning was begun around The Rocks, Millers Point and the docks area. Later some slum demolition was imposed. In March, the city council began organising teams to exterminate the rat population. The government paid two pence per rat delivered to an incinerator on Bathurst Street. In nine months, more than 108,000 rats were killed by government employees alone.

In total, there were 12 outbreaks of the disease in Australia between 1900-1925 resulting in 1371 cases and 535 deaths.

*Ref: National Museum of Australia nma.gov.au*

### The Light that Never Shone New book about the Star Amphitheatre at Balmoral Beach

Author Chris Borough's association with Balmoral Beach began with his grandparents who were married on The Island at dawn and lived in Mandalong Road. Chris grew up at Waitovu Street, then Almora and Lavoni Streets. He has long been interested in the Star Amphitheatre and the Order of the Star in the East. He has researched its history from the formation of the Theosophical Society through to the final stages of the amphitheatre's existence.

His book was recently self-published and can only be purchased directly from him. *Price \$20 plus \$5 postage.*  
Contact [chrisborough@gmail.com](mailto:chrisborough@gmail.com) or phone 02 6555 8024

### HISTORICAL JIGSAWS for social distancing

Members with on-line facilities might enjoy filling in some time solving jigsaws created from old historical images. Local studies librarians at The Central Coast Library have created a few jigsaws, which can be accessed on:

<https://www.jigsawplanet.com/HistoryCCLS20>