



MOSMAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER - August 2019

At the July speaker meeting, Peter Sweeney talked about *The Attack on Sydney Harbour 31 May – 1 June 1942*, which resulted in the death of 2 British sailors and 19 Australians. His talk included many interesting anecdotes. The submarines navigated their way into the harbour by following in the wake of Sydney ferries in order to avoid anti-submarine boom nets. This resulted in, at one stage, a reported sighting of what was described as a particularly lengthy ferry. One of the submarines became trapped in the netting and although disturbance there was observed from land, it was followed up by someone rowing his boat out to the area to investigate. This seems quite a contrast to modern security methods.

NEXT SPEAKER MEETING
Wednesday 11th September at 7pm
Downstairs at Mosman Library

Speaker Robert Westphal's best-selling book is called *The Tailor and the Shipwright: A tale of two convicts and the generations that followed*. The tailor is Thomas O'Neil, who came to Australia as a convict and is possibly Mosman's earliest settler having farmed the area which is now Balmoral Park and Oval. The shipwright is William Foster who married O'Neil's daughter Anastasia. Both men were ancestors of the speaker who lives not far from where his ancestors once resided.

See attached flyer

From 2019, the AGM talk will be known as the **Pat Mills Tribute Talk** to honour and remember our very popular Chairman of many years.

The talk will be preceded by the **Annual General Meeting** to commence at 6.45pm, all members welcome to attend. Our Secretary, Anne can be contacted for more information at the phone number or email address heading this newsletter. *Attached are AGM related files – Agenda and nomination form, Minutes of 2018 AGM, Proxy form.*

Congratulations to Marlene Reid

Marlene is a member of MHS and has addressed us as a speaker. She was awarded an OAM in the Queens Birthday Honours List, for services to women and the community.

Vale Brian McEgan

Brian was the hard-working Treasurer of MHS for a number of years and a member for many more. We are saddened to hear of his passing in June 2019.

Local Studies at BARRY O'KEEFE LIBRARY

Military Memories: now and then memories of Military Road
Photographic exhibition 1-15 September 2019

The 2019 History Week exhibition compares 1890s photographs of Military Road with later 21st century images. You are invited to come along and be surprised.

STOP PRESS: Mosman Council Community Grant

On Monday 13th August, we were very pleased to hear of the success of the MHS application for another grant to continue with the important work of preserving Mosman's old newspapers on TROVE.

BLIGH, HERO OR VILLAIN?

exhibition on now until 2nd Feb 2020

Australian National Maritime Museum, Darling Harbour

Bligh of the Bounty mutiny was Australia's most divisive and infamous maritime figure. Two sides of the same story are told – Bligh as hero and Bligh as villain. Some of the exhibition is interactive, enabling visitors to experience stepping aboard the small boat in which Bligh and his crew were set adrift and seeing breadfruit growing. Visitors are also given the opportunity to vote on the question.

More info from ANMM on 9298 3777

From HECKLER in SMH - name confusion in Mosman

A member was amused by an old Sydney Morning Herald article written by Harriet Veitch for the column HECKLER. It drew attention to differences in the pronunciation of some Mosman place names, between locals and newcomers:

Awaba Street should be uh-WAR-bah but is often a variant. Redan Street should be re-DAN but is often called REDden. Mosman itself is mossman, often mispronounced as moz-man.

The unresolved conflict is over Wycombe Road in Neutral Bay, which is pronounced both as wickum and whycome by locals, both sides claiming theirs is the only correct version.

THE THREE SPIT ROADS – more name confusion

In researching the feature article on page 2, our writer found there have been 3 Spit Roads, all with varying forms of the name. The first Spit Road (1880) was followed by the New Spit Road (1890, later Parriwi Rd) after which the first became the Old Spit Road. When our current Spit Road was built (1922), it was originally called Upper Spit Road and New Spit Road eventually became Parriwi. Eventually Spit Road became the norm, and Old Spit Road became the present Upper Spit Road. All clear??

Maps were even more confusing – the roads were named Old and New Spit Roads, Upper and Lower Spit Roads, Pariwa and Parriwi Roads. At the time our Spit Road was built, locals didn't like the name Spit and suggested things like The Diggers Road/Highway!

Request to members: Have you done some research on Mosman's history you would like to share in this bulletin? Perhaps about some aspect of Mosman's history not widely covered elsewhere. Alternatively, is there a topic you would like researched and written by our feature writer? If so we would love to hear from you on mhsnewsbulletin@gmail.com

THE ROADS TO THE SPIT

From 1850 a punt service, operated by Peter Ellery, transported passengers across the harbour at The Spit. Rough tracks enabled pedestrian and mounted travellers to reach the area, but not until 1880 was a more serviceable road built by the Government, enabling vehicular traffic. This route followed Spit Road to Medusa Street, over Parriwi Headland on the current Upper Spit Road, then down a precipitous slope at the western side of the escarpment to The Spit. Visitors describe wildflowers, beautiful views across the harbour to the Heads, and Middle Harbour to the west. Having built this road however, the government was reluctant to maintain it, nor provide funds for its upkeep, so it soon fell into disrepair.

By 1890 a new road had been constructed, following the Rosherville track and running around the eastern side of the Parriwi Headland. Having a much gentler gradient than the old road, it was better for vehicular traffic. It was known firstly as the New Spit Road, and Pariwa then Parriwi Road. This became the preferred route to The Spit, with even adventurous cyclists favouring it over the dangerously steep, increasingly rutted and pot-holed Old Spit Road. When the tram service from Spit Junction was extended to The Spit in 1900, Parriwi Road was the route it followed.

For some 10 years this seemed to be the solution to accessing The Spit. Apart from the punt, this area had become a popular picnic and recreation destination for Sydneysiders, and Parriwi Road was busy with tram, horse-drawn and pedestrian traffic. With its harbour views, it became known as the prettiest tram route in Sydney. Problems began with the advent and increase in motor cars, trying to share the narrow winding road with other vehicles and pedestrians. This was greatly exacerbated when the tram track was duplicated in 1911, leaving little room for cars and resulting in collisions and narrow misses. As there were no footpaths, pedestrians risked their lives dodging traffic. A speed limit of 6 mph was imposed on cars, with police along the route to enforce it. The narrow road is bounded by a high rock cliff on one side and steep drop to the harbour on the other, leaving little possibility for widening. Constant articles and letters about the dangerous situation appeared in the press, with appeals for the virtually abandoned Old Spit Road to be made serviceable again, then each road made one-way.

Mosman Council could not afford to do this, and requests to the government for funds to restore the Old Spit Road to a condition suitable for traffic were continually rejected. Meanwhile congestion grew – on holidays vehicles were often queued back for a mile up Parriwi Road awaiting the punt. The situation came to crisis point when, in winter 1922, a section of the east side of Parriwi Road collapsed. Repairs were made but the Council engineer found that “a considerable portion of the side of this road ... was on the move and could be expected to leave at almost any minute”. The cost of building a retaining wall was prohibitive and would not provide any extra capacity. A new route to The Spit had to be found. Fortunately for Mosman a solution was finally at hand - the government began providing funds for projects on which ex-servicemen could be employed.

As reported in Council’s 1922-23 Annual Report, ... “In June 1922 the State Government made a Special Grant available for the employment of necessitous returned soldiers in approved work which provided a maximum of labour and minimum of materials. Under this grant, Mosman Council secured £17,000 for the construction of Spit Road”.

Engineer J.H. Tonkin, realising the steep grade of the old road was unviable, sought a new route to the Spit. His road was to run along the western side of the Parriwi Headland, below the original road and with a much gentler gradient of 1 in 12. From the top of Spit Hill, this descent to a lower level was achieved by the construction of two sweeping curves (now known as the Spit Bends), requiring property resumptions in order to eliminate an inconvenient T-junction and sharp dog-leg at Medusa Street.

Construction began in 1922. A huge amount of rock needed to be removed by cutting away the cliff on the eastern side, and retaining walls built on the western side. Despite most of the 150 workmen having no experience at rock work, with the aid of 2 jackhammers and compressed air provided by the nearby sewer works, the heavy construction was almost finished by December 1922. After much disagreement in Council, it was decided that rather than macadam, the new road should be of concrete, one of the first in Australia. Although more expensive, this would be more resilient to automobile tyres.

Council Minutes of 4th December 1923 recorded that the new Spit Road was now complete, with a surplus of £950. This would be spent on associated works such as additional lighting, and garden alcoves with seating on the western side. Plans for a planted strip down the centre of the road were abandoned in favour of additional width. The Spit Road immediately took the majority of motor cars off Parriwi Road, and was deemed a great success. One year later in December 1924, the first Spit Bridge opened, resulting in ever increasing traffic on this route.

The Spit Road served Mosman and northern beaches commuters well for over forty years until, on Sunday morning, 26th Feb 1967 after days of rain, a 50 yard section between Ida and Pearl Bay Avenues collapsed. Two houses were damaged and later demolished and phone cables snapped. The two northbound lanes were closed and traffic diversions put in place while repairs were carried out. The Main Roads Dept. had already planned to widen that part of Spit Road to six lanes and had been negotiating with affected home owners, so took the opportunity to carry out that work. Several properties on the high side of the road were resumed, and others lost their garages and gardens in the process. By 16th May the two damaged lanes were back in use and the new lanes opened soon after. Since then Spit Road has become increasingly busy, and despite widening and various traffic flow strategies, it remains a seemingly insurmountable problem for peak hour Mosman.

*P. Morris, Mosman Historical Society
References available on request*



Building Spit Road 1922 (Mosman Local Studies Collection)