



PO Box 39, Mosman NSW 2088
mosmanhistoricalsociety@gmail.com
Ph.9960 4286

Patron: Gavin Souter AO

Affiliate Member: Royal Australian Historical Society

MOSMAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER - February 2020

The subject of the talk at our final speaker meeting for 2019 was **Projects at Middle Head and Georges Head**. Our speaker was **Robert Newton**, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service Principal Project Officer who has worked on Sydney Harbour fortifications for 20 years. We were privileged with first-hand insights into the impressive collection of local fortifications in the Mosman area and the extensive new projects currently underway, including adaptive re-use of buildings and construction of new walking tracks.

The annual daylight saving walk on 20th November, was named **History and Snags at Balaklava** (the current Mosman Junction). Our walk climaxed with Dansie's snags in front of Mosman Police Station followed by Greek Baklava cake to reinforce the Crimean historical connection.

At the Leahy Real Estate building, we heard one of the less famous historical anecdotes, involving the funeral of Paddy Leahy, real estate agent and mayor, on a hot day in 1909. It was attended by almost the entire population of Mosman and all the shops closed. The route to the cemetery at St Leonards was along Military Road and the publican of the Oaks at Neutral Bay was opening up just as the funeral cortege of hot dusty walkers passed by so there was a very popular diversion.

NEXT SPEAKER MEETING

Wednesday 10th March at 7pm
Downstairs at Mosman Library

Dr James Dunk will discuss his critically acclaimed book **Bedlam at Botany Bay**, which investigates the impact of insanity in the fledgling colony of New South Wales. It impacted all strata of society - convicts, ex-convicts, small settlers, wealthy colonists and government officials. James argues that madness stalked the colony and tracing its path changes the way we look at our colonial history. Legal and social distinctions faded as delusion and disorder took root.

James Dunk is a Sydney historian and writer. A research fellow at the University of Sydney and a conjoint fellow at the University of Newcastle, he is a frequent contributor to the *Australian Book Review*. *See attached flyer*

GARDEN ISLAND - Proposed tour cancelled

Despite significant effort, we have found it too difficult to organise the Garden Island Dockyard Heritage Tour scheduled for Thursday April 2. We may reconsider a tour at a future date if the regular ferry service to Garden Island resumes. The Naval Historical Society of Australia runs tours on demand.

Brief historical background: Garden Island's name is the result of its having been the site of a ship's vegetable garden. Captain Phillip gave it to the crew of the *Sirius* just 10 days after arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 to grow their vegetables. Initials carved into a sandstone rock at the site are believed to be the oldest colonial graffiti in Australia. Other evidence of its early history can be seen in sandstone fortifications, built in the 1820s to protect Sydney from a feared Russian attack. It did not officially become a naval depot till the late 1800s.

In 1945, it ceased to be an island after construction of a naval graving (dry) dock was completed, involving the reclamation of 30 acres of land connecting Garden Island to the mainland at Potts Point.

THE SPANISH FLU – Friends of Gore Hill Cemetery

Pneumonic influenza was the most common cause of death in Australia in 1919. An article commemorating its centenary in the December 2019 issue of the newsletter of the **Friends of Gore Hill Cemetery**, has become even more relevant today with the global fears surrounding the coronavirus outbreak.

Towards the end of World War 1, from mid 1918 to 1919 a pneumonic influenza pandemic swept across the entire world and killed over 20 million people. It became known as the Spanish Flu only because neutral Spain had no wartime news restrictions and publicised the devastating effects.

On 28 January 1919, NSW was declared infected, despite quarantine procedures having been introduced in all Australian ports in October 1918. Consequently public venues and facilities such as schools, libraries, theatres, churches, public telephones, race meetings, and pubs were closed and the wearing of face masks in public was required to minimize the spread of the extremely contagious airborne infection.

The 1919 victory parade through Sydney was cancelled because assembly in large numbers was prohibited. Victory celebrations on the Lane Cove River were postponed indefinitely. Across Australia there were over 12,000 deaths, and in NSW approx. 3,500 deaths. The Royal North Shore Hospital ran out of space to care for so many victims and hospital staff had to set up a makeshift camp on the site of the present Gore Hill Oval. One of the early surgeons at the hospital Dr Vincent Welch survived the war only to die from the pneumonic influenza on his return home.

The epidemic tailed away in August 1919. There are at least 12 grave sites in the Gore Hill Memorial Cemetery which have been identified as pneumonic influenza victims, some showing that relatively young, healthy men died from the lethal virus.

Local Studies at BARRY O'KEEFE LIBRARY

LOST MOSMAN: identifying elusive Mosman. Your help is needed in identifying historic photographs in the Local Studies Collection. Come along and play detective at a fun workshop. This is an Australian Heritage Festival event. *Tea provided.*
21 April 2.30-4.30pm *Bookings essential 9978 4101*

NOW & FOREVER when disaster strikes private collections. Conservator, Kay Soderlund, Director, Preservation Australia will offer solutions and approaches to reducing risks and responding to a disaster that will effectively reduce permanent damage to treasured family memorabilia such as photographs, letters, ephemera and memorabilia when the unexpected happens. *28 April 7-8.30pm. Free: Bookings essential*

HMS SIRIUS - The Mosman Connection

Mosman has a number of Sirius placenames – Sirius Cove, Sirius Cove Road, the Sirius memorial near the wharf, but what is the connection of the First Fleet flagship HMS Sirius with Mosman?

HMS Sirius, flagship of the First Fleet, departed Portsmouth on 13th May, 1787, bound for NSW. A naval ship previously named HMS Berwick, she was chosen for the journey due to her storage capacity. She was refurbished and fitted out as an armed store ship, carrying Governor Arthur Phillip, other officers, marines and crew, large amounts of goods and provisions, but no convicts.

Although having been overhauled before departure from England, Sirius leaked badly throughout the journey to NSW, necessitating constant pumping and caulking. On arrival in Sydney Cove the carpenters were busy building housing for the settlement so repairs to the ship had been minimal. Nevertheless, due to dwindling stores in the colony, in October 1788 Sirius was dispatched to the Cape of Good Hope for supplies. This journey took seven months and circumnavigated the globe, still leaking. On her return journey she hit a severe storm while rounding Tasmania, nearly going aground. Sails were ripped, topmasts damaged, the figure head and railings washed away and front sections of the ship badly damaged. On her return to Port Jackson on 9th May 1789, crewman Newton Fowell wrote that she was in such a shattered condition that she was not immediately recognised. Sirius was in serious need of repair.

A convenient cove on the north side of the harbour, about 3 miles from Sydney Cove, was chosen for this purpose, where the crew was less likely to be distracted by bad company. Sirius was towed there on 19th June 1789. Described by seaman Jacob Nagle as Elbow Cove due to its shape, and Captain John Hunter as Careening Cove due to its purpose, this cove later became known as Sirius Cove and eventually Mosman Bay.

The topography of this cove, clearly shown in Bradley's Chart #10 (remarkably accurate when compared to a modern map), made it ideal for the purpose of careening the ship. The elbow shape and surrounding high hills shelter the cove from strong winds and large waves, with deep water but also extensive mud flats at low tide. Careening involved positioning the ship at high tide, then causing it to heel over onto its side on the mud as the tide went out so that the hull could be inspected and repaired. (Most of the mud flats were dredged in 1901 to create Reid Park).

The chart shows two sources of fresh water nearby... the waterfalls at the end of the bay (now enclosed and channelled through Reid Park) and a creek on the western side (now the boundary between Mosman and Cremorne). Bradley shows that a wharf, forge and sawpits were built, with the Sirius secured by cables, hawsers and anchors to points around the cove. He noted that anchors, casks and other items had been cleared from the ship and were stored alongside.

Crewman Jacob Nagle recorded that the carpenters built formwork alongside the shore which was filled with rock and made level for a wharf. Here supplies could be landed, and Sirius could be brought alongside in five fathoms of water to enable everything to be removed from her. Once cleared, careening and repairs could begin.

The carpenters found suitable timber on the surrounding wooded slopes and all available crew were involved in the repairs. "Her sides were greatly strengthened with 28 additional riders", (large timber ribs) strongly bolted inside to the existing timbers to increase their strength. (Southwell). The upper works were strengthened, and broken and rotted planks and rusted bolts replaced. Copper sheath on her hull was removed to examine her bottom, which was quite sound.

During these proceedings, local aborigines were seen watching from the bush, but didn't visit. Two crewmen went missing. Midshipman Francis Hill had visited Sydney Cove and afterwards been dropped off on the North Shore by boat, intending to walk back to Sirius. When he did not return as expected, parties were sent out to look for him, firing guns to guide him towards help, but he was never found. Gunner's mate John Mara also got lost when sent to fill water casks near the ship. He had drunk some rum and, before reaching the watercourse, lay down for a rest. On waking after dark he was disoriented and went the wrong way, wandering lost in the bush for several days. Finally his cries were heard from a boat on the harbour and he was rescued.

With few tools or skilled tradesmen, repair of the Sirius took almost 5 months. By the end of October work at Sirius Cove was complete, and the stores and provisions were reloaded on the ship. On 7th Nov 1789, it was towed back to Sydney Cove where some finishing touches were made.

The colony remained desperately short of food, with rations being constantly reduced. By March 1790 the other First Fleet ships had all departed, leaving just the Sirius and Supply in Sydney. It was decided to send Sirius to China for supplies, transferring a number of convicts and marines to the more fertile Norfolk Island on the way. Arriving there on 13th March, the passengers were landed but strong winds and swell prevented mooring, and eventually threw the Sirius onto a reef. Desperate attempts ensured most of the stores were saved, but the ship was soon completely wrecked. The colony's main lifeline with the outside world was lost, leaving just the tiny Supply.

The 19th March 2020 marks the 230th anniversary of this loss, and Norfolk Island is holding a number of festivities to commemorate the event.

P. Morris. Mosman Historical Society.

Sources: Journals, charts, diaries, letters, memoirs of officers and crew of HMS Sirius: Bradley, Hunter, Fowell, Southwell, Nagle. Details on request.



Ship similar to Sirius being careened in late 18th century Europe. Wikipedia