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Patron: Gavin Souter AO

Affiliate Member: Royal Australian Historical Society

## MOSMAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER - October 2019

At the September speaker meeting, local resident, Robert Westphal talked about his best-selling book *The Tailor and the Shipwright: A tale of two convicts and the generations that followed*. It is the story of two of his ancestors, one being Thomas O'Neil, a convict who became one of Mosman's earliest settlers having farmed the area which is now Balmoral Park and Oval. The other is shipwright William Foster who married O'Neil's daughter Anastasia.

### NEXT SPEAKER MEETING

Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> November at 7pm  
Downstairs at Mosman Library

Speaker Robert Newton will talk about *Projects at Middle Head and Georges Head*. Extensive work is underway including adaptive re-use of buildings and construction of new walking tracks. Our speaker is the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service Principal Project Officer in charge of these activities and has worked on Sydney Harbour fortifications for 20 years. He will talk about our impressive collection of local fortifications and upcoming projects. *See attached flyer*

This will be the last meeting for 2019 so please stay for the annual **Christmas cake and glass of wine**.

As usual, members are very welcome to bring a friend.

Vale **John Roberts**, long time Mosman resident and MHS member who died recently aged 100.

### HISTORY AND SNAGS AT BALAKLAVA

Wednesday 20 November, 5pm  
Meet outside Westpac Bank, corner Belmont & Military Roads

This is the latest in our popular daylight saving history walks. The area we think of as Mosman Junction was the site of a proposed village called Balaklava. Committee members will talk about the fascinating history of the buildings as we walk around this area. The duration will be about one hour, concluding at Hampshire Park where John and Peter will be waiting with the sausage sizzle. *See attached flyer*

### THE HISTORY AND SPLENDOR OF THREE MOSMAN CHURCHES

Thursday 24 October, 9.30am – 1pm  
Meet at Uniting Church, corner of Belmont and Cowles Roads

This Festival of Mosman activity is organised by MHS Committee Members and is a unique opportunity to visit three of the oldest churches in Mosman. The church communities have welcomed the initiative with enthusiasm and we are promised piano and organ recitals as well as seeing beautiful stained glass windows and wall plaques.

The walk will begin with the Uniting Church, then move on to Scots Kirk and will finish at St Clements in Raglan Street.

*See Mosman Council's Festival of Mosman events program.*  
Bookings [mosmanhistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:mosmanhistoricalsociety@gmail.com) or 9960 4286.

### Local Studies at BARRY O'KEEFE LIBRARY

#### House history one-on-one sessions

Every house has a history. Discover yours. Local Studies staff are introducing a Mosman house history session on the morning of the second Wednesday of each month. The first will be held on 13 November 2019 and bookings are essential.

*To book and for more information please call Local Studies staff on 9978 4101.*

### ARCHIBALD MOSMAN'S SIGNALLING MAST

Badham Avenue

A new flag is now flying on the historical mast near the home of Archibald Mosman, once used to signal whaling ships. In 2016, craftsmen of The Lions Club restored the old pole. John Dansie arranged for our Secretary to write to Ms Zali Steggall MP, Federal Member for Warringah, requesting a new Australian flag approx.1m x 2m. She kindly followed up on our request and the new flag is now proudly flying.

### SCOTS KIRK, 9 Belmont Road

Events for Festival of Mosman

#### *The Swinging Sixties*, Sunday 20 October at 2pm

This is a Cavalcade of History and Fashion Presentation, a themed talk which promises to jolt memories with amusing reminders of the fun, rebellion and short skirts of the 1960s. Examples from the collection will be carried through the audience to permit close inspection.

*Tickets at the door \$25/20 Students \$10*

*Proceeds to Allowah Presbyterian Childrens Hospital.*

*Ph. Helen 9969 3815 or Lyn 9969 5947.*

#### *Scottish Service*, Sunday 27 October at 9am.

You are invited to come and celebrate your Scottish heritage and the Scottish heritage of Mosman. Bring your tartans, banners, kilts, shawls and trews and enjoy the pipes, harp and organ in hymns and song.

*Ph Rev.Brett Graham 9969 6101 or Heather Hall 9969 9989*

### GAVIN SOUTER / GEORGE ORWELL – the connection

Darcy Moore, an avid collector of George Orwell (1903-50) books, was delighted to acquire a signed first edition copy of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, published 1949. It was signed to Leon Gellert, an Australian poet and survivor of Gallipoli who was also a Mosman resident. In his Fairfax journalism days, our patron Gavin Souter had written a biography of Leon so Darcy was keen to find out if Gavin knew how Gellert and Orwell had known each other. This related to his extensive research at The Mitchell Library seeking to authenticate the signature.

Darcy phoned MHS Secretary regarding contacting Gavin. The two men met and Darcy has subsequently written a 6-page paper on the topic. He has given MHS permission to publish the paper so a copy can be emailed if you are interested.

*Please contact us on [mosmanhistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:mosmanhistoricalsociety@gmail.com)*

## BALLOONS ALOFT

The first known ascent of a gas balloon was made in Paris in 1784, and many further attempts followed. After numerous failures, the first successful flight in NSW was made from the Domain, in front of a large crowd, in December 1858. Over the following decades this fascination with flight grew, and though still perilous, many “aeronauts” took up the challenge. Ascents were advertised to take place at shows, the races, pleasure grounds and gatherings for public holidays, crowds flocking to see this wonderful new phenomenon.

By the 1890s Mosman’s population was growing rapidly, and local exhibitions of such novelties drew large crowds of locals and visitors. The pleasure ground at Clifton Gardens was a favourite site for these performances. Such an attraction was advertised for Boxing Day 1894, when a “*Maxim Flying Machine*” was to be launched, then fly over Chowder Bay. This machine was constructed of steel tubes and wires, with large canvas wings, powered by a boiler for generating steam power. It was positioned at the top of a 40 feet high light railway, which sloped down a cliff to the harbour – the contraption was on a trolley from which it was to be tipped toward the water as the wings lifted it aloft. Needless to say it tipped straight onto the rocks without taking flight at all, the hot boiler setting fire to the rest of the machine, and the crowd booing and jeering. The promoters claimed that onlookers had interfered with the apparatus, and that there was insufficient wind to set the wings in motion. Regardless, it was a complete failure and the *Maxim* project was abandoned.

Balloon ascents however were usually more successful, and were regularly advertised around Sydney as holiday entertainment. The following Boxing Day, 1895, holidaymakers at Clifton Gardens had a “sensational and thrilling experience of a balloon ascent and parachute descent by Professor J.W. Price, an American aeronaut”. Over a thousand visitors watched the canvas balloon being inflated, and an ascent to a height of almost 8,000 feet was made. The wind carried the balloon towards Mosman Bay where the Professor detached himself from the craft and floated to earth in his parachute, a performance deemed highly successful.

Things didn’t always go so smoothly however. In January 1896 another American, Miss Leila Adair, dressed in black velvet knickerbockers, worked stockings, white bishop lawn blouse and a yellow sash, made an ascent in front of several thousand people. Sitting on a trapeze beneath the balloon, she gracefully rose to a height of over 800 feet then began to drift across the harbour, where she separated her parachute from the balloon. The crowd, thinking the show was over, began to leave, but as she disappeared from sight behind Bradleys Head, disaster struck. Instead of landing on solid ground, a strong wind gust blew her into Taylor Bay. She was rescued, unconscious, by two Italian fishermen. Though she could “swim like a fish”, she said later, her parachute, strapped to her wrist, had dragged

her under water and nearly smothered her. She was returned to Clifton Gardens, where she recuperated for several days at Mr Thompson’s Marine Hotel. (Miss Adair had already had serious injuries and several brushes with death while touring New Zealand in 1894).

From 1909 to 1920 aeronaut “*Captain Penfold*” (Vincent P. Taylor) regularly made balloon ascents at Clifton Gardens and other harbour venues, demonstrating the uses to which balloons could be put. At various times he dropped bombs and other munitions from high altitudes to demonstrate their value for military purposes, fired guns at targets, and detonated explosives electrically from mid air. In 1914 he planned to make an ascent with a passenger – clothing manufacturer William Lowe had volunteered. Unfortunately Lowe’s weight prevented his flight but, undaunted, he attached a large sign advertising *Lowes Hats* to the balloon. The flight proceeded with just Penfold aboard, and was blown beyond Brookvale where he landed and was lost in the bush for several hours. Later that year “*Captain Penfold*” flew a balloon from Clifton Gardens to Liverpool, with his sister Miss Chrissie Taylor as passenger taking aerial photos with her Kodak camera along the way.



*Captain Penfold takes off at Clifton Gardens in 1914. The long demolished dance pavilion and hotel buildings are in the background.*  
Source: State Library of South Australia

So popular were these events that Sydney Ferries for years ran extra services from the Quay to Clifton Gardens. However when World War 1 broke out, and aeroplanes became a reality and a more practical form of flight, balloon ascents were no longer such a drawcard. Penfold, who gained fame as a daring aviator and balloonist, went to America in 1920 in search of work, performing parachute and aeroplane stunts, but died penniless in 1930. Balloons as entertainment became a thing of the past.

*P. Morris, Mosman Historical Society*  
From newspaper reports of the day on Trove, National Library of Australia, and Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand  
References available on request.