

North Shore Historical Society Inc.

Celebrating North Sydney's Heritage

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Affiliate Member of Royal Australian Historical Society



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NEXT GENERAL MEETING

6.00pm Thursday 9th May 2024

To be held on 2nd floor, Stanton Library, Miller Street, North Sydney.

Commencing at 6pm, our meeting will finish around 7.30pm- the library closes at 8.00pm

Take lift to level 2.

May Guest Speaker: **Ray Rees CMDR, RAN Rtd**

Ray spent over thirty years in the navy, starting out as an apprentice shipwright. After continuing his education and climbing the officer ranks, his last position at sea was as the Marine Engineer Officer in the steam powered guided missile destroyer, HMAS Brisbane. After spending several years in San Diego working on exchange with the USN, he finally retired from the navy as a commander.

He has published a memoir on his life in the RAN and has been an active volunteer in the Sydney Heritage Fleet, currently serving on the board of directors and regularly sailing aboard the Barque James Craig.



Topic: **Restoration of the Barque James Craig**

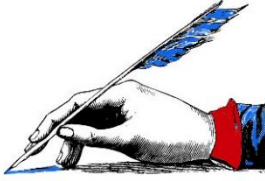


James Craig was built in England in 1874 and sailed the oceans of the world until the early 20th century, ending her working life as a coal hulk south of Hobart. She was refloated by members of the Heritage Fleet and fully restored to operational condition. Almost unique in the 21st century, she celebrates her 150th birthday in 2024 and still sails regularly out of Sydney.

Today, we build social capital by providing opportunities for people of all ages and walks of life to become involved.

Restoration, maintenance and learning to operate our old vessels prove that we are never too old to learn and to pass on our skills and experience to others. Together, we make range of vessels available for the public to experience the bygone days upon Sydney harbour and beyond.

Welcome to new members - **Bronwyn Muir and George Dimaris**



April 2024 report – by Don Napper

Dr Judith Godden

Lucy Osburn, Controversial Nursing Founder

Judith Godden has been very active in broadening local knowledge of the historical importance of Lucy Osborn. Lucy, who was trained at the Nightingale School of Nursing, was the founder of modern nursing in Australia. Judith has spread Lucy's story both via her book, *Lucy Osburn, a Lady Displaced: Florence Nightingale's Envoy to Australia*, as well as by her many talks. She said that the transformation of nursing practices that Lucy initiated in Sydney has impacted all levels of health care in Australia.

Lucy was born in Leeds in 1836, a year before Queen Victoria came to the throne. Her father became bankrupt when she was aged 5 and moved to Manchester but she stayed in Leeds and lived with a difficult aunt. She grew up as a middle-class woman in the class-riven Victorian Age.



She had few opportunities when she left school and spent three years working as a family governess for her cousin, a surgeon in Jerusalem. This may have further stimulated her long-term interest in nursing because after returning to England, she enrolled at the age of 30 in the year-long nursing course at the Nightingale Training School at St Thomas' Hospital in London.

It was at this time that Florence Nightingale herself received two letters: one from the politician and welfare activist, Henry Parkes, on behalf of the NSW Government and the second, a supportive letter from Alfred Roberts, senior surgeon at Sydney Infirmary and Dispensary. Both appealed for Nightingale to send out a small team of trained nurses to the Sydney Infirmary. Their idea was to reform the current nursing practices by introducing the Nightingale system of nursing and nurse training. This was expected to lead to a significant improvement in patient care.

The Nightingale system of nursing was based especially on ensuring the cleanliness of the nurses and the wards in which they nursed. At this time, the 'Germ Theory' of disease transmission was still in its infancy. It had long been held that disease transmission occurred through a foul-smelling vapour containing decomposing particles from wastes, called a 'miasma'. This 'Miasma Theory' was first proposed by the Greeks in the 4th century BCE and survived until 1900. Nightingale nurses were taught to wash their hands between each patient using plenty of soap and water and were also required to clean their wards frequently. These teachings were prescient of the adoption of the Germ Theory.

When Lucy Osburn was only one month into her training, she was selected to lead a team of five other nurses to found the Nightingale system in Australia. She subsequently missed four months of her course due to illness, but her indifferent health was one of the reasons why she was willing to relocate to a better climate.

The arrival of the Nightingale nurses in 1868 was warmly welcomed by the people of Sydney and they were taken to meet the new Governor, the 4th Earl of Belmore. Within a week of her arrival, Lucy was called upon to supervise two Nightingale nurses in their care of Queen Victoria's second son, the Prince of Wales, following an assassination attempt on him at Clontarf beach by an unhinged Irishman, Henry O'Farrell. Judith said that this event gave the Nightingale nurses the reputation of being the best nurses in Sydney.

One aftermath of Lucy's appointment as Matron of these nurses was to cause serious problems with surgeon Roberts because he considered that he alone controlled all of the nurses in the Infirmary. Up until Lucy's arrival, the Matron had been little more than an institutional housekeeper and her nurses essentially charwomen. Lucy introduced a hierarchical system of management that put her in complete control of both nursing and the female nursing staff. However, her extremely autocratic behavior led to difficulties, not just within her own nurses but also to criticism from outside.

One problem was that to have a woman like Lucy operating in such a position of governmental authority was not widely practised nor socially acceptable at the time, although Henry Parkes sought to promote it. Judith said that the Government even built a special Nightingale wing at the Infirmary to improve the living conditions of its female nursing staff.

Judith also said that at the Infirmary, male nurses had originally nursed men while female nurses nursed women. By 1881, however, sufficient female nurses had been trained for there to be only female nurses at Sydney Hospital, as the Infirmary had recently been renamed. This was one of Lucy's most important transformations if viewed from the social mores of her times, although not perhaps from today's mores. Lucy also introduced the two-tiered class-based system of training that she had experienced in London: nurses who were working-class entered as ordinary probationers and were expected to remain as nurses for the remainder of their careers; in contrast, middle-class women were trained to become Nursing Sisters and could aim at becoming Matrons.

Lucy's efforts at nursing reform were initially obstructed inter alia by her inexperience in management, internal hospital politics, the opposition of the powerful surgeon Roberts and vermin problems. Religion was also a source of tension as Lucy instituted practices similar to those of High Church nursing orders despite Sydney Infirmary being a secular institution. She also fell out of favour with Florence Nightingale to whom she wrote frank letters about her Sydney problems. Nightingale did not wish to hear about these problems and ultimately refused to respond to Lucy's letters.

In 1873, Lucy was subjected to a Royal Commission headed by Justice William Windeyer, that completely vindicated her and praised the vast improvement in the quality of nursing that had taken place under her guidance. Judith said that there was huge demand for the 153 Nightingale-trained nurses, who over time were able to spread the Nightingale principles throughout Australia.

Things slowly improved for Lucy in the years that followed. However, in 1884 during one of her bouts of illness and amid further criticism, Lucy suddenly resigned and returned to England after 16 years of successfully transforming nursing in Australia. She continued working in district nursing in London until she died of diabetes, aged 55, in 1891.

Our members, many of whom who knew little about Lucy Osborn before this talk, were greatly informed by Judith's cleverly constructed exposition of Lucy Osborn's remarkable life story and her transformation of nursing in Australia. Her history deserves to be known more widely.

Judith Godden's biography can be purchased directly from Sydney University Press
(https://sydneyuniversitypress.com/products/78882?_pos=1&_sid=557af6f27&_ss=r).

She normally has a few copies for sale at a reduced price – contact her at
Judith.godden@alumni.sydney.edu.au It is also available in a Kindle edition.



Wading through the Archives

Susan Wade Edition No.87

A new member recently asked me where I obtain my information for my Wading Through The Archives contributions, so I would like to share with you this summary recently written by Kelly Mitchell, Historical Services Curator for the Stanton Library.



“North Sydney Council Archives holds correspondence files from 1909 to 1955, which are arranged alphabetically by sender/recipient within each year and chronologically within each alphabetical folder. This extensive series is contained in 203 boxes. Before Susan became involved there was no index available for this correspondence. She has now created a valuable finding aid of more than 38,500 record entries, which opens the contents of these records for public researchers, library staff and Council Officers. Due to the extensive quantity of documents in varying sizes and formats, it is not practical for them to be scanned. Susan’s work has turned up wonderful detail of everyday life in North Sydney and the content of the correspondence files assist the library staff with answering public enquiries and for exhibition research”.

I started in 2015 and I am up to box 91 (out of 203) and 1934 (out of 1955) – so just under halfway there! However, as a lover of social history I do not find it a chore, especially when I find letters and information which I think our members of our History Society will find interesting and entertaining to read in our Bulletin!

An example I found recently is some correspondence from a resident of Cremorne Point in June 1934 asking Council if they would remove two trees – *“by no means beautiful, as they obscure our view of the harbour. And in view of the prince’s visit, I am asking Council to remove these two straggly trees. On Regatta Day they spoiled everything for us as they block the view from our windows and balcony”.*

The Council Engineer replied to the Council that *“the trees being complained about are growing on the West side of the Reservation, a short distance from Wharf Road. The trees are native Banksia, and I cannot recommend their removal or lopping. There are plenty of vantage points in the vicinity of the property from which the harbour can be clearly viewed”.* Compared with the correspondence included below you can see how insignificant these issues were compared with the life of most residents of North Sydney!

And if we want some graphic information about life in North Sydney around the time of the Great Depression, from the late 1920’s to mid to late 1930’s, then I believe the following extracts from some letters from residents during this time, paints a very interesting picture.

A letter from a Cremorne resident to Council in November 1934 complaining of various matters states:

1. Beggars soliciting under guise of music, playing, and singing at Old Cremorne Wharf (photo next page). The resident complained about a man playing a mouth organ and the noise floats up to the nearby houses all day long and is highly aggravating. Council stated this is a matter that the resident should bring under the notice of Sydney Ferries Ltd.

2. Dogs at the wharf. A dog called “Peter” who barks day and night while waiting for people to throw things into the water for him to retrieve. Council informed the resident that this is a matter over which they have no control.

3. Youngsters who frequent the boat shed in summertime and bathe from the pontoon. They yell and scream and can be heard around Cremorne. Also, at the top of Mosman Bay and down Musgrove Street. Council response was that the people bathing in the vicinity of the Boat shed wharf are on private property. They suggested the author bring the matter under the notice of the Police who may be able to help.



4. A man who sells cream on Sunday mornings yells as he walks around Cremorne. Council explained that this is a matter that is impossible to deal with, in the one case the man is not working at unreasonable hours and the noise he creates could hardly be said to be a public nuisance.

5. The yells of the ferry hands and the banging about on the planks on the wharf, and the megaphones used by the ferry hands are intolerable. The council advised this matter should be brought under notice of the Manager of Sydney Ferries Limited.

Another 1939 letter to Council reflects the different attitudes of various “classes of residents” in North Sydney during these times. A resident wrote congratulating Council, on behalf of many residents of this district, for their actions regarding the filthy delivery and handling of bread from carts. *“Now that you are interested might I suggest that you could do more by visiting some of the homes where unhygienic conditions prevail in the cutting and parceling of boxes or lumps of butter and eggs by the hawking class and vendors in this district”.*

A letter from the Town Clerk to the Inspector of Police North Sydney in October 1937 outlining that *“Council attention had been directed to the prevalence of street vendors, particularly small cart fruit-sellers, within the Municipality. The vendors take up their stands in the streets of the business areas in direct opposition to the shopkeepers, deposit refuse in the street and cause hinderance to traffic. Council is doing everything possible to combat this nuisance and it would be appreciated if you will instruct your Officers to apprehend any offenders”.*

The Inspector of No.6 Police station North Sydney replied that within the past few months several of these street sellers have been prosecuted by police, two being dealt with in the past week and a persistent offender had a Commitment Warrant executed against him.

And as I have mentioned previously many letters were anonymous, possibly due to people being uncertain of the consequences, or the repercussions they might endure. And this letter below is a very interesting example. It was written to the Health Inspector in March 1939 wanting to inform him of the conditions existing in a house in Euroka Street North Sydney.

It states

“In one downstairs room there is a family of 5 children and 2 adults, eating and sleeping. If this isn’t pigging it nothing is! This is in addition to the tenant’s family of 4 adults and 2 children who live upstairs. Summed up, 13 persons are living in a four roomed house, and the people in the locality are of the opinion that you should be told the facts and steps taken to make these people conform to the ordinary standards of decency. If I thought any good purpose would be served by giving you my name and address I would willingly do so, but in this case, I don’t think it necessary, so will simply sign my name Hygiene”.

Hmm! Maybe “Hygiene” was uncertain about the consequences he/she might be subject to, especially if the Heath Inspector told the residents of the crowded house about the letter.

In April, I hit the jackpot! I came across the original letter from the North Sydney Council to the Virgona family in December 1934, giving them approval to build the Orpheum Theatre and six lock up shops in Military Rd Cremorne. Of course, Council Historian Dr Ian Hoskins was very thrilled too as his article about the history of the Orpheum Theatre appears in NSHS Member Journal No 180 – April 2024.

Outing Report - Wednesday 27 March with Dr Ian Hoskins

Our walking outing on Wednesday 27 March was titled **Historical Landscapes and Heritage Consciousness in North Sydney by Ian Hoskins**. We met at David Earle Reserve in Commodore Crescent Waverton at 10 am. We explored the site of Ivycliff, cross Waverton Park, and then explored Carradah Park and the lookout. Ian led a discussion about John Blue’s House, Blues Point Tower, the Araon Bolot Cooperative flats, Woodley’s and forthcoming works, and Noakes and the floating slip. We finished by finally walking back up Bay Road to Waverton Station. This was a newly created walk by Ian and was reflected in the title he chose.

Many of those in attendance have provided unsolicited feedback about how much they enjoyed the locations, and also learnt so much new information about our North Sydney precinct.



Photo by Gaynor Austen

Our Next Outing is the State Theatre

Monday 20th May at 10.00 am – cost \$17.00

Meet at the State Theatre in Market Street at 10 am.

The State Theatre opened on the 7th of June 1929. The Theatre was the vision of Stuart Doyle, owner of Union Theatres and the esteemed architect Henry White. It was to be seen as “The Empire’s Greatest Theatre” and was designed as a picture palace when such monuments to movies were at their grandest and most spectacular.

Bookings essential – contact Susan Wade at susan.wade@ozemail.com.au