

North Shore Historical Society Inc.

Celebrating North Sydney's Heritage

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Affiliate Member of Royal Australian Historical Society



BULLETIN for July 2024

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NEXT GENERAL MEETING

6.00pm Thursday 11th July 2024

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

Starts 6pm, finishing around 7.30pm- the library closes at 8.00pm

Take lift to level 2.

Refreshments from 5.30pm

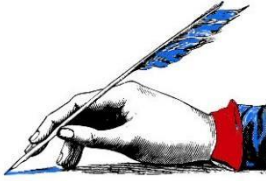
July Guest Speaker: Ron Besdansky

Ron grew up in Manly and became very interested in local history from an early age. He studied electronics and communications at university, and later moved into IT. He has lived in Northbridge for 12 years, and was involved in preparing material for the centenary of the suburb in 2013.

Topic:

A Brief History of the Suburb of Northbridge and its Famous Suspension Bridge

Ron conducts guided walks covering places of historic interest, as well as producing and presenting illustrated talks on local history and transport. His presentation about Northbridge covers the early history of land sales and the subsequent plans to construct a bridge and tramway to serve the new suburb. In addition, he gives a detailed account of the construction and reconstruction of the famous Suspension Bridge. In addition, he will talk about the development of the suburb of Northbridge following its first major land sales after the extension of the tramway system across the bridge in 1914.



June 2024 report

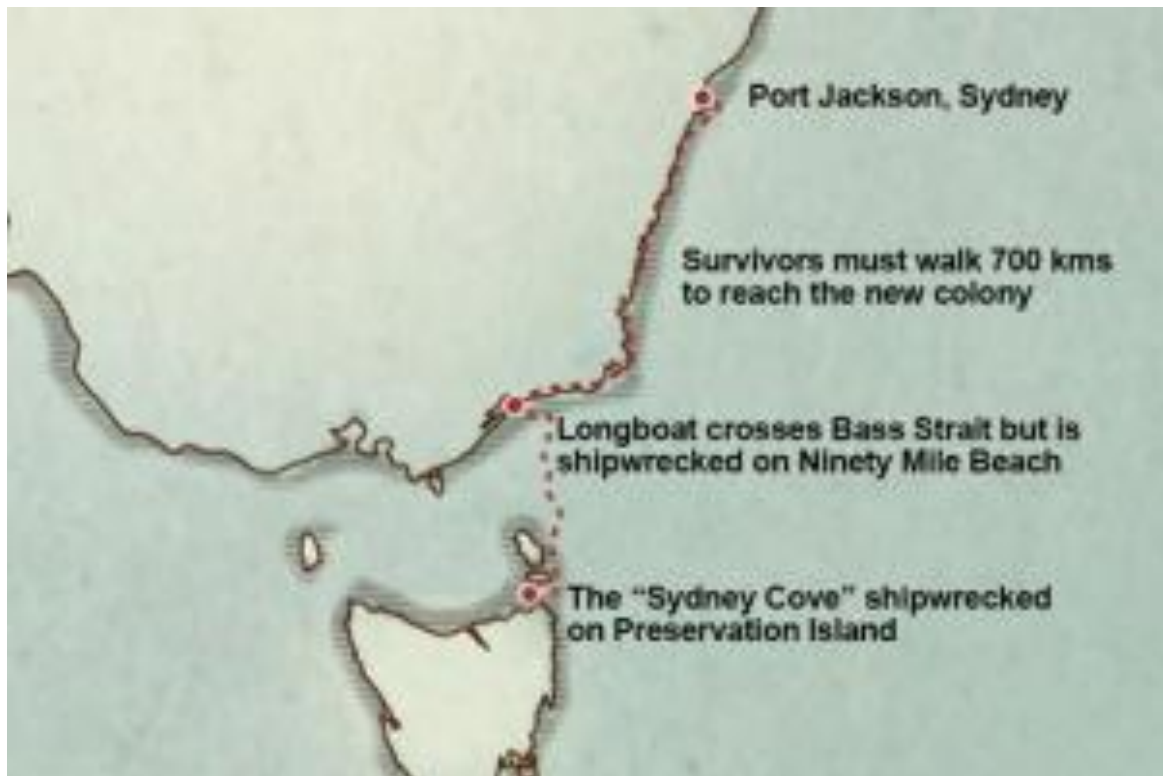
Adam Courtenay - **Three Sheets to the Wind**



The renamed three masted brig, *Sydney Cove*, set out from Calcutta on 10 November, 1796 on her inaugural voyage to the recently established convict colony in Sydney that Adam referred to as a 'gulag'. She had a crew of about 50 under the command of Captain Guy Hamilton and with William Clark in the role of Supercargo (the representative of the owners, Campbell & Clark, who was responsible for the cargo). She was carrying a mixed cargo, including livestock, but importantly 7,000 gallons (32,000 litres) of rum in over 100 casks, as well as a number of casks of brandy and gin and many bottles of beer.

Sydney Cove's route took her southeast through the East Indies to the west coast of New Holland and then passage eastward to van Diemen's Land before heading north up the east coast of New South Wales. In the heavy weather that she encountered while sailing around the southwest coast of New Holland, *Sydney Cove* sprang a leak, which forced her pumps to be manned day and night. This resulted in five Indian sailors (also known as 'Lascars') dying of exhaustion.

By the 9 February 1797, *Sydney Cove* had reached the southern tip of the Furneaux Group of islands to the northeast of van Diemen's Land where it became necessary to beach her on what became known as Preservation Island. The crew was initially able to salvage about half of her cargo. The rum, however, had to be ferried to a nearby small island, which they called Rum Island, to stop the crew from purloining it.



The *Sydney Cove*'s longboat had been damaged during the beaching and was repaired by the ship's carpenter. This made it possible for the longboat on 28 February to set off across what is now known as Bass Strait heading for Port Jackson, 750km away. The longboat was under the command of First Mate, Hugh Thompson, and the Supercargo, William Clark. They were accompanied by two other Europeans and 13 of the fittest Lascars. Captain Hamilton was the only European left on Preservation Island, along with 29 Lascars.

Adam said that Thompson would have realized from the longboat crossing to Victoria that van Dieman's Land was not connected to the Australian mainland, as was universally believed at that time. Adam also implied that he accepted Margaret Cameron-Ash's recent controversial theory that James Cook was the first person to recognize the existence of this strait, not Thompson, Clark or Bass. Cook omitted this insight from his captain's log because he did not wish the French to make a claim on the separate island of Tasmania when his log was subsequently published.

Unfortunately, when landing at Ninety Mile beach on the Victorian coast (Gunaikurnai land), the longboat was severely damaged so that it was not possible for the group to continue their journey to Sydney by sea. This meant that the only way for the party to reach Sydney, some 700km away, was by an arduous trek on foot northward along the coast, with William Clark providing leadership on the way. The only food available was several bags of rice that had to be rationed for seventeen people. This rice was eaten with seafood, some of which was donated by the Indigenous people.

The trekkers had minimal weapons, possessing just one gun and two pistols. Fortunately, most of the six Indigenous groups whom they encountered were friendly, although not all as one of the trekkers was killed in one such encounter. Adam said that the closer the trekkers got to Sydney, the less friendly the Indigenous people became because of their previous contact with Europeans.

Initially, the Gunaikurnai people were very curious about these trekkers, who had to build improvised rafts to cross the larger rivers. At Eden, however, the group was even ferried across a river in canoes paddled by the friendly Thaua people. Clark felt that the trekkers were being moved along in a gentle manner from one Indigenous group to the next, who were sometimes even waiting for them to arrive. At Coalcliff, Clark made the first observation of coal in Australia.

The number of trekkers declined as the walk proceeded, most perishing from fatigue and the lack of food. Only three remained from the original 17 when they reached Wattamolla: William Clark, a sailor John Bennet and one Lascar. It was here that they were able to attract the attention of a passing fishing boat that took them to Sydney, completing their epic walk in 77 days.

Adam described the group's destination, Sydney, in 1797 as being totally under the control of the NSW 'Rum' Corps, not just in its financial matters but also in its political, commercial, legal and social activities. This had come about because there had been no Governor appointed for three years after Governor Phillip departed. The Rum Corps provided the interim government and took control of the colony, led by Captain John Macarthur. Governor Hunter was unsuccessful in his attempts to reduce the power of the Rum Corps so that rum remained the universal financial exchange in place of money for all payments. This was the reason that *Sydney Cove* was transporting its cargo of rum to Sydney.

Adam said that he would not talk about the fate of the rum stored on Rum Island because it was described in his recent book "Three Sheets to the Wind", which was on sale at the meeting. Its fate, however, is well documented on the internet. Briefly, Governor Hunter set up a rescue mission with two ships, one of which was shipwrecked as it returned to Sydney. This resulted in eight of the crew rescued from the *Sydney Cove* perishing. Captain Hamilton and the remaining fifteen Lascars reached Sydney aboard the other ship, *Francis*, that subsequently returned twice to Preservation Island to salvage the remaining cargo for the Governor.

Adam's talk about an event in Australian history that deserves to be better known was well received by all members present.

Don Napper



Wading through the Archives

Susan Wade Edition No.89

For this Bulletin I have included four topics from various themes which I discovered recently in the index boxes of Council Correspondence. I hope some of this information will amaze you and some will educate and entertain you!

Firstly, I discovered an invitation from Mr. E.E. Prowse, Headmaster of North Sydney Public School, to His Worship the Mayor and Mayoress to be present at the Empire Day function to be held at the De Luxe Theatre on Wednesday 24th May 1939.

Question: Who remembers Empire Day? What was it commemorating? When did we cease to acknowledge it?

Answer: The celebration of Queen Victoria's birthday on May 24 was renamed Empire Day in 1903 after her death in 1901. It was celebrated throughout the British Empire culminating in fireworks and bonfires in the evening. The last celebration of Empire Day in Australia took place in 1958. After World War II, the event fell into rapid decline.

On 18 December 1958, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan announced in Parliament that the name of Empire Day would be changed to Commonwealth Day and moved in 1966 to 11 June when¹ it was more commonly known as Cracker Night and celebrated by bonfires and the lighting of fireworks until stricter government regulation reduced their availability.

Empire Day was observed in state schools from 1905 with a program of addresses, pageants and patriotic songs, with children swearing allegiance to King and Empire with a loyal declaration. Also known as Flag Day, Empire Day saw the city decorated with flags on principal buildings and trams. The Empire Day Movement issued badges and Union Jack cards, with flags and buttons sold to raise money for the Lord Mayor's Fund, Red Cross and Queen Victoria Hospital.



Empire Day was primarily a Protestant celebration, often the subject of sectarian debate and opposed by a Catholic hierarchy whose annual festival equivalent was St Patrick's Day. The last bonfire was lit in 1988.ⁱ

And a negative about cracker night was that it took authorities several days to clean up spent fireworks littering parks etc.

Secondly, I came across a partition from Mr O'Keeffe and others, residents of Ernest Street North Sydney in March 1939 referring

to the demolition of 78 Ernest Street and the establishment of a Milk Depot and Stables in its place, to which they objected. Their reasons for objection were:

1. That the stables will be a menace to health
2. That flies and rats will be a source of annoyance
3. That the noise and clatter of milk carts and cans, particularly in the early hours of the mornings, will constitute an unbearable nuisance
4. The value of surrounding property will be greatly depreciated
5. The present tenants have indicated that they will leave if stables are erected, and horses kept on the place.

The Chief Inspector responded by stating:

1. I believe the petitioners conclusions are only imaginary
2. If stables are properly kept and the whole area rat-proofed no annoyance can arise
3. This is a matter which can be regulated should such clatter occur
4. Another imaginary conclusion
5. If the tenants leave it would be very likely the premises would be readily filled with new tenants.

And The Town Clerk replied to the petitioners that as the plans complied in every way with the Building and Health Laws, the Council had no alternative but to pass them and that it feels the objections raised by you, when the premises are completed, will be somewhat groundless.

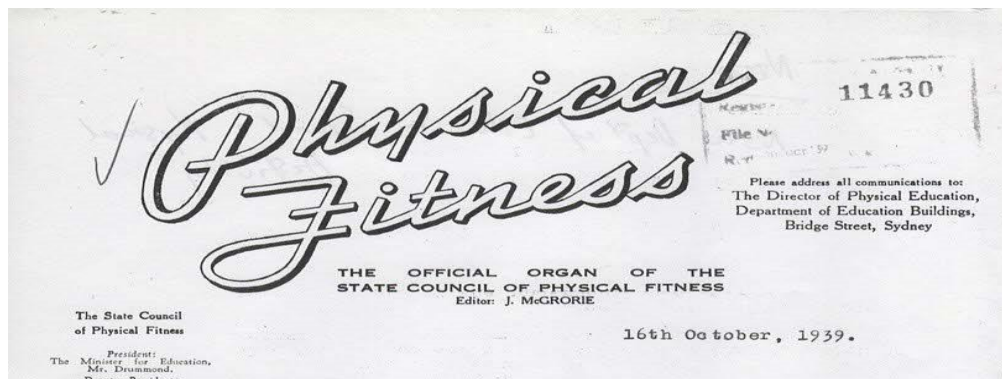
¹https://dictionaryofsydney.org/event/empire_day#:~:text=The%20celebration%20of%20Queen%20Victoria's,and%20bonfires%20in%20the%20evening.

I have been unable to discover if the Milk Depot and stables went ahead. As the Council were supporting it, I imagine it probably did. But in the 21st Century when such aspects as a Milk Depot and stables were no longer in use – well, see 78 Ernest St (photo right).



Note: 78 Ernest Street “photo taken in 2022, with 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, and 2 parking spaces. It is on a block of land that is 154 square metres. 78 Ernest Street” last sold in 2022, for \$2.1328m

Thirdly a letter to the Manager of the Olympic Pool Milsons Point and North Sydney Council from **Physical Fitness** October 1939. I have always assumed that the interest in physical fitness came into existence in the second half of the 20th Century, but not so!



This magazine front page states from the Editor:

I have the pleasure in giving you below, particulars of the Monthly Magazine “Physical Fitness” which is used by the State Council of Physical Fitness for the dissemination of official news and other information pertaining to the movement. For the past twelve months the organisation of the Physical Fitness Movement has proceeded throughout the State and is now in operation under a State Council of Physical Fitness in conjunction with the Department of Education.

The necessity of a Magazine dealing with the movement is apparent, as it must be brought home to the public as a body that at the present moment the “Survival of the Fittest” is no mere phrase, but a truism – as that “Fitness” must be the objective of both youth and adults alike. Your co-operation and help are solicited to make the magazine an unqualified success, so that Australians may be fit to play their part in the Crisis we are facing.

I do appreciate the realism of this final sentence and the recognition of the grim future society were anticipating.

And finally, one of the topics I have covered several times during my reports from the 1920's and 1930's has been about the poor housing and living conditions and everyday life during these years. I had considered that I have covered this topic sufficiently enough that you didn't really need to read more on this aspect from the historical records. However last week I came across a rather sad and distressing letter dated May 1939, from the Council of the Municipality of North Sydney and signed by the mayor, to the resident of 25 Eureka Street, and it paints such a grave and sad situation for a family that I have chosen to include one final letter about grim living conditions in our area during this period. It states:

Please take notice that you, your wife and six children being the occupiers of one room at No. 25 Eureka Street North Sydney, for cooking, eating and sleeping purposes, which has a cubic capacity of only 1,340 cubic feet, thereby contravening the requirements of the Public Health Act 1921, which insists upon at least 500 cubic feet of unencumbered air space for each person sleeping in such a room. My

Council has therefore instructed me to order you within FIFTEEN DAYS to comply requirements of said Act and Regulations by accordingly reducing the number of occupants in the said room. You are further ordered not to use the said room for the combined purpose of cooking and/or eating and sleeping. Failure on your part to comply with the requirements of this Notice will render you liable to legal proceedings.



What would you do if you were the father of this family? It is most likely you were unemployed and living in this situation was your only option. If the Council regulations were adhered to, only two people could live in this room. Which two would you choose? And would the room be used for sleeping, for example, and if so, where would they cook their food? And what about bathroom facilities? Where would the rest of your family live? I think it is a very tragic situation and not uncommon during this era.

Our Next Outing is Tuesday 16 July 2024

University of Sydney War Memorial Carillion

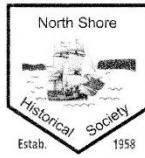
Visiting the University of Sydney War Memorial Carillion plus a guided tour of the Museum Highlights and Heritage tour.

We will travel by Community Bus because parking is difficult at the University. The bus will depart from the usual spot at the rear of the Council Library at 9.30 am and return there at 12.30 pm.

Cost for the return trip is \$15, paid on entry to bus.

The cost for the two-hour tour is \$25 (Seniors Concession), to be paid on the day at the University. I think it will be a special tour and definitely not to be missed!

Bookings essential – put your name down at the July meeting or contact Susan Wade at susan.wade@ozemail.com.au



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The North Shore Historical Society is reestablishing its history essay competition to encourage research at the community level. We are seeking participation by any amateur history enthusiast. Entries should be provided in WORD format only.

PRIZES

Open Category: prize of \$1000 will be awarded. Entries should be a maximum of 4,000 words (excluding footnotes and bibliography).

Secondary School students Category: two prizes of \$250 each will be awarded. Entries should be a maximum of 2,000 words (excluding footnotes and bibliography).

Entries close on 1 October 2024.

Your entry should be an original research project into the history of North Sydney area in an essay form. Entrants may submit an entry on any aspect of North Sydney's history, such as:

- Local events of interest
- Local heroes and people of note
- Historically significant buildings and developments
- Organisations, community groups, schools, churches, and charities
- Politicians and political movements
- Parks and natural environmental features

Research your own topic, or use one of the following ideas:

- * Photograph a building or person from the area - tell us about the story behind the image.
- * Record a person's story about living, working, or going to school in the North Sydney area
- * Timeline – what are some of the events which have happened in the North Sydney area during your lifetime? What was important about these events?
- * Tell the story of a person, building, event, sporting organisation, school etc
- * Explore how your street has changed over time.
- * How our way of life has changed, for example, shopping, transport etc
- * Your family's links with North Sydney's past (family history)
- * Local weather events / storms / floods

More information and entry forms are available on the Society's webpage, within the "Visit the Heritage Centre Section" of the Stanton Library website.

For questions or more information, email: northshorehs@hotmail.com