NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Society will be held on Thursday 13th June 2019
2nd floor Conference Room, Stanton Library, Miller Street, North Sydney.

Light refreshments served from 6.30pm prior to meeting which commences at 7pm.

Guest Speaker: Robert Mills

Robert has been collecting postcards for many years and finds the hobby extremely rewarding. A member of the NSW Postcard Collectors Society, he believes postcards offer a unique insight into the past and not only for private use but also for commercial purposes.

Topic: Postcards

Written communication in the form of postcards is no longer fashionable in the age of computer communications. However, 100 years ago the postcard was a prime means of communicating with friends and business associates. Multiple mail deliveries per day ensured that messages sent in the am would be delivered in the pm (same day). Cards were also often produced for business use and advertised all manner of activities and products. Maps also appeared on cards.

Robert Mill’s selection of views come from an extensive collection of images and scenes of events during the 1st half of the 20th Century in Sydney. 

Many key photographers of the period dabbled in Postcard production - eg Frank Hurley, Frederick Peden Hobbs and Charles Kerry.

In the postcard era (c1900 - 1914) aka "the golden age " views of the City were common as were images of the harbour, beaches and events. Cameras were rare and professional images were valued by the public. Often a family would have an album of cards sitting in a prime position on a table in the drawing room of their dwelling. Fortunately, many of these albums have survived over time and now provide a magnificent visual record of what is essentially lost Sydney.

Welcome to new member- Don Dougan
Vale - Centenarian Janet Thomson

Janet passed away peacefully on the 21st April 2019

At our 2017 October meeting we were able to acknowledge one of our long-term members, Janet Thomson, who turned 100 years of age. Janet joined the Society in 1986 and has been a regular participant in our activities for the last 33 years. She was still regularly attending our monthly meetings up to the time of her passing. Our sincere sympathy is extended to Janet’s family.

May’19 Meeting Report

Talk by Noel Phelan - The Halvorsen Story

Noel began his informative talk by pointing out that this was one of 10 talks developed by the National Maritime Museum for its Outstanding Australians series. It was based on the book Wooden Boats, Iron Men written by Randi Svensen, a granddaughter of Lars Halvorsen, the family patriarch. The talk, however, was augmented by access to family photos and historical documents.

The Halvorsen story began in Norway where Lars Halvorsen followed his father Halvor into boat building. Lars built the wooden sailing ship Nidelv using a bank loan but was unable to afford the high insurance premium required in the post-WW1 depression. When Nidelv was lost at sea on her maiden voyage, a penurious Lars decided to emigrate to Cape Town with his family to start over again. Here Lars built a successful boatbuilding and repair business but, with five sons, realised that there was not sufficient business there to create a family enterprise that could include all of his sons. A chance contact in Cape Town with an Australian who extolled the virtues of Sydney Harbour resulted in Lars relocating to Sydney with his family.

Lars and his eldest son Harold (aged 14) arrived in Sydney in late 1924, with the rest of the family arriving early the next year. In the 50 years that followed, the Halvorsen family business built 1,300 wooden boats of various types: luxury pleasure craft; police boats; missionary boats; small cruiser warships; speedboats; Sydney-to-Hobart and America’s Cup racing yachts, etc. The initial boatyard, trading under the Lars Halvorsen name, was in Careening Cove (and also at Drummoyn for the 30ft ironbark Sirius). As the business expanded, it became necessary in 1927 to move to new premises in Neutral Bay and then as WW2 approached, to even larger premises on the Parramatta River at Ryde.

Halvorsens were able to grow their business through repeat orders from satisfied customers. These included the Water Police, whose well known boat Nemesis performed so well that hundreds of people in distress were rescued in almost any sea; the Seventh Day Adventists, who used Halvorsen mission boats in their Pacific work; and the island trader Burns Philp.

Lars died prematurely from osteomyelitis in 1936 at the age of 49. He was undoubtedly the creative genius behind the extraordinary success that Halvorsens had achieved with his innovative designs. When Lars died, his family (including his widow, Bergithe, and their two daughters) inherited equal shares in the ownership of the business. Eldest son Harold took over as Managing Director of the renamed company, now called Lars Halvorsen Sons; he also continued as the successful designer of their many different types of boats, having inherited his father’s remarkable design flair. His four brothers took responsibility for other areas of the business.
It was from their Ryde boatyard that the Halvorsen family made their prodigious but little-known contribution to the Australian WW2 effort, employing a staff of 350, mostly tradesmen. More than 250 boats of various types designed by Harold were produced for the Australian, American and Dutch armed forces. These included 178 air-sea rescue boats and 11 Fairmile B cruisers (110ft in length) that saw active service in the waters to the north of Australia and in the New Guinea area.

When WW2 was declared, many of the larger luxury Halvorsen cruisers were requisitioned by the Government and then commissioned into the Royal Australian Navy (to be known irreverently as the Hollywood Fleet). Perhaps the most notable of these was *HMAS Sea Mist*, which was one of 10 Halvorsen channel patrol boats whose role was to keep the shipping channels in Sydney Harbour open. When the Japanese midget submarines attacked Sydney Harbour on the night of Sunday, 31st May, 1942, it was *Sea Mist* on early Monday morning that spotted the conning tower of the last of the three submarines (M21) to enter Sydney Harbour as it tried to hide in Taylors Bay. *Sea Mist* depth charged the submarine and later called for assistance from two other requisitioned Halvorsen cruisers – *HMAS Steady Hour* and *HMAS Yarroma*. Together, they disabled M21 which resulted in its two crew committing suicide in conformity with their Samurai tradition. Noel pointed out that depth charges were developed for use against submarines in much deeper water than that in Taylors Bay and that *Sea Mist* had only 5 seconds to clear the area once the charge was dropped. As a result, *Sea Mist* itself was disabled by its second depth charge. Noel also told how other Halvorsen boats escorted troopships out of the Heads to rescue any soldiers who decided to jump overboard at the last minute.

Noel related the story of the 38ft cruiser *Sirocco* that Halvorsens sold in 1946 to Theodore Flynn, the Professor of Biology at the University of Tasmania. He purchased it for his now notorious son, Errol, who insisted on changes being made before he would accept the boat. Errol’s cheque for the cost of these changes bounced.

After WW2, the Halvorsens built a fleet of upmarket wooden cruisers that could be hired at Bobbin Head for holidays on Pittwater. At its height in the 1950s, there were more than 60 of these boats at their moorings, as well as dayboats available for hire by the many picnickers who came to delight in the Coal and Candle Creek environs. In 2003, this activity closed after 56 years when new environmental laws were introduced that required that all vessels to be fitted with holding tanks to prevent sewage discharge into the waterways. Such storage tanks were difficult to fit, either prospectively or retrospectively, into boats not designed for them.

Although best known for their motorised cruisers, Lars Halvorsen Sons also successfully designed and built racing yachts for international and national races. In 1962, they built the 12 metre yacht *Gretel*, designed by Alan Payne, for Sir Frank Packer. *Gretel* was the first Australian challenger for the America’s Cup and the first international challenger to win a race. Subsequently, in 1963, 1964 and 1965, while sailing *Freya*, designed by Trygve Halvorsen and skippered by Trygve and his brother Magnus, the Halvorsen brothers won three successive Sydney-to-Hobart races on handicap. It has taken the exceptionally brilliant maxi yacht, *Wild Oats XI*, to create a comparable record by becoming in 2007 the only yacht ever to win four consecutive line honours titles.

The Halvorsen company stopped building boats in Australia in 1980 but by then was building them in Southern China, where some 900 were built and exported worldwide. This plant was closed when its lease expired in 2000.

Noel showed a spectacular photo of the 90 Halvorsen cruisers that held a regatta on the Hawkesbury River to celebrate Harold’s 90th birthday in 2000. Earlier that year, Harold had been awarded the Order of Australia Medal, partly in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the war effort. He died in November of that year.

The Halvorsen story is an example of the way in which immigrants to Australia can make outstanding contributions to its growth and the provision of services and facilities. Noel’s consummate telling of that story added greatly to the historical knowledge of all who attended.

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Don Napper
In our November 2018 Bulletin I mentioned that while indexing the 1930’s correspondence I came across a considerable number of letters arriving at North Sydney Council from people desperately seeking employment. This was in the period of the great Depression from 1929 to 1932, with high unemployment, low profits, crowded housing and poverty.

As if reinforcing these circumstances, I recently discovered a circular from the Benevolent Society of N.S.W. to all Municipal Councils and Shires announcing a Public Collection day allocated for Friday August 22nd 1930. It stated, “During the past six months the number of necessitous people coming to the office for food relief had increased from 200% to 300 % and the Government had granted permission for a special collection on that day.” The North Sydney Council replied that “they regret that it is unable to contribute towards your funds, as it is already making considerable donations to local charities for the alleviation of distress.”

Now, I ask you to consider your options if you were one of the many unemployed during this period. If you were not able to find employment to feed your family, pay the rent etc, what might you do in order to generate some income, no matter how small, if you were in these dire circumstances?

Well here is a sample of letters from 1930 and 1931, written by some resourceful people endeavouring to generate some money (although the outcomes were not always positive and the responses from the Council not always consistent).

Mr Cox wrote to the Council in January 1930 asking if he could install a shooting gallery at 133 Military Rd Neutral Bay. He stated “the whole of the structure would be of steel plate ½ inch thick and all precaution would be taken to prevent noise. The premises is adjacent to the Neutral Bay Police Station, who have no objection”. Council granted permission for three months.

Mr Benham of North Sydney wrote seeking permission to sell frankfurts and rolls throughout the streets of North Sydney. The Town Clerk responded, saying Council had refused permission, contending that Mr Benham would be “trading in opposition to small goods men who are paying high rents and rates for their premises and who are finding it hard to make their businesses pay during the present time”.

Selling fish seems to have been an option for generating income, no doubt because we are a harbour Municipality and therefore it was possibly considered relatively easy to acquire “stock”.

For example, a letter of complaint in January 1930 from Stanway & Slack, House Land Estate & Insurance agents of Falcon St Crow’s Nest, to the Council, claiming that a vendor of fish had placed a stall at the door of their office, and apparently intends to make it a permanent stand. The agents objected, stating it was very inconvenient. An attached note from the Health Inspector states that Council had given permission to the man to sell from the stand for six months, with instructions to keep back from the street frontage and to keep the place tidy.

Another application in May 1930 for a fish stand, this time at the corner of the laneway at the side of the Hotel at Crow’s Nest Junction, seeking Council’s favourable consideration. Council refused Mr Rosendahl’s application.

In February 1931 another letter applying for permission to sell fish from a properly constructed fish stand on McMahon’s Point Wharf. In his letter Mr Blake stated, “The case is 6 ft long, has 3 glass windows on top, with 3 draws for containing fish, and is resting on 4 iron wheels.” The Town Clerk responded that it was necessary to pay the prescribed fee and make application on the prescribed form before consideration could be given.
Mr Black of High Street North Sydney applied for permission, in August 1931, to play an accordion in the streets within the Municipality, as a means of making a livelihood. He stated in his letter that he was 60 years of age and had been unemployed since March, with little prospect of finding employment. The Mayor commented that this was entirely a matter for the Police to decide.

Mrs Bewley of Crows Nest wrote in September 1931 requesting permission to manufacture jams and pickles at Christie St Crows Nest, for sale by her husband who has a fruit run in the area. The Health Inspector noted on her application that he found the premises suitable and recommended her application be approved, stating “permission should be granted with pleasure of the Council.”

The Australian Boomerang Mouth Organ1 Band, consisting of unemployed men, sought permission in a letter from Mr. Thew, the Bandmaster, on 8th December 1931 to play on the streets of the Municipality on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve with a view to a collection from the public for their benefit. And Council granted permission. However, a further application written on 28th December seeking permission to play in Northern Shopping centres on Friday nights during 1932 was rejected by the Police Commissioner because the Christmas Eve performance had “obstructed vehicular and pedestrian traffic and it was necessary for the Police to request them to move on.”

And finally, it was obviously important that even in these distressing times, people were expected to maintain a level of decorum, as demonstrated in this letter in July 1931 when the Town Clerk wrote to the Inspector of Police North Sydney, asking on behalf of the Mayor, if the Police on duty at St. Leonards Park at the time the Food Orders are being issued by the Labour Exchange, to see “that the men do not sit on the back rails of the seats or put their feet on the seats. The Council had recently had the seats painted, and it has been noted that a number of men offend in the manner stated above”.

Volunteer Museum Guide opportunities

Would you like to help preserve and promote North Sydney’s heritage?

Stanton Library is looking for Volunteer Guides to staff our two local history museums, Don Bank and Sexton’s Cottage. If you are able to commit to at least one 2-3 hour shift per month (Wed/Thu/Sat), have an interest in the history of North Sydney and enjoy interacting with a broad range of people, we would love to hear from you!

Please contact Kelly Mitchell, Historical Services Curator, Stanton Library for more information. Phone 02 9936 8413 or kelly.mitchei1@northsydney.nsw.gov.au.

1 The J. Albert and Son Boomerang mouth organ (pictured above) was an iconic Australian musical instrument and being compact, portable, tuneful and cheap it became immediately popular with the Australian public upon its release onto the market in 1897. Between late 1896 and late 1897 an estimated 44,000 mouth organs, including the Boomerang, were sold by Alberts. From about 1924 the production of an instrument actually shaped like a boomerang, complete with similarly shaped box,
**Female Factory Tour – 17 May**

A busload of NSHS members enjoyed a tour of the Parramatta Female Factory site with our informative guide, Steve, from the group “Friends of the Female Factory”. We learned about the history of the site buildings, and of the lives and daily activities of the women who spent time there. Steve also described several prisoner riots in the 1820s and 30s which demonstrated the independent spirit of those incarcerated there.

And the visit was enhanced by the home-baked cheese scones which our organiser, Susan, supplied to slake our hunger in the bus on the way home. Thank you, Susan. We all voted it a great morning out!

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**July 2019 Outing**

**Thursday 18th July**

**Tour of the Royal North Shore Hospital Century Museum**

Meet in front of the Vanderfield Building (the Museum Building - photo below) at 10.30 am

There are car parking facilities on the grounds at a cost. The 144 bus stop at the hospital is almost in front of the Vanderfield Building. Although there are stairs to the front door entrance of the building, anyone with a mobility issue can come around to the side of the building and meet us in the foyer.

The tour will finish at 12 noon and the entrance fee is **$2.00 donation**.

To participate please register at our next meeting on June 13 or by email with the Outings Officer

susan.wade@ozemail.com.au