



# Peninsula Historian

Newsletter of the Manly, Warringah & Pittwater Historical Society Inc.

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## FROM THE EDITOR

The article in this issue is Part 1 of the life of Lady Wakehurst, known in Australia as the wife of the last non-Australian Governor of NSW. My interest in her was triggered about two years ago when, in researching the source of the local name Wakehurst for a talk I had been asked to give, I learnt that her maiden name was Tennant, that her father was Charles Tennant, and that the family business had been and still was in the manufacture of industrial chemicals.

So why did this trigger an interest? For a time in my own career I worked with a family company located on the Northern Beaches which, amongst many other things, represented the current incarnation of Charles Tennant and Co. in Australia, and had done so for many years. So for me there was a connection, however tenuous.

I acknowledge that the local connection is relatively weak. You can easily remedy this by sending me your own articles. Contributions of any length are very welcome.

*Richard Michell*

## DIARY

**Note: July meeting is at the Tramshed Arts and Community Centre, Lakeside Room, 1395A Pittwater Road, Narrabeen, August meeting is at North Curl Curl**

13 July, 2019 2.00 pm

Early Sydney Radio *Jo Harris OAM*

Jo will talk on the very early days of Australian radio, the important role played by some locations and residents on the North Shore and some connections with the Northern Beaches.

10 August, 2019 2.00 pm

East Coast Lows *Richard Whitaker*

Richard is a meteorologist who used to appear on the now-defunct Weather Channel. He will talk about east coast lows, explain their origins and relate some stories of large surfs and coastal damage, including on the Northern Beaches.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Our AGM on 8 June was very well attended. I had the privilege of being re-elected as President and I thank Members for their support. I also thank all others who offered themselves for positions and was very pleased to see several new faces come forward. The result of the elections is summarised in the meeting report on p.2.

The work on sorting out our Archives has reached the point where we now intend to begin the process of digitising key items. The first decision is to decide on priorities. We will probably start with photographs. We have quite a number of glass negatives from the late 1800s and these may be a logical starting point.

The second decision is how to finance the project. We have accumulated some funds but the total cost will be beyond our means. This probably means that we will have to seek an appropriate grant. If anyone has suggestions I would love to hear from you.

Northern Beaches Council is currently working out how it will combine the digital local history collections from its three component Councils. We will liaise with them to ensure that what we do is compatible.

*Richard Michell*

## NEWS AND VIEWS

NEXT MEETING, Saturday 13 July, 2019

Jo Harris is the Historian of the NSW Division of the Wireless Institute of Australia and a very active member of the Kurungai Historical Society. She will talk on "The three wireless men", the men who played key roles in the introduction of radio in Australia, including the significant part that Sydney's North Shore played. She will also explain the connection to a little-known monument at Narrabeen.

Jo has had a very active life in radio, including as "mission control" for Dick Smith's hot air balloon flights from Carnarvon W.A. to Tabulam NSW and also from New Zealand to Australia. In her spare time she has raised three children and has 12 grandchildren and seven great grand children.

*Annual General Meeting*

A good roll up of 29 members attended our AGM and heard brief reports from both the President and the Membership Secretary and accepted the audited accounts for the 2018 year. All committee positions were declared vacant and Brian Dunphy conducted the election of office bearers with the outcome as listed below. Afternoon tea followed, together with the screening of the 1953 short film *Pacific Playground*. This was a light-hearted documentary on life on the northern beaches and covered the full geographic extent of the Peninsula from Manly to Barrenjoey.



See the notice for our next meeting

In general business, the meeting discussed three matters - the name of the Society, the venue for meetings and the position of Patron. The outcomes are summarised below.

a) Name of the Society

After further discussion of the suggestion that, with the amalgamation of the Manly, Warringah and Pittwater Councils, and their renaming as the Northern Beaches Council, we should consider changing our name to the Northern Beaches Historical Society there was a strong consensus that we should retain our name as part of our own history.

b) Location of our monthly meetings

It was agreed that, after the July meeting, we would return to North Curl Curl for the remainder of the year. It was also agreed that we would discuss the matter at the final meeting of 2019 to make a decision for 2020.

c) Position of Patron

The President pointed out that this was currently vacant. There was some discussion of the need for a Patron and some clarification of the role. The general view was that there was not a need to fill the position in the short term and that we should consider the matter, and potential candidates, over the next six months.

Position	Elected	Position	Elected
President	Richard Michell	Archivist	Jan Tinkler
Senior Vice President	Kevin Martin	Editor	Richard Michell
Vice President	Philip Dart	Web Master	Bill Slessor
Secretary	Di Farina	Social Secretary	Merryn Parnell
Membership Secretary	Alan Burrowes	Publicity Officer	Vacant
Treasurer	Richard Michell	Tours Officer	Vacant
Assistant Treasurer	Di Farina		

**POT POURRI**

**Not Pining**

Sybil Holst Small has taken me to task, reasonably gently, for calling, in a recent article on erroneous plantings, the tree that we call a Norfolk Island Pine, well - a pine. As she points out, botanically it is not a pine, and neither is the so-called Cook Pine. They are members of the Araucaries family, not the Pinus family.

However, despite Sybil's exhortations, I doubt that any stand by me on this matter would make a difference. Australia loves its pines, even though they aren't. There is the Bunya, the Hoop, the Kauri, the Huon and, far more recently, the Wollemi. None of them is formally a pine.

Talking of Norfolk Island, March 2020 will be the 230<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the wrecking of the *Sirius*. Special events are planned on the island.

**History Council of NSW**

History Week this year will run from 31 August to 8 September. The theme is *Memory and Landscapes* which would seem to give quite a lot of scope. The History Council has also announced that its Internship Program is now open. They advise:

“Our Internship Program provides an opportunity for students enrolled in History or related disciplines at a tertiary level to gain experience in a History organisation. We are committed to providing vocational opportunities for students and/or young people to assist them in developing sustainable career paths and networks.

Whether as part of our History Week or Speaker Connect programs, interns will be able to develop their skills in a supportive environment whilst being a professional representative of the History Council of NSW.

Applications must be made through the online form which is accessible, along with further information, on our Internship page <https://historycouncilnsw.org.au/project/internships/>”

**A Lighthouse at the southern end of the Peninsula**

Here is a memory test for Members from the southern end of our territory - the Lighthouse Service Station.

With thanks to John MacRitchie: “This service station was erected in 1930 on the corner of Sydney Road and Woods Parade at Fairlight. It was designed by architect Frederick Fuller in a vaguely Spanish Mission style and the photo from October 1931 shows that it was located adjacent to the "Heath Buildings", which featured a distinctive painted advert for tea. Part of these buildings remain today (see image from Google).

In its early years the service station was known as the Auto Super Service Station and was run by a Mr Ginsburg and a Mr Hartigan, who were also agents for Chevrolet motor cars. They appear to have gone out of business in early 1940 when wartime restrictions meant fewer cars on the road. The garage was reopened by Franz and Paul Krasny and renamed the Lighthouse Service Station. In turn this was replaced with the Manly Motors Garage which was still in business into the 1950s.”

I can add that the site, and apparently part of the Heath Buildings, became a McDonalds Restaurant in 1972. This in turn closed in 1995 when Manly council refused permission to add a late-night drive-through and the site is today home units. Can anyone fill in the history from the 1950s to 1972?



## ARTICLE

### LADY WAKEHURST

Margaret Loder Wakehurst is known to Australians as the wife of Lord Wakehurst, the last non-Australian Governor of NSW. To the citizens of Northern Ireland she is similarly known, but as the wife of their Governor. But who was she in her own right?

Margaret "Peggy" Tennant was born in Scotland on the 4 November 1899 at The Glen, Innerleithen, the Peebles-shire seat of her father, the industrialist Sir Charles Tennant (1823 – 1906), on his 76th birthday. Sir Charles had already produced 12 children by his first marriage, the youngest of whom was 34 when Peggy was born to his second wife Marguerite, née Miles. Three more daughters followed, including Kay, later Baroness Elliot of Harwood, one of the first life peeresses.

Peggy's father was the grandson of another Charles Tennant (1768 – 1838), a Scottish chemist and industrialist who invented bleaching powder and founded an industrial dynasty. The earlier Charles Tennant had been born at Laigh Corton, Alloway, Ayrshire to John Tennant (1725–1810) and his second wife, Margaret McClure (1738–1784). He was the ninth of John Tennant's sixteen children. As a baby, he moved from Laigh Corton farm to Glenconner, Ochiltree, also in Ayrshire.

The family had worked the land for generations and were friends with a local poet Robert Burns (1759–1796). In Burns' epistle to "James Tennant of Glenconner", Charles Tennant is mentioned as "wabster Charlie" (weaver Charlie).

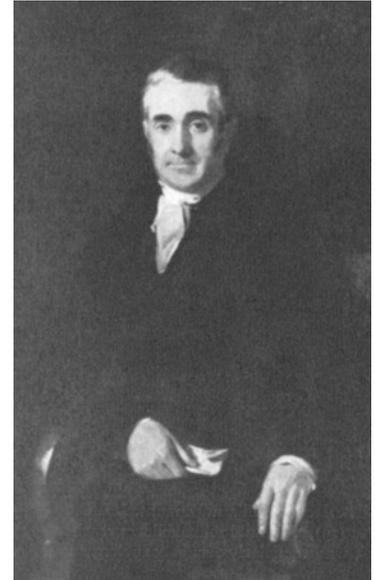
Auld comrade dear, and brither sinner,  
How's a' the folk about Glenconner?  
How do you this blae eastlin wind,  
That's like to blaw a body blind?  
For me, my faculties are frozen,  
My dearest member nearly dozen'd.

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And no forgetting wabster Charlie,  
I'm tauld he offers very fairly.

Charles was fortunate to receive schooling both at home and at the Ochiltree parish school. He was apprenticed by his father to a master handloom weaver at the village of Kilbarchan, Renfrewshire (hence the reference by Burns). This was a highly paid occupation, requiring great skill and considerable intelligence. Weavers were to be envied at the end of the eighteenth century for weaving had developed into Scotland's first industry.

Young Tennant was quick to learn his trade, but also quick to see that the growth of the weaving industry was restricted by the primitive methods used to bleach the cloth. At that time this involved treatment with stale urine and leaving the cloth exposed to sunlight for many months in so called bleachfields. Huge quantities of unbleached cotton piled up in the warehouses.



Charles Tennant (1768 – 1838)



*Bleekveld in een dorp (Bleachfield in a village),*  
circa 1650 ([Jan Brueghel the Younger](#))

In 1788 Tennant left his well paid job and acquired bleaching fields at Darnley, near Barrhead, Renfrewshire. He turned his mind and energy to developing ways to shorten the bleaching time. Others had already managed to reduce the time from eighteen months to four by replacing sour milk with sulphuric acid. In the last half of the eighteenth century, bleachers started to use lime in the bleaching process, but only in secret due to possible injurious effects.

Tennant had the original idea that a combination of chlorine and lime would produce the best bleaching results. He worked on this approach for several years and was finally successful, the product being a solution of calcium hypochlorite in water, still used today as a pool chemical and bleaching/sanitisation agent.

His method proved to be effective, inexpensive and harmless. He was granted patent #2209 on 23 January

1798. He continued his research and developed a bleaching powder for which he was granted patent #2312 on 30 April 1799.

While still working in the bleachfields, around the year 1794 at age 26, Tennant formed a partnership with four friends (one of whom was a chemist, Charles Macintosh, who is remembered today for his technique of Macintosh waterproofing and who also assisted Tennant in the invention of bleaching powder).

Immediately after the granting of the patent, Charles and his partners purchased land on the Monkland Canal, just north of Glasgow, to build a factory for the production of bleaching liquor and powder. The area was known as St. Rollox, after a French holy man. It was close to a good supply of lime, and since the area was rural, the land was cheap. Additionally, the nearby canal provided excellent transportation.



Charles Tennant's Darnley Bleach Fields c.1800

Production was swiftly moved from the earlier bleachfields in Darnley to the new plant and the business quickly became successful. Production increased from fifty-two tons the first year (1799), to over 9200 tons the fifth year.

Charles continued to expand his horizons and when the partnership ended he purchased the company. By 1815 the business was known as Charles Tennant & Co. and had expanded into other chemicals, metallurgy and explosives. By the 1830s and 1840s the St. Rollox chemical plant was the largest in the world and had a world focus. Raw materials came from as far away as Spain and Russia. The plant covered over 100 acres (0.4 km<sup>2</sup>), had 250,000 square feet (23,000 m<sup>2</sup>) of floor space and a payroll of over one thousand persons. It dominated the local economy.

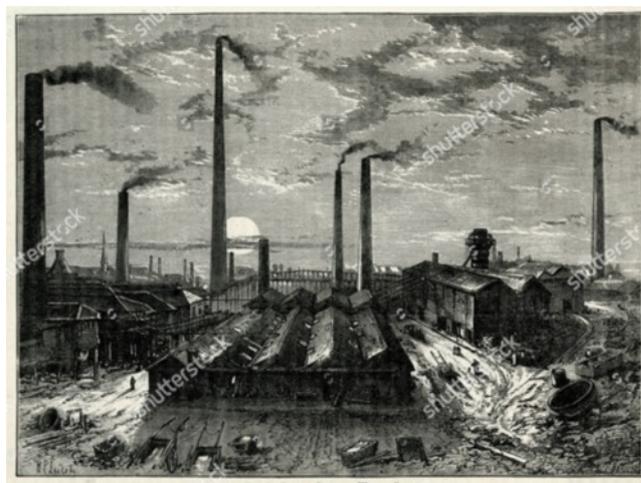
Charles lived to see his chemical empire grow to be the largest and most important in the world. Although he died on 1 October 1838, the mighty business and the immense wealth generated allowed many of his descendants to marry into the aristocracy, his grandson Charles Clow Tennant (1823–1906) becoming 1st baronet.

The chemical business became known as the United Alkali Company Ltd. and eventually it merged with others in 1926 to form the chemical giant Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI). However the original company still exists and has headquarters in Bath Street and a factory in Maryhill.

So this was the family that Peggy was born into, almost exactly 100 years after her great grandfather received his bleaching patents.

*Richard Michell*

(To be continued in a future issue)



Two sketches of Charles Tennant's St. Rollox Chemical Works c1831 (Historia/Shutterstock)



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## 1972

It is perhaps interesting to know what your money could buy at McDonalds Fairlight when it opened in 1972. The menu reproduced poorly here is from an advertisement in the SMH that year. It was for the opening of another new outlet, at Weston in the ACT.

A Big Mac was 90 cents, a Junior Burger 40 cents and French Fries - helpfully described in brackets as chips - were 25 cents.

Unlike its Fairlight contemporary, the Weston McDonalds is still trading.



# Manly Warringah & Pittwater Historical Society Inc.

## Membership Renewal/Application Form - 2019

Title: Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms (please circle)

Name:

Age group (please tick):  10 – 18  19 – 50  51 – 70  71 – 85  86 – 95

[Note: this information is required for insurance purposes; if two persons included in this application fall into different age bands please tick both boxes]

Address:

State

Postcode

Phone: (Home)

(Bus.)

(Mobile)

E-mail:

Signature:

Date:

### MEMBERSHIP FEES

\$20 Single

\$25 Household (2 persons) or Organisation

FEE: \$.....

as above, includes emailed copy of the Peninsula Historian

\$12.00.....

only if you require Peninsula Historian by post

DONATION: \$.....

TOTAL: \$.....

Do you require a receipt? Yes/No

### PAYMENT METHODS

- **By cheque or money order**

Please make payable to 'MWP Historical Society Inc' and mail with the completed Renewal Form to:

**The Treasurer**

**Manly Warringah & Pittwater Historical Society Inc**

**PO Box 695**

**MANLY, NSW 1655**

**DO NOT MAIL CASH. If paying in person place cash, cheque or money order in an envelope together with the completed Renewal Form)**

- **By Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT)**

Account Details:

Commonwealth Bank, Manly

Account Name:

MWP Historical Society

BSB Number:

062-197

Account Number:

00907384

(If paying by EFT please ensure that you enter your name in the 'to account description' box and confirm your payment by sending an email to the Treasurer at [treasurer@mwphs.com](mailto:treasurer@mwphs.com). This is essential for your correct identification and is particularly important if your payment is made through a Credit Union)