



Peninsula Historian

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FROM THE EDITOR

The various articles that have been published on the Dutch Shop at Dee Why prompted Mrs. Betty James to contact me. Betty - nee Betty Bennett - grew up in Dee Why in the 1930s and 40s and was able to tell me who had originally built the house that later came to contain the Dutch Shop. She knew this because, as the daughter of Bennett the Draper, she lived directly opposite, on the other (eastern) side of Pittwater Road.

I am sure that Betty won't mind me telling you that she is 90 years old and has an amazing memory. I discussed many aspects of "old" Dee Why with her. One was a bushfire in early 1939 and it forms the basis of the article in this issue. Thanks Betty.

We all have memories and while it is perhaps unfortunate it is nevertheless a true fact that memories are part of history. Once again I encourage readers to send in even the smallest snippet. As well as being of interest in its own right it can serve as a catalyst for others, just as the original very simple question of "where was the Dutch Shop in Dee Why?" has done.

Richard Michell

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

It has been good to have our monthly meetings back. The social distancing and other precautions have worked well. Thank you for your cooperation and thank you also to the various members who have helped with the meeting set-ups and controls.

The Mayor, Michael Regan, contacted me a few weeks ago updating me on Council's progress with rationalising its property holdings post-amalgamation and reopening dialogue on the possibility of potential future premises focussed on our local history, including potential incorporation of the Society's needs and archives. I appreciated the approach and, while it remains very early days, it is a positive development. I will keep you informed.

Richard Michell

NEWS AND VIEWS

MEETING REPORT, Saturday 8 August, 2020

This was our first meeting post the original COVID shutdown where we have had a guest speaker and it was well-attended, albeit with appropriate restrictions in place. Keith Amos gave a fascinating and comprehensive talk on Dorothea Mackellar, including her close relationship with the Northern Beaches via her holiday house Tarrangaua at Lovett Bay. It inspired a lively range of questions from the audience and was much appreciated.

NEXT MEETING, Saturday 12 September, 2020

The speaker will be another of our members, David Tribe. His topic will be the Indigenous Language of the Northern Beaches. David has done a great deal of research and his talk will cover the historical background, including the problems in discerning what are the languages. He will also outline work on a Kuringai Language Dictionary, making the language conversational and working with the Kuringai Elders, plus give some examples. Finally he will discuss renaming places in the Kuringai Language.

DIARY

Meetings held at the NB Council Community Centre on the corner of Abbott and Griffin Roads, North Curl Curl

12 September, 2020 2.00 pm

David Tribe *Indigenous language of the Northern Beaches*

Outline of recent research and examples of the language.

10 October, 2020 2.00 pm

To be advised

MANLY HOSPITAL SITE

Manly MP James Griffin has informed us that the State government has prepared a draft masterplan for the old Manly Hospital site on Eastern Hill. It can be viewed at

<https://www.property.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/Forme%20Manly%20Hospital%20Additional%20Information.pdf>

Background re the site and the plan can be found at

<https://www.property.nsw.gov.au/former-manly-hospital-site>

You may have to type the addresses in to your browser. Feedback on the draft is required by 31 August.

POT POURRI

Manly Hospital

It is perhaps not widely known that the original name for Manly Hospital - the one on Eastern Hill, not the earlier Cottage Hospital in Raglan Street - was the Manly Peace Memorial Hospital. At a public meeting in the Manly Town Hall in July 1919 it was resolved that a 'Peace Memorial Hospital' be built on the former quarantine land as 'a permanent tribute to the men who went forward and fought in the Great War'. A committee was formed and fundraising commenced.

In 1924 the NSW Parliament passed an Act (No. 55) to 'sanction the construction of a public hospital at Manly'. This Act describes the hospital as the Manly Peace Memorial Hospital (Paragraph 4). What the Act did not reveal is that the residents of Manly were required to pay two-thirds of the cost of the hospital, including fit out and furnishing.

Construction began in 1927 with the foundation stone laid on Saturday 28 January, 1928. The residents' main fundraising came from the annual Venetian Carnival but they struggled to raise their portion of the funds. However to put their efforts into context, the first stage of the two-stage build cost £69,000 and the residents contributed £18,666. In today's money the two figures are \$144 million for Stage 1 with the residents providing \$39 million. The new French's Forest Hospital cost \$600 million all up.

The residents still had their asset of the Cottage Hospital to liquidate but they wished to keep these funds for the fitout. Their situation was relieved a little in January 1929 when the then Minister for Health, Richard Arthur, who also happened to be a Patron of the Manly Cottage Hospital and a consulting medical officer there, agreed that the residents' contribution could be reduced to 50%, as was the case with other local hospitals in the State, but the assets of the Cottage Hospital also had to be handed over.

There was ultimate relief in November 1929 when Arthur successfully introduced the Public Hospitals Act. This meant that a Hospitals Commission would administer all public hospitals via local boards. The government would finance hospital construction, with local financial involvement limited to furnishings. Stage 2 commenced in June 1930 at the expense of the government (although with the passing of the Act they took over ownership and operation of the Cottage Hospital which was sold after the new one opened in October 1931).

While the residents got their new hospital they lost its original name. It was now simply the Manly District Hospital.

Richard Michell

Act No. 55, 1924.

An Act to sanction the construction of a public hospital at Manly; and for purposes connected therewith. [Assented to, 23rd December, 1924.] George V,
No. 55.

BE it enacted by the King's Most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly of New South Wales in Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

1. This Act may be cited as the "Manly Hospital Act, 1924." short title.

2. The carrying out of the works described in the Schedule to this Act is hereby sanctioned, and the Secretary for Public Works is empowered to carry out the said works. Works sanctioned.

3. The cost of carrying out the said works, exclusive of land resumptions, is estimated at ninety-eight thousand four hundred and thirty pounds, and such estimated cost shall not, under any circumstances, be exceeded by more than ten per centum. Cost.

4. The plan of the works is the plan marked "Manly Peace Memorial Hospital," signed by the Secretary for Public Works and countersigned by the Acting Government Architect, and deposited in the public office of the said Secretary. The plan.



Manly Peace Memorial Hospital under construction late 1928

ARTICLE

The 1939 bushfires

When talking to Betty James (nee Bennett) recently she recounted how, during the dreadful bushfires of early 1939, all mothers and children in Dee Why were evacuated to the beach, while the men and youths remained to defend property. Hot ash blown by the raging north westerly wind was landing on the beach and Betty burnt her feet, spending much of the time in the water. The date would have been Saturday 14 January and she would have been nine years old.

Sydney was suffering an extreme heatwave at the time and was ringed by fire. According to the evening edition of The Sun newspaper of that day, the Dee Why and Narrabeen fire brigades had been dispatched to Pittwater to fight a large fire threatening Newport and Church Point. Meantime a fire approached Dee Why from the west and this was the one that Betty was escaping.



Front page of The Sun newspaper, Saturday 14 January, 1939 (evening edition)

At Dee Why West boys from the St Mathews Training Farm - located at today's St Mathews Farm Reserve sporting field - spent two and a half hours fighting a blaze on South Creek Road that was threatening two houses. They managed to save them but another one nearby was destroyed. Houses were also lost at Frenchs Forest.

Although it was probably of little consolation for the Dee Why residents, the fires that their brigade had been sent to fight near Newport were serious. One of the properties threatened was the Workers Education Association's Summer School. It had been built in 1929 and by 1939 was a popular facility, being used by a range of organisations from chess clubs to the Country Women's Association, even State Government Departments. The WEA ran a residential school each summer that consisted of a variety of strands, with lectures and tutorials. The attendees of a youth school in the summer of 1939 received some practical lessons in addition to the more theoretical ones. The 50 or so young men and women spent a good part of that same Saturday 14 January fighting a threatening blaze. Their efforts were largely successful, the main school structure being saved while fencing and the laundry building were destroyed, along with a nearby house that was not part of the school complex.

The fire situation on the east coast of Australia in late 1938, early 1939 was dire and uncannily similar to that which prevailed early this year. In 1938/39 bushfires burnt for the whole summer, with ash falling as far away as New Zealand. Approximately three-quarters of the State of Victoria was directly or indirectly affected by the disaster, while other Australian states and the Australian Capital Territory were also badly hit by fires and extreme heat.

In Victoria 71 people were killed and several towns were obliterated. Over 1,300 homes and 69 sawmills were burned, and 3,700 buildings were destroyed or damaged. In response, the Victorian state government convened a Royal Commission that resulted in major changes in forest management.

Although not as hard hit as Victoria, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory also faced severe fires. Destructive fires burned from the NSW South Coast, across the ranges and inland to Bathurst, while Sydney was ringed by fires which entered the outer suburbs. Fires raged towards the new capital at Canberra and South Australia was also struck by fires in the Adelaide Hills.

The 1938/39 bushfire season was exacerbated by a period of extreme heat, following several years of drought. In the days preceding the fires the Victorian state capital, Melbourne, experienced some of its hottest temperatures on record at the time: 43.8 °C (110.8 °F) on 8 January and 44.7 °C (112.5 °F) on 10 January. On Friday 13 January, the day of the most severe and destructive fires, temperatures reached 45.6 °C (114.1 °F), which stood as the hottest day officially recorded in Melbourne for the next 70 years.

In Sydney, on Monday 16 January 1939 the Sydney Morning Herald reported as follows regarding the day that Betty was sheltering on Dee Why Beach:

"Saturday was the hottest day ever experienced in Sydney. The maximum temperature, 113.6 degrees (45.3 degrees Celsius), broke a record which had stood for 32 years, since January 13, 1896, by a margin of 5.1 degrees.

The previous record temperature of 108.5 (42.5) degrees was overshadowed at the early hour of 9.30 a.m., and for the ensuing six and a half hours, until 4 p.m., the temperature did not fall below 109 (42.8) degrees.

The intense heat in the country caused an appalling death roll, especially among children and aged people. Up to last night the deaths of 79 persons had been reported during the heat wave. Thirty-eight died on Saturday.

About 6.30 p.m. a cool, squally southerly wind swept over Sydney, bringing instant relief. Within 10 minutes the temperature fell from 105.1 (40.6) degrees to 79.5 (26.4), and it fell steadily during the remainder of the night, to reach a minimum of 67.5 (19.7) degrees at 8.50 a.m. yesterday."

Richard Michell



WEA Summer School at Newport, June 1942
Ivan Ives, State Library NSW

Post script(s)

During our conversation, Betty James (nee Bennett) told me another story from 1939. The drought that preceded the bush fires also led to a water shortage in Sydney, with consequent water restrictions. Betty's father employed the services of a water diviner to find water in their backyard and Mr. Bennett then proceeded to hand dig a well in the location that the diviner suggested. After quite a lot of effort, with regular collapses of the sides of the hole in the sandy soil, he struck water. This could be viewed as full credit to the skills of the diviner or, alternatively, as the inevitable consequence of digging a deepish hole on the fringes of a wetland, adjacent to an old creek bed.

Either way, no sooner had water been struck than the drought broke, albeit temporarily. It rained for several days and water restrictions were lifted. Betty's mother, concerned for the safety of her own and other children, insisted that her husband fill in the new well. The family never drew water from it.

Betty's story reminded me of one that the father of a friend told me in my youth. It makes more sense now that I have learned of the drought and water restrictions that prevailed through the late 1930s and early 1940s

Residents of Dee Why are probably aware of the waterfall or cascade at the western end of the lower or eastern section of Redman Road. There is still an open drain that carries stormwater runoff from Narraweena. The story I was told was that, during WW2, this small waterfall ran continuously. It never dried up.

The phenomenon attracted attention and some felt that it indicated some form of divine intervention. A small shrine was built and maintained near the apparently eternal spring.

When the war finished and local levels of manpower returned to something like normal, a Water Board crew found a leak in a water main a little upstream of the fall. They quietly repaired it and the spring was no longer eternal. But by then the horror of the war was over and there was less need for spiritual solace.



Drought scene, New South Wales, 1938



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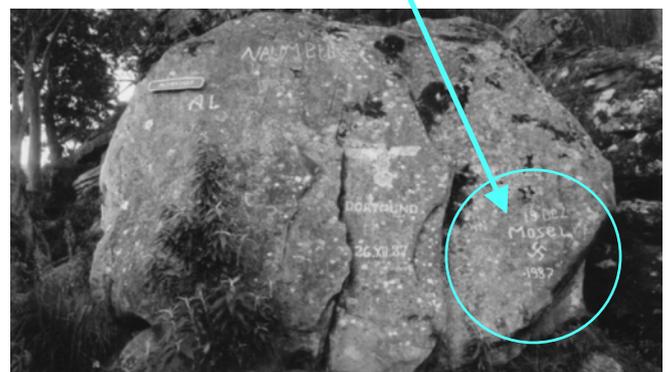
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Deep Creek, Narrabeen in the 1930s

While Betty James was growing up in Dee Why in the 1930s there were some picnickers and campers at Deep Creek off Narrabeen Lagoon that she probably knew nothing of. John Morcombe has recently written an article explaining that they were German merchant seamen.

Loyal Nazis in Sydney, under the leadership of Rudolph Duerkop, formed a so-called Harbour Service. Its role was to meet the crews of all incoming German ships, to provide practical advice about hotels and entertainment, arrange social evenings and excursions, reinforce German solidarity, propagate Nazi philosophy and – most importantly – keep the seamen away from the corrupting influence of Sydney's left-leaning waterside workers, who were naturally antagonistic to Germany's fascist regime. They set up the camp Deep Creek as a suitably remote spot.



German carvings at Deep Creek,
William McClean (MWPHS archives)

Manly Warringah & Pittwater Historical Society Inc.

Membership Application Form - 2020

(The membership year runs from 1 January to 31 December)

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]

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\$25 Household (2 persons) or Organisation

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(\$12.00...)

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Do you require a receipt? Yes/No

PAYMENT METHODS

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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)

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