



Peninsula Historian

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

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FROM THE EDITOR

One of our members, Candy Bingham - who is also a NB Councillor - has been very active and vocal re the future of the Manly ferries. Candy asked me to summarise the history of the ferry service to help with her dealings with authorities and in gaining publicity. The summary is reproduced as the article in this issue.

Speaking of research, I realised quite a few years ago that a location at the southern end of Dee Why Beach had been known historically as The Oaks. The name was current in the last couple of decades of the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth. The only remnant of it that I know of today lies in a street name in Dee Why - Oaks Avenue.

I have recently done a little digging and will write a short article in a future issue. However if any reader has any information I would be very grateful to receive it.

I have also been talking with Tony Fitzgerald. Now in his eighties, Tony grew up in a flat overlooking Fairy Bower beach. He had some wonderful anecdotes and was able to name buildings and residents in a number of old photos that the Society has in its collection. Thanks Tony.

Richard Michell

DIARY

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

12 December, 2020

No meeting - Christmas/New Year break

9 January, 2020

No meeting - Christmas/New Year break

13 February, 2021

Meetings resume, Covid willing. Details to be advised.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Well in spite of the restrictions placed on us by Covid we had a very enjoyable Christmas function on Saturday 14 November at North Curl Curl.

Thank you to all members for your support in what has been an unusual and at times trying year for the Society. We were not able to have our normal full programme of talks but we did try to remain active and relevant. Further good progress was made with the organisation of our Archives (thanks Jan), we were able to help many people with local history enquiries, and we conducted some research (thanks especially to Keith Amos). Unfortunately I cannot report any real progress re a potential local history museum.

On that front, following the amalgamations, the Northern Beaches Council has some redundant property at various locations on the Peninsula. One of them is the Manly Town Hall and Council has invited suggestions/comments re its future use.

Personally I am somewhat concerned with this. In my opinion Council should first identify all of the significant properties that it owns that are likely to be redundant. This review should cover the entire northern beaches. It should then identify the various potential needs and opportunities for space, both by activity and geographic location, again peninsula-wide. Only then should it begin to consider specific future uses for a building.

It may be argued that it is only ideas that are being sought at this stage. But this approach produces expectations and anticipations. A wrong move will be difficult to recover from.

In spite of my misgivings I still encourage members to make their own submissions. The Society will also.

Talking of submissions, I also encourage you to make one re the plan by Transport NSW to emasculate the Manly ferries. As I stated last issue, to me this is a triumph of narrowness of vision. The powers that be do not seem to understand that they have a dual-function asset. Yes it is part of the public transport system but it is also has a role in tourism and image.

This role could be greatly expanded. The silver lining in the lack of public transport use in non-peak periods of the

working week is that part of the space on a ferry could be devoted to tourism which flourishes in that time slot.

As a simple concept, redesign the seating set up on a third of the upper deck and lease that space from 10 am to 4 pm each weekday to a private operator. Let them offer for example a champagne and cheese experience, seated in comfortable chairs with small tables. Include an audio visual multilingual guide via headphones or smartphone.

The government would recover its \$6 million per annum shortfall, a new business would be developed and jobs created. The mythical win - win?

Richard Michell



Christmas wishes

The Society will have a break over December and January but there will be a *Historian* in January

Meetings will return in February, Covid willing. Details next issue.

NEWS AND VIEWS

MEETING REPORT, Saturday 14 November, 2020

This was the Christmas function and it would perhaps be unfair on participants to give a detailed report!

NEXT MEETING, Saturday 13 February, 2021

There will be a break over the Christmas/New Year period. We plan to return with our monthly meetings on 13 February, 2021, Covid permitting. There will be a Historian in late January and details will be given there.

FILING CABINET

Our archive continues to grow. The most recent addition was some information on two important figures from competitive swimming in Manly in the early part of last century - Harry Hay and Eric Fox, - forwarded to us by a relative, together with a generous donation.

With the growth comes a requirement for more storage space. If anyone has a redundant three-drawer filing cabinet we would happily give it a home. As it has to integrate with existing cabinets in what is a very tight archive space, ideal dimensions would be Height 112 cm, Width 45 cm, Depth 62.5 cm, with the height being the most critical.

100 YEARS - CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Our Historical Society will celebrate its centenary in 2024 and your Executive has decided to establish a Planning Committee to give consideration as to how we will celebrate it and what activities will form part of this significant occasion. We want to draw on the expertise of our own membership in formulating suitable ways of highlighting it and involving the wider community.

Our Senior Vice President, Kevin Martin, and Vice President, Philip Dart, have been asked to oversee this process. If you are willing to assist them would you please email philip.dart@icloud.com and indicate day(s) of the week and times you would be available to meet with Kevin and Philip.



With apologies to Jan - her filing is immaculate - plus we need a **three** drawer



Opening day of the new Manly swimming baths on 30 October, 1926, just three months prior to the visit by the two Japanese swimmers

POT POURRI

Turning Japanese?

That pair of Japanese swimmers - Katsuo Takaishi and Takahiro Saito - are turning out to be more prolific in generating material for the Historian than the Dutch House at Dee Why. John Morcombe drew my attention to the Minutes of Warringah Shire Council from 1927. The relevant portion read:

Correspondence, Dee Why Baths Trustees, 10/1/27, advising the Council of a proposed visit of the Japanese swimmers to Dee Why on 16th inst. and requesting permission to enclose the rock bath and make a charge for admission, the proceeds to be applied to the enlarging of the bath.

Resolved: That the request be complied with.

Apparently the visit never occurred. As I have explained previously, the various state and local swimming associations imposed on the two Japanese swimmers a near impossible schedule of appearances in competitive events. By the time they reached Sydney on 5 January 1927, their tour having commenced just under a month earlier in Townsville on 9 December 1926, they had swum in an average of three events per week.

The Warringah Shire Council meeting was on the 10 January. The two swimmers were to make their third appearance in the NSW swimming championship at Manly on the upcoming Saturday 15 January and be in Melbourne four days later for the Victorian championships, to swim in their events on Wednesday 19 January. It is little wonder that they did not agree to swim at Dee Why, the day after the Manly event, leaving only two days to travel to Melbourne by train. At the Victorian championships, they each won their respective events, Takahiro Saito's time in the 100 yards backstroke breaking the Australian record by two seconds. In his swim at the Manly Baths just four days prior Katsuo Takaishi had set an Australian all-comers record for the 200 yards. So the arduous tour had not exhausted either of them.

ARTICLE

Brief history of the Manly Ferries

A ferry service to Manly commenced as far back as 1830 with Barney Kearns operating an on-demand transfer by sailing boat between Balmoral and Manly.

However, the type of operation that we know today, with ferries running between Circular Quay and Manly at scheduled times and for posted fares, began in earnest in 1853 when Henry Gilbert Smith built the Pier Hotel and a ferry wharf, positioned where the Hotel Manly and the ferry wharf are today. His purpose was to encourage land purchasers and day trippers to his newly laid

out village of Brighton. As well as building the fixed infrastructure he chartered *The Brothers* – a wooden paddle steamer of 23 tons – to run a reliable service.

Both the village and the ferry service prospered and by the late 1850s about half a dozen vessels operated on the route.

In 1865 the Brighton and Manly Steam Ferry Company was formed. It operated a service with a purpose-built double-ended steel paddle steamer of 63 tons, the *Phantom*. Its funnel was painted white, with a black top, and both this colour scheme and the double ended design were to become synonymous with the Manly ferries.

In 1877 the Brighton and Manly Steam Ferry Company was reorganised as the Port Jackson Steam Boat Company. It commissioned a purpose-built vessel from Scotland, the steam paddle steamer the *Fairlight*. It had a top speed of 12 knots and made its way to Australia under its own steam in just three months, starting on the Manly run in 1879. Its overall appearance and layout would tend to set the template for future ferries.

In spite of the popularity of the *Fairlight* with passengers, the Port Jackson Steam Boat Company got into financial difficulties and in 1881 was replaced by the Port Jackson Steamship Company Ltd. (PJSCL) which took over the bankrupt company's six ferries and tugs. To encourage people to take up land in Manly the new company auctioned property that it owned in the area, with the bonus of a five-year ferry pass to those who built a home.

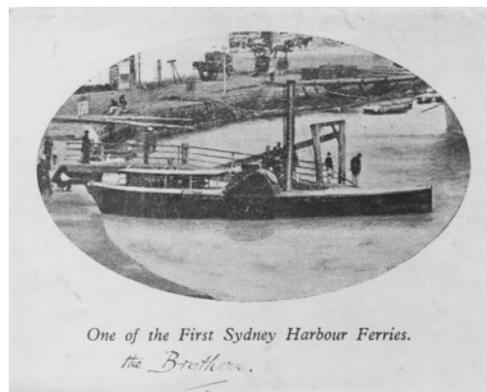
Patronage increased and with it the ambitions of the PJSCL. In the late 1890s they increased passenger fares by 50% to 1/6d return. There was an outcry and the fares reverted to 1/- but two years later the company put them back up to 1/6. This triggered the formation, in early 1893, of a rival company, the Manly Co-Operative Steam Ferry Company Ltd., with fares of just 6d. By December of that year the PJSCL had had to drop its fares to the same level.

A war now raged between the two rival companies and passenger numbers grew massively. The number of daily return trips had to be increased from 15 to 24, with passenger numbers of the order of 50,000 being transported each month. As well as cheap fares passengers enjoyed cheap food, the soothing sounds of orchestras and, on the *Brighton*, access to a wine bar complete with an aviary of canaries to give a choral background.

In November 1895 the PJSCL dropped the fare even further, to 3d return, and its rival matched it immediately. The influx of day trippers to Manly continued to increase, leading some locals to observe that "they were not the most select of Sydney's youths and maidens".

But something had to give and it was the Co-operative Company. On 15 May 1896 it agreed to amalgamate with its rival and the Port Jackson Co-Operative Steamship Company Ltd. was formed. Passenger fares stabilised at 6d return but services further improved. New vessels were commissioned and potential travellers now had 34 return journeys a day to choose from. Travel time had reduced from the earlier one hour to 30 minutes.

History was to repeat however and the merged company failed in 1907, leading to the formation of the Port Jackson and Manly Steamship Company Ltd., which was to run the service for the next 70 or so years.

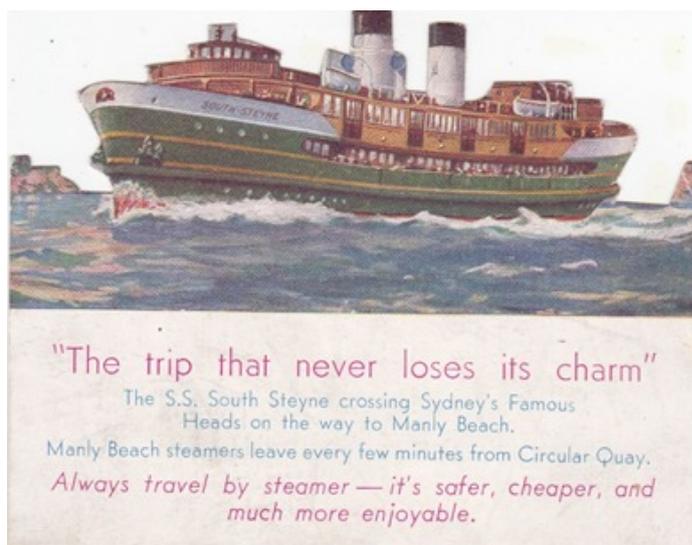


One of the First Sydney Harbour Ferries.
the Brothers.

The "first" Manly ferry, the *Brothers*



SS Fairlight



The archetypal Manly ferry, the *SS South Steyne*

For its first 50 years, starting in 1853, the ferry service to Manly was used mainly by day trippers and holiday makers. Huge crowds flocked to Manly on public holidays and at weekends. However with the introduction in 1903 of a limited tram network radiating out from the Manly Wharf, residential settlement was encouraged and commuters began to be a market on weekdays. The tram network expanded rapidly up the Peninsula, reaching Narrabeen by 1913. Feeder bus services were also introduced. Resident numbers increased enormously and by 1950, commuter traffic began to rival holiday traffic on the ferries. Fortunately for the operators there was not a clash – commuters travelled mainly on weekdays and day trippers on weekends.

For many years it was a profitable operation. To further encourage patronage the Port Jackson and Manly Steamship Company Ltd. built a large enclosed harbour pool on the western side of the passenger wharf and a mini Luna Park on the old cargo wharf to its east, with a modest aquarium located between the two wharves.

To service the demand, in the period from 1910 to 1952 a total of eight ferries were either purpose built or modernised. The flagship was the *South Steyne*. Built in Scotland in 1938 it steamed out to Sydney in just 64 days. It was 1,203 tons and could carry 1,781 passengers.

However the onset of World War 2 saw a reduction in patronage and this continued into the immediate post-war years as money was tight. Fares were increased to try to meet costs but this was counter-productive. In 1964 control of the company changed at Board level and the new directors had little interest in the ferries, being more focused on other interests of the company. They saw the future of commuting being in much higher speed, lower capacity vessels and introduced hydrofoils to run a parallel service to the ferries.

Nevertheless things improved through the 1960s as commuter numbers increased and day trippers made something of a return. In late 1971 this situation attracted what was ultimately a successful takeover bid by Brambles Industries Limited. However the new owners had even less interest in the ferry service, having also been attracted by other operations of the company which included the servicing of off shore oil drilling rigs.

At the time of the takeover there were four ferries in operation – *South Steyne*, *North Head*, *Bellubera* and *Baragoola*. In 1973 the *Baragoola* was withdrawn and in early 1974 Brambles announced that the *Bellubra* was also to go. This caused public outrage and a Save the Manly Ferries campaign was mounted, with petitions containing tens of thousands of signatures being delivered to state parliament. Brambles response was to indicate that they would consider a State Government takeover bid.

After various twists and turns, with Brambles claiming that they would stop the ferry service by November 1974, the State Government announced that it would take it over. However they would operate only two ferries – *North Head* and *Baragoola* – supported by the inner harbor ferry *Lady Wakehurst*.

In 1976 the government announced that it was to build three new ferries - the so-called Freshwater class. The first, the *Freshwater*, was not commenced until December 1980 and it was eventually commissioned two years later. It was followed by the *Queenscliff*, the *Narrabeen* and, after a gap of five years, a fourth, the *Collaroy* in 1988. The style of these three ferries was in the tradition of the old ferries and proved quite popular with passengers. They are still in service today.

Richard Michell



MV Freshwater on a slipway in Brisbane in 2010 for its five year survey



Passengers enjoying the unique experience of the Freshwater crossing the Sydney Heads



Manly, Warringah and Pittwater
Historical Society Inc.
Established 1924

President
Richard Michell
0417 255 726
president@mwphs.com

Senior Vice President
Kevin Martin
kdm1932@bigpond.com

Vice President
Philip Dart
philip.dart@icloud.com

Patron
Currently vacant

Treasurer
Terry Gatward
treasurer@mwphs.com

Assistant Treasurer
Richard Michell

Archivist
Jan Tinkler
archivist@mwphs.com

Secretary
Di Farina
difarina@bigpond.com

Membership Secretary
Allan Burrowes
0407 901 605
secretary@mwphs.com

Editor
Richard Michell
0417 255 726
editor@mwphs.com

Webmaster
Bill Slessor

Website
www.mwphs.com
Postal Address
PO Box 695 Manly, NSW 1655

Membership renewal

Our membership year is the calendar year, running from January to December. That means that membership renewal is now due.

Thank you to all those who have already done so but, if you are not in that group, we would love to receive your renewal. Details are on the last page of this issue.



Phantom in the foreground in Campbell's Cove,
Circular Quay

Manly Warringah & Pittwater Historical Society Inc.

Membership Renewal/Application Form - 2021

(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]

Address:

State

Postcode

Phone: (Home)

(Bus.)

(Mobile)

E-mail:

Signature:

Date:

MEMBERSHIP FEES

\$20 Single

\$25 Household (2 persons) or Organisation

FEE: \$.....

(\$12.00...)

DONATION: \$.....

TOTAL: \$.....

as above, includes emailed copy of the Peninsula Historian

only if you require Peninsula Historian by post

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:

Account Name:

BSB Number:

Account Number:

Commonwealth Bank, Manly

MWP Historical Society

062-197

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(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. This is essential for your correct identification and is particularly important if your payment is made through a Credit Union)