

WILLOUGHBY HISTORY
CHATTERS

FEBRUARY 2017

INSIDE THIS
ISSUE:

MUSEUM UPDATE	2
MEMBERS' CORNER	3
MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS	3
JOHNSTON FAMILY	4 - 5
FROM THE ARCHIVES	6
CONTACT DETAILS	6
COMING EVENTS	6

COMING EVENTS

Saturday 8 April WDHS
General Meeting at
Chatswood Library' (see
p6).

Tuesday 18 April:
Formal opening of the
'Willoughby District
Artistic Voices' exhibi-
tion at the Museum
from 2pm. ??

THE WDHS IN 2016

The Society's 45th Annual Meeting was held at the Chatswood Library on Saturday, 11 February 2017 with 11 members and one visitor in attendance. There were four apologies.

President Paul Storm presented his report on the year's activities, focusing on the speakers at our general meetings and the contributions made by our small group of volunteers throughout the year. He referred to our nomination of the 'Place Marking' exhibition created by local artist Rhonda Pryor for a 2015-16 Museums & Galleries IMAGinE award held at Verge Gallery on 11 November 2016. Bob McKillop represented the Society and, while our entry did not gain an award, he was able to celebrate the success of the Narromine Aviation Museum with representatives from that centre (his old 'home town'). He concluded with an assessment of the future prospects of the Society over the coming years.

Bob McKillop presented the audited financial returns for the WDHS for 2016. Expenditure again exceeded income—by \$2143.21—a similar figure to those of the past three years. It was noted that, following receipt of an updated land valuation, our property has been revalued from \$1.1 million to \$2.0 million, giving a total equity of \$2,048,200.

Following ratification of the financial report, Bob then presented his Museum Report for 2016. This covered the exhibitions mounted at the Willoughby Museum during 2016, the increased visitation by students from local schools, the ongoing tasks being undertaken by our volunteers at the museum, significant additions to our collection during the

year and the role of the WDHS website in promoting the Society and its museum to a wider audience. Visitation for the year at 870 people was 100 more than the 2015 figure, while the age profile of visitors was reversed from the previous profile, with visitors under 19 years of age (513) now dominating those by visitors over 65 (116).

He noted that the website is currently being updated and reformatted into an improved layout, which is progressively being relocated to the Wordpress website. During 2016 the present website had between 1300 and 2000 visitors a month and received between 46,000 and 66,000 'hits' a month, with an average of 54,656.

Judy Peters then took the chair for the election of office bearers for 2017. The following were elected unopposed:

- President, Paul Storm
- Vice-President, Mary Thom
- Secretary, Terry Fogarty
- Treasurer, no nomination
- Museum Curator, Bob McKillop
- Committee: Joan Antarakis, Don Swonnell and Rob Wilson.

The above reports will be posted in the Members' Section of the website.

The meeting rounded off with an illustrated presentation by Bob on aspects of Willoughby City history over the past 150 years, using photos from the Museum collection, Willoughby City Library and some of his own.

MUSEUM UPDATE

Thanks are extended to our young volunteers, Hayley Chan and James, who were regular attendees on Sunday afternoons. Hayley has done a remarkable job indexing newsletters and books in a format that will help future users to quickly locate articles, images and similar sources of information. James assisted with cleaning and gardening tasks. 2016 was his HSC year at Knox Grammar and congratulations are extended to James on his results.

Members and friends are also reminded that Catherine Martin's 'Word on the Street' exhibition of her recreations of the street names in the footpaths in Willoughby City continues at the museum until the end of April. Some minor updates have been made for this second phase of the exhibition. If you have not yet visited this most interesting display, we look forward to your presence in the near future.

Planning is well underway for our new exhibition for the 2017 National Trust Heritage Festival in April–May. In keeping with this year's theme, it will be 'Artistic Voices of Willoughby District', which offers scope for documenting the contributions made the local cultural scene by individuals in a wide range of artistic fields, including architects, artists, cartoonists, dancers, film producers, graphic artists, musicians, photographers, playwrights, sculptors, singers and writers.

Terry Fogarty is handling the main curatorial tasks for this exhibition assisted by Rob Wilson and Bob McKillop. Indications are that we have a wide range of talented people who worked in Willoughby and the Lower North Shore to draw from.



An updated view of the Word on the Street exhibition at the Willoughby Museum taken on 5 February 2017. Bob McKillop photo

If we can get additional volunteers to help during the exhibition, we hope to be able to open it during at least one weekday. If you are able to assist in any way, we will be only too pleased to hear from you over the next two months.

MEMBERS' CORNER: Our Christmas Event

This year our President, Paul Storm, hosted the members' Christmas function at his heritage home, *Victoria*, at 15 Johnson Street, Chatswood. Some 20 members, friends and family members attended the event.

With participants bringing a 'plate', there was a good supply of food and drinks, while Don Swonnell entertained us with his reading of 'The Specialist'.

The event also marked Paul Storm's birthday and his son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren participated in the celebration. As shown in the photographs, it was an enjoyable, light-hearted affair.



Don Swonnell entertains with his reading of *The Specialist*. Bob McKillop photo

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Please note that 2017 renewals are now due. Notices were circulated with the December 2016 issue of the Newsletter, with individual membership being \$30 and \$40 for families.

We have received one \$30 renewal posted to our bank account on 12 January 2017 that does not have a surname provided. If you recognise this payment, can you please contact the Treasurer (see details on page 6).



Paul Storm ready to blow the candles on his birthday cake with his grandchildren as eager spectators. Bob McKillop photo

THE JOHNSTON FAMILY OF WILLOUGHBY: A new family history Judy Peters

In 2011 I had the pleasure of interviewing Mrs Valda (Val) Bullus, granddaughter of Samuel Dobbin Johnston. Samuel (born 1863) and his brother John (known as Jack) were partners in Johnston Brothers Tannery located in Gibbes Street, Chatswood. Samuel Johnston was also an Alderman on Willoughby Council.¹

Val has provided new information and photographs of her family which have added valuable details to our local history. Val's brother Samuel Johnston documented the family oral history of both of his great grandfathers James Johnston and Lars Dahlquist, and his grandfathers, Samuel Dobbin Johnston and John Horsley, from which some of the information in this article is drawn.

It is thought that around 1860 James Johnston came from County Amagh, Northern Ireland to Sydney accompanied by his wife Margaret and daughter Isobel.^{2,3} They moved to the Berry Estate at Berry, and then settled at Jerrara near Kiama NSW.²¹ James and his wife Margaret had seven children: Isobel, John, Samuel, James, Joseph, Susan and Thomas. They lived on their farm where James died in his 80th year in 1901.^{2,4} His wife Margaret pre-deceased him in 1892.⁵

As a young man Samuel, seeing no future at 'Jerrara', moved to "the city" of Sydney with one pound in his pocket from his father. Settling in Willoughby by the early 1880s he began work at William Cunningham's Tannery. Once settled in his tannery work Samuel called for his brothers to join him at Willoughby, firstly John (Jack) and later circa 1883 Joseph (Joe or JB).^{2,3}

Family recollections indicate that Mr Cunningham wanted to sell his tannery and offered to sell it to Samuel for the amount of money he had available.² John became a partner in the business, forming Johnston Brothers Tannery. Samuel travelled to Flemington markets on Fridays to bid for hides, which were taken back to Willoughby and processed and subsequently sold to boot manufacturers. Samuel made many improvements to the tannery, including enlarging it.²

Willoughby Council proceedings in May 1888 mention the Johnson Brothers tannery, their new house and their request to have Short Street cleared and stumped to allow better access to their property.⁶ The tannery was listed in the *Sands Directory* for Willoughby as Johnson Brothers in 1892. Located on the East side of Gibbes Street off Smith Street it appears to have been there until at least 1932–33.^{7,8}

Willoughby Council rate books indicate that by 1899 J B Johnston owned land in High Street near Short Street with the intention of starting his own business. Joseph opened his own tannery called J B Johnston Tannery around 1900 with one employee and a horse and cart.^{2,3} J B Johnston's tannery made fancy leathers for shoe uppers whilst Johnston Brothers made sole leather.²

Samuel met his bride Sarah Jane Dahlquist, daughter of Lars and Hannah Dahlquist, in Willoughby. On 31 July 1884, they were scheduled to be the first couple to be married in St Stephens Anglican Church, Willoughby, however another couple beat them to the altar on the Thursday night before their wedding on the Friday.⁹ Despite this, they received a Bible from the church to commemorate the occasion. Samuel's father-in-law Lars Dahlquist is said to have assisted in the clearing of the land for the building of the church.²

Samuel lived in Robert Street for a time, then in Gibbes Street, near the Tannery around 1888.^{2,6} Samuel also built a weekenders at Orange Grove near Woy Woy where he enjoyed going fishing. He also had a trotting horse which he enjoyed racing.² Later, Samuel and Sarah lived on the corner of Mann and Alleyne Streets Willoughby. This was a majestic stone house with a vineyard alongside.² Samuel and Sarah had five children: Alfred, Elsie, Violet, Ida and Amy; the youngest two being twins.¹² Tragedy struck the family when their middle child Violet died in 1894 aged two years and 11 months.^{2,13}

Samuel's brother and business partner John (aka Jack) married Ada Montgomery in 1890, a lady who helped Sarah Johnston with her sewing.^{2,13} They lived in Alleyne Street close to Smith Street by 1895 and around 1925 moved to the north-west corner of High Street and Victoria Avenue. This house, *Moorwood*, still stands today at 95 Victoria Avenue.^{2,10} Jack and Ada had three children Claude, Gwendoline and Linda.¹⁴

In 1891 Samuel's brother Joseph married Sarah's sister Caroline Dahlquist.¹⁵ In 1895 Joseph lived in Alleyne Street Willoughby in close proximity to his two brothers and around 1925 moved to 354 Penshurst Street, just down from the north-west corner of Victoria Avenue.^{2,3} This house had its own garage and tennis court. Joseph also owned shops on the southern side of Penshurst Street, Willoughby North, west of Victoria Avenue.³ Another shop on the corner of Penshurst and McMahon Street still bears his initials 'JBJ'

1924'. Joseph and Caroline had six children: Margaret, Roy, Oscar, Stan, Doreen and James.¹⁶ Sadly, Margaret died in her birth year and Roy died around 8 years of age.¹⁷

Samuel Johnston's son Alfred married Elizabeth Horsley from the well-known local tannery family in 1908 and they came to live with Samuel and Sarah at Alleyne Street.¹⁸ Around 1920, Samuel and Sarah moved to the corner of Devonshire Street and Albert Avenue, Chatswood. Soon after, they sold this house and moved to Hampden Road Artarmon. Around 1925 they moved again to 13 Harwood Avenue, Willoughby, the house being named *Maralyn*.² Samuel died there on 5 January 1928.^{19, 20} He was buried at Northern Suburbs Cemetery (now Macquarie Park).²⁰

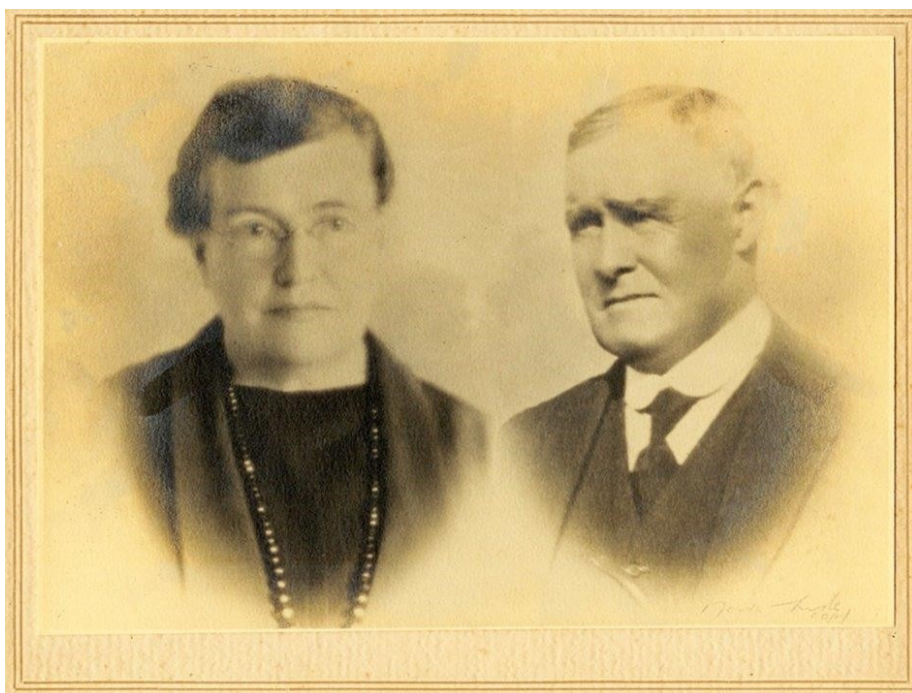
At some time after Samuel's death the Johnston Brothers tannery was sold. Members of the family are said to have bought shops in Penshurst Street Willoughby North and houses in the area on the distribution of Samuel's estate and/or from the proceeds of the sale.¹⁰ His wife Sarah lived until September 1952.²⁰

Alfred, the eldest of Samuel's children, and his wife Elizabeth Johnston (nee Horsley) had five children: Elfreda, Olga, Samuel, Betty and Valda (Val). The couple lived in the first house in Cambridge Street, Willoughby (behind 233 High Street). In 1918, Val's father Alfred and grandfather Samuel built a house on the corner of High and Cambridge Streets, Willoughby. They named the house *Dahlquist*, and it is said to have been the first house built in the area to be fully electrically powered. Val grew up in the house and also lived there with her

husband Sid Bullus raising her own family there.¹⁰ Although Val moved out of the area around 2000, the house is still standing today at 233 High Street and has been extensively renovated and extended.

References

1. Leplastrier, C., *Willoughby: The First Fifty Years*. Written 1915 reprinted.
2. Information recorded by Samuel Bullus regarding family history.
3. Esther Leslie and Jean Michaelides, *Willoughby: The suburb and its people*, 1988, p125.
4. Death notice of James Johnston on Trove, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sat 21Sept 1901 p1.
5. Death of Margaret Johnston, n Kiama; BDM Death Index 6835/1892.
6. *Sydney Morning Herald*, article Saturday 19 May 1888 p 10.
7. *Sands Directory* 1892, Part 5 p15.
8. *Sands Directory* 1932-83, Part 9 p7
9. Marriage notice of Samuel and Sarah Johnston, Trove, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sat 16 Aug 1884.
10. Interview with Val Bullus May 2011.
11. NSW BDM Index Birth Records 12103/1885, 12973/1888, 32935/1892, 17904/1896, 17905/1896..
12. NSW BDM Death Index 12625/1894.
13. NSW Births Deaths and Marriages index Marriage record no 6804/1890.
14. NSW BDM Births Index 32700/1892, 33577/1893, 8906/1896.
15. NSW Births Deaths and Marriages Index Marriage record no 7194/1891.
16. NSW BDM Index Births records 32936/1892, 31413/1894, 15854/1898, 6932/1903, 12205/1905, 25363/1910.
17. NSW BDM Index Death Record 12322/1892, 13209/1901.
18. NSW BDM Index Marriage record 2731/1908.
19. Death notice of Samuel Johnston, Trove, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Fri 6 Jan 1928.
20. <http://northerncemeteries.com.au/macquarie-park/deceased-search/> CHURCH OF ENGLAND, E7, Grave 0001.
21. *Kiama Independent*, on trove Wednesday 13 October 1948 p3, 'Obituary of Joseph Johnston'.



Portraits of Sarah Jane Johnston (nee Dahlquist) and Johnston. Samuel established the Johnston Brothers Tannery in North Willoughby. Photo courtesy Val Bullus



The former Chatswood Community Hospital has largely been demolished for a new apartment complex with only the heritage-listed main hospital building remaining. It provided a more tranquil scene in this 1978 photo.

Martin O'Donoghue collection, Willoughby Museum

CONTACTS

WDHS Management Committee:

President: Paul Storm (9419 7354)

Vice-President: Mary Thom

Secretary: Terry Fogarty

Museum Curator: Bob McKillop

Committee Members: Joan Antarakis, Don Swonnell, Rob Wilson

Patron: Gail Giles-Gidney, Mayor of Willoughby City

Newsletter Editor: Bob McKillop

Willoughby Museum

Our museum is located at *Boronia*, 58 Johnson Street, Chatswood.

Opening hours: 1-4pm each Sunday.
Admission \$6 adults; \$5 concession; \$3 child, \$10 family [Note: latter under review].

COMING EVENTS

Members' Meetings

Held at the Willoughby Room, Willoughby City Library at The Concourse, commencing at 2pm on the second Saturday of even months (except December).

Saturday 8 April 2017: Members' meeting. Details of Guest Speaker in April newsletter.

Tours & Events

Word on the Street: This exhibition continues until 2 April

Artistic Voices of Willoughby District: This new exhibition exploring the artistic talent of individuals in the Willoughby District will open in April for the 2017 National Trust Heritage Festival. Further details in the April newsletter.

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LEFT: The shop on the corner of Penshurst and McMahon Streets in Willoughby North with the prominent initials of Joseph Berry Johnston (see pages 4–5). Judy Peters photo

FROM THE EDITOR

My apologies for the late circulation of this issue of *Willoughby History Chatters*. Significant computer problems over the past three months have been a challenge. One advantage of the late publication is that this issue includes coverage of our 2017 Annual General Meeting held on 11 February.

Bob McKillop