

WILLOUGHBY HISTORY
CHATTERS

JUNE 2017

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'ARTISTIC VOICES' Exhibition Opening

Our new exhibition for the 2017 National Trust Heritage Festival got off to a good start with the official opening by Mayor Gail Giles-Gidney on Sunday 23 April.

'Artistic Voices', curated by Terry Fogarty, explores the contribution to the cultural life of Willoughby City by some 100 individuals across a wide range of artistic and cultural fields over the years. They include writers, poets, artists, photographers, film producers, sculptors, musicians, singers, actors, composers and many more—all documented in panels (big and small), together with objects relating to their fields of endeavour.

An estimated 35 members and visitors attended the opening. Mayor Gail formally opened the exhibition at 2pm, followed by poetry reading by Don Swonnell in the garden, where refreshments were served. Mary Fogarty did a remarkable job in providing food and drinks for the occasion.

The exhibition is open on Thursdays and Sundays during May from 13:00:16:00. It will subsequently revert to Sunday afternoon openings, together with catering for tour groups as required.



Mayor Gail and Terry Fogarty carry out the formal opening of the exhibition on 23 April 2017. Mary Fogarty photo



The displays for 'Artistic Voices' generated lively discussion among the visitors at the opening. Mary Fogarty photo

COMING EVENTS

Saturday 10 June: The General Meeting for this date has been cancelled (see pages 3 and 6). See page 6 for other events.

MUSEUM UPDATE

Our small band of volunteers at the Museum was kept busy during late March and early April preparing and checking the panels for the 'Artistic Voices' exhibition, together with identifying and preparing the various objects that have been incorporated into the new display.

Special thanks are extended to the individuals and organisations who assisted with objects for display in the exhibition. Particular thanks to the Walter Burley Griffin Society for providing Max Dupain's photograph of the view from inside the *Moon House* in Castlecrag to the surrounding bushland, and framing it. This provides a central feature on the western wall of the exhibition room

On Friday 19 May, a group of 16 visitors from Willoughby City Council's MOSAIC program visited the Museum during a guided walk as an activity during the 2017 Heritage Festival. Rob Wilson, Mary Thom and Don Swonnell guided the group, initially in the 'Artistic Voices' exhibition and then as smaller groups to visit the other displays in the museum.

Our volunteers continue to research and document objects, photographs, and other items in the collection, entering the information into our MOSAIC database. The collection of photographs relating to Paul Harricks when he was at Mowbray House School between 1927 and 1929, together with the cup he won as the Best All-round Sportsman at the School in 1929, have now been entered into our MOSAIC database. Donated by Paul's daughter, Debbie Flynn, they are important records of a former institution and era.



A view of a section of the new exhibition from the doorway prior to the opening on 23 April. The Max Dupain photo of the Moon House is prominent over the display case, while a print of the Margaret Preston flowers painting originally donated to Willoughby Girls' High School is over the fireplace. Mary Fogarty photo



Nick Lewis brought a selection of the Lewis family puppets along to the exhibition opening event. He is pictured here holding one of the many 'Harold' puppets created by the Lewis family at the Castle Cove 'Puppeteria', while other puppets are displayed in the case. Mary Fogarty photo

MEMBERS' CORNER

Willoughby District Historical Society welcomes new members John Cason and Dr Meredith Foley. We currently have 31 paid-up members and five Life/Honorary Members.

Our current membership base, particularly the number of active volunteers, is unsatisfactory in terms of our ongoing operations. If any readers have ideas on how we might more effectively build our membership base, we would be delighted to hear from you.

SPECIAL MEETING NOTICE

The WDHS General Meeting scheduled for Saturday 12 June at 2pm has been cancelled as it falls on the Queens' Birthday long weekend. Attendance at our General Meeting in April was very disappointing as it clashed with the Easter holiday period.

Brian Scott will reschedule his presentation on the commerce of the Lane Cove River at a date to be announced.



Members of Willoughby City Council's MOSAIC group enjoy the 'Artistic Voices' exhibition at Willoughby Museum on Friday 18 May. Rob Wilson photo

Lieutenant William Dawes and Town Planning in Sydney

Don Brock from Parramatta was our guest speaker at the April General Meeting of the Society. Despite a small audience and difficulties with the AV projector initially supplied by the Willoughby Library, Don kept us entertained with his presentation of the many talented Lieutenant William Dawes (1762–1846), who arrived in Sydney on the First Fleet.

Don outlined the many pioneer activities of

Dawes in Sydney, notably building the first observatory at what is now known as Dawes Point, and in his capacity as an engineer and surveyor, when he constructed the batteries on the points leading to Sydney Cove. He also surveyed the first streets and allotments in Sydney and Parramatta, while he made pioneer explorations into the interi-

or, including an expedition into the Blue Mountains that appears to have penetrated further west than any other up to the famed Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson expedition.

Don Brock joined us for refreshments following the talk. Despite the small audience, it was a worthwhile experience.

MASHMAN BROTHERS POTTERY IN THE 1950s

Judy Peters

A CASTOR'S' RECOLLECTIONS

Don Soper was born in Muswellbrook, New South Wales in December 1934. His family moved from Lawrence near Yamba to Northcote Street, Naremburn in Sydney when he was about 12 years old in 1947. On leaving school his older brother Garnet Soper went to work at Mashman Brothers Pottery in Jacques Street, off Victoria Avenue Chatswood. At 15 years of age Don worked for several weeks at Steelcraft before joining his older brother at the pottery in early 1950. Garnet had suggested he could get him a job there, which he did, Don commencing as a caster.

Don began as a lad of 15 years and when he left in 1979 he was a Production Supervisor at what was then the Doulton Factory. He worked there for a total of 29 years. The following is an account of Don's recollections of the Mashman Brothers Pottery in the 1950s before it was taken over by the Doulton Company in 1960.

The Mashman Brothers Pottery

Don worked in the bathroom ware section as a caster of toilet pans and basins. He was located in the two storeyed building at the side of the block off Jacques Street. The pottery was then divided into two main sections—earthen ware pipes and ceramic bathroom ware. When Don started work in 1950 the pottery still had dirt floors downstairs in the earthen ware section. The casting area upstairs had wooden floors.

When Don commenced work the coal strike of 1949, which extended into 1950, resulted in rationing of electricity in zones. As a result, the factory was only allocated 3-4 days of electricity a week and had only three electric lights and was therefore dimly lit. A generator was installed in the back of the factory after this to ensure this problem never happened again. The following describes the operational areas of the pottery in the 1950s and how they functioned.

The Clay Slip House

Liquid clay slip was made here. Big presses were used to compress clay into slabs which were then transferred into tanks fitted with agitators. Water and chemicals were added and mixed with the clay to make liquid clay slip to the right consistency. The resulting slip was then pumped by old English Willet pumps through pipes to the casting area.

Casting of Bathroom Ware

The layout of the casting benches in the 1950s was as follows:-

A U-shaped arrangement of two parallel long benches with racks above the back of each bench for cast wares. A hand operated potter's wheel was permanently located on the inner end bench between the two long benches. There were multiples of these bench arrangements, one for each caster. There would have been around 25 caster's benches at that time.

The process of casting a toilet pan required artistry. The mould had a foot, two pan sides, a top and a chock for the 'S' or 'P' trap. The moulds were laid out on the long benches before being filled with slip from the overhead pipes. A bung was placed in the bottom of the foot of the mould, later removal of which would release the slip. A spreader was put into the mould to make the flushing hole at the rear of the pan and the weep holes. The caster operated a tap on the hose in order to control the flow of the slip into the moulds.

A pan generally took two and a half hours to cast to 3/8 inches thick. The bung was removed and the waste slip drained away after the appropriate time had elapsed. The caster would demould the pan in stages, starting at the top by taking out the waste clay

from under the rim of the top of the pan, inserting a plate and sponging and smoothing the pan by hand. The pan was then turned upside down onto its rim to work on the foot, trimming off excess clay. The trap was also rubbed and smoothed. It was then turned upright. When the pan was firm, the side moulds were taken away and the pan was placed onto the rack near the wheel. The wheel at the end of the bay was then used by the caster for smoothing away any rough edges.

The pan was left to dry before being taken for firing. This process took one day to make one pan. A similar process was followed for the casting of basins. Casting was a very physical, hands-on operation requiring considerable strength and skill.

The casters had a simple set of tools many of which were hand-made. These included sponges, potters knives, scrapers, hole punches made from the brass ferrules of a fishing rod and a counter sinker often made from clock springs with a wooden handles, as well as pottery sticks.



The potters' casting tools retained by Don Soper. Judy Peters photo

Don recalls circa 1950-55 that if there was a westerly wind he would go up to the factory on a Sunday to check that the pans hadn't cracked. He would put dry bags over the pans to stop the wind from cracking them. At this time the bathroom ware was made in a tin shed and the wind would blow through the cracks between the panels. If there was a week of rain the pans took longer to dry out slowing down the whole process, usually taking a day longer. There was no drying system for the cast wares at that time.

The Sagger Potter

A wheel potter made the sagggers – clay containers in which to place goods for firing to stop blistering of the glaze. Sagggers were made of a special gritty type of clay and were oval shaped containers with sides and a separate top lid. The bottom container was loaded with goods for firing and then the top put over the filled bottom sagger. It was then sent down for firing in the kiln.

Bottle Kiln Firers

Kiln firers shovelled coal into the furnaces and set the kiln with the filled sagggers. Firing the kiln using coal took three to four days to get the kiln to the correct temperature. Pipes were fired in the pipe kiln up to 600 degrees centigrade then salt was shovelled in and the fire box sealed. The firing took 3-4 days. Holes were then made in the sealed walls of the bricked in kilns by removing some bricks so that the goods cooled slowly. The whole process took 14 days to complete. Firing the ceramics kiln used a similar system. The old bottle kilns were fired with coal at that time and later replaced by Mashman Brothers with an electric kiln for a few years. A tunnel kiln powered by oil came later still which ran from east to west.

The Glaze Room

Toilet pans were first biscuit fired and then hand dipped in glaze. Glaze was then scraped off the foot before the second firing so that the pan would not stick to the sagggers in the kiln. When dipped in glaze the pans would turn blue until they were fired, after which they were white. The coloured pans were hand painted with three coats of gelatine glaze before firing.

Tollet Testing

Towards the end of the Mashman era from time to time the Water Board would come in and test the toilets to see if they flushed properly using paper and plastic stools. Once they passed testing a wax seal with stamp was placed on them to indicate they had passed.

The Warehouse

This was where finished goods were stored before being transported to retail outlets.

The Pipe Yard

In the pipe ware section the pipes were punched out by a steam machine powered by a large steam boiler. Behind the boiler was a clay crusher with large revolving wheels on a platform. The clay was then mixed and crushed via a long conveyor. The operator pulled a lever and the pipe was stamped out. Subsequent processes used were similar to casting including removing excess clay and smoothing the pipes by hand.

In the Mashman Brothers days the pipes made by machine were straight and then the ends and junction pieces had to be added later to the end of the pipes, including 'T' pieces. At this time there was a manual wheel driven by a leather belt for smoothing excess clay from the pipes. They also had electric

rollers onto which they put the straight pipes and then grooves were cut into them as they spun around and they sponged them up. The grooves were put on the pipes so that the plumbers could make the cement grip when they put them together when laid.

Transport

Private contractors delivered the raw clay to the factory. Henessy Brothers were contracted by Mashman Brothers to provide truck transport for the clay pipe ware, whilst John L Pearce transported the finished sanitary ware.

Working for Mashman Brothers

Don recalls that Mashman Brothers were a good firm to work for as when you had filled your quota for the day (10 pans or 12 basins), they would allow you to leave early at special request to attend appointments and they would not dock your pay. Once your quota was filled for an item you were paid by the piece for each item above the quota. The working hours were generally 7am–4pm with a three quarter hour lunch break. Up until the 1970s the pottery operated on the basis of four days casting and one day's finishing off. On a Friday afternoon if the work was finished they would sit around and play cards. In Mashman Brothers time the staff were paid in cash. One of the staff walked around with a box filled with their pay packets, handing them out to the individual staff.

References: Information supplied by Judy Peters from an Interview with Don Soper, April 2010.



Left: Don Soper poses at the Mashman pipeware kiln at the works in the 1950s.

Right: Don Soper and Jennifer pose with the Henessy Brothers truck at the Mashman Pottery works in the 1950s.





Given that the 'War on Waste' is topical at present, this image of Willoughby Municipal Council workers picking up household items on 15 October 1935 during 'Health Week' is an appropriate subject that demonstrates the changes over time. It is from the David Warner collection. Willoughby Museum, David Warner collection, 592

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 10 June 2017: As advised on page 3, the General Meeting scheduled for this date has been postponed as it conflicts with the Queen's Birthday long weekend.

Saturday 12 August 2017: Our speaker will be writer and teacher Elizabeth Butel, whose book *Arthur Roberts: a teachers' journey*, covers the history of early education in New South Wales with particular emphasis on the challenges faced by teachers. Additional information will be updated in the next newsletter.

Tours & Events

Artistic Voices of Willoughby District: This new exhibition exploring the artistic talent of individuals in the Willoughby District was formally opened by our Patron and Mayor. It features around 100 artistic individuals

who have made significant contributions to the cultural life of Willoughby City over the years. The exhibition is open from 1.00 to 4.00 pm on Sundays or by appointment until the end of August.

Biennial Willoughby Arts Festival. We have held discussions with Cassandra Hard Lawrie, Willoughby City Council's new Biennial Coordinator, which has led to a revision of our plans for the next exhibition at the Museum.

We are now planning a new exhibition, *Museum Kaleidoscopes*, which will utilise a range of objects from our collection to reflect on the potential new meanings cast by household and local items, as well as agricultural and artistic endeavours. Co-curated by Bob McKillop, Terry Fogarty and Rob Wilson, the new exhibition will seek to present a fresh look at traditional items in the collection.

If you have ideas or items that may assist, we will be delighted to hear from you.

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].

WILLOUGHBY DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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LATE ITEMS