

WILLOUGHBY HISTORY CHATTERS

DECEMBER 2012

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**8 December: WDHS
Christmas Party at the
Museum (page 6)**

**9 February: North Shore
Railway history presen-
tation and AGM at
Chatswood Library
(page 6)**

THE WDHS IN 2013

2013 promises to be a big year for the Willoughby District Historical Society. Most significantly, it will be the centenary of our Federation cottage, *Boronia*, and we will be developing a new exhibition to mark this event.

Next October we will also be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the opening of the Willoughby Museum. We plan to celebrate these important milestones in a special way as outlined in the Museum Report on page 2.

The Mayor, Pat Reilly, formally launched *Picture Willoughby*, the Library's new website on 22 November. This resource provides access to some 700 historical images showing the development of Willoughby from the 1890s to the present day. In his presentation, Pat noted the contribution that the WDHS has made to the project. Following the formal launch, I made a presentation on our local history and what Willoughby means to me as the 'City of Diversity'.

I attended the funeral of Willoughby City councillor Philip Hickie on 27 November on behalf of the Society. Cr Hickie was a strong supporter of heritage issues in Willoughby and chaired the Heritage Advisory Committee for a number of years. Mayor Pat Reilly referred to Philip's

gentle nature and his devotion to his duty as a councillor in his eulogy.

Bob McKillop represented the WDHS at the annual IMAGInE Awards for the museum and gallery sector in New South Wales. This was held at the White Rabbit Gallery in Chippendale on the evening of 23 November.

There were 70 nominations for awards across 12 categories. The Willoughby Museum was one of seven nominations for the Exhibitions and Public Engagement category for voluntary-run museums and galleries for our 'That's Entertainment' exhibition. We won this category last year, so were not anticipating further recogni-

tion. The Port of Yamba Historical Society won this category for its special exhibition *Ghosts of World War I—101 Local Heroes*. This small museum has seen a remarkable revival under the energetic leadership of Marea Buist, who accepted the award at the event.

We were particularly pleased that Ken Smith, our assessor under the 2009 Standards Program won the Individual Achievement Award for a volunteer-run museum or gallery. Ken has been the force behind the revival of the Parramatta & District Historical Society and has continued to provide advice and support to the WDHS.

Paul Storm



Colin Rhodes, Chair of Museums & Galleries NSW, introduces Ken Smith of Parramatta DHS as the winner of the Individual Achievement Award for a volunteer run museum or gallery at the 2012 IMAGInE Awards.

RF McKillop

RAHS State Conference: 'Saturated with filth and corruption?'

Mary Thom and Bob McKillop represented the Willoughby DHS at the 2012 RAHS State Conference on 20 October at Rowers on Cooks River, Wolli Creek.

The conference had been initiated by the late Lesley Muir, who had set out to explain why the Cooks River had a reputation as one of Sydney's most polluted waterways, while the area was a place for 19th century speculation and political intrigue.

Following the presentation of the 2012 Heritage Grants by the Minister for the Environment & Heritage, the RAHS President, Dr Anne-Marie Whitaker, gave an address on the 'Future of History'. She argued that rather than diminishing history, electronic media has the potential to enhance historical research and the communication of its findings in leaps and bounds.

A highlight was the inaugural Lesley Muir Address by Professor Peter Spearritt. He explored Sydney's proud history of foreshore conservation, public access to the beach and the establishment of national parks against a backdrop of filthy and sometimes corrupt intrusions into the

landscape. He provided an entertaining and insightful argument regarding recent moves towards unsustainable investments in our capital cities, particularly in desalination plants. Peter was followed by Lesley Muir's husband, Brian Madden, whose presentation was based on the work that Lesley had undertaken on pollution and corruption relating to Cooks River.

The other outstanding presentation was by Howard Tanner, a heritage architect and former Chairman of the NSW Heritage Council. Using *Tempe House* as a case

study, he explored the fate of Sydney's historic houses in the context of today's development pressures. He concluded that the current NSW planning laws are largely ineffective in realising good outcomes for heritage buildings. To rectify this, we need new policies and new actions that suit the 21st century.

Participants then walked to *Tempe House*, where they were broken into two groups to undertake guided tours of Alexander Spark's wonderful 1836 residence designed by John Verge, and the adjacent 1883 St Magdalene's Chapel.



AT THE MUSEUM in 2013

The Willoughby Museum will be closed for the summer holiday period after 2 December until Sunday 26 January 2013. Our small group of volunteers will continue with collection management tasks, together with building maintenance tasks.

As noted on page 1, 2013 will be a big year for the museum. We are planning a new exhibition as part of the 2013 National Trust Heritage Festival, *Community Milestones*, from 18 April. It will focus on *Boronia* as a typical pre-

World War I Federation cottage built for rental and its setting in the wider South Chatswood Conservation Area, which demonstrates the rapid rise of Chatswood following the opening of the North Shore Railway.

We have applied for a Museums & Galleries VIM Project Development grant to fund the production of a short film on Boronia and the Conservation Area as the centre-piece of the exhibition. Should this be successful, we will engage local photographer Rachel Simp-

son of Victory One Media to film to produce this film. Rachel completed her BA in Media Arts and Communication at the University of Technology Sydney in 2011 and is a director of Victory One Media.

Recent tasks at the museum have focused on assessing and cataloguing collection items. Recently we have been concentrating on Whiting family items handed down from Evelyn Whiting, which provide a fascinating insight into late 19th century life.

MEMBERS' CORNER

Welcome to our new member, Seong Cho, who has been active as a museum volunteer since mid-October. Seong's interests are art history, heritage and social culture and she has been applying her specialist skills in graphic design and illustrating to enhance the labelling of our museum displays.

Jo Harris, the Ku-ring-gai family historian, drew a large audience to our general meeting on 13 October. Jo outlined basic principles and rules for family history research and then gave an account of how she had gone about researching her own family's history.

Jo Harris concluded her presentation with an amusing poem about an overzealous genealogist before presenting details of the ancestors of two local individuals she had researched especially for the presentation. Much to the delight of the audience and the individuals concerned, these turned out to be the ancestors of Harry Fox and Robin Storm. Jo then presented the

documents she had prepared for Harry and Nicholas Storm on behalf of Robin.

Bob McKillop thanked Jo Harris on behalf of the society for her most entertaining presentation and presented her with the copy of his own family history book, *Into the Golden West: The McKillops of Buddah 1782-1974*.

A small group of members participated in the tour to The Arms of Australia Inn Museum at Emu Plains on 21 November. Two guides led our group around the old inn cum residence and explained the various artefacts on display and their connection to the locality or prominent local residents. The museum is blessed with ample display space, including a large barn adjacent to the main building where farm machinery is displayed. Following the visit, the group adjourned to the nearby hotel for an excellent 'pub lunch'.

The **WDHS website** has assisted in promoting the Society to a much wider audience and our monitoring of its use

is encouraging. The historical profiles of prominent Willoughby residents, industries and suburbs are the most popular areas viewed by our visitors. During November there were 521 visits to the website and it recorded 5612 'hits', the highest monthly figure to date.

The website continues to be upgraded with new material on a regular basis. We have recently added the Willoughby History Chatters newsletters for 2010 and 2011, together with profiles of prominent residents such as Eric Nicholls, Edgar Deans and the colourful playwright Betty Roland. Their residences, now listed on the Willoughby Local Environment Plan are also featured.

We need assistance from members to undertake the research necessary to prepare additional history topics on the website. It is a most rewarding task that provides interesting insights into our local history. Please contact the society if you can assist.



Mary Thom at the WDHS table, which we shared with the Berrima DHS at the RAHS State Conference at Wollie Creek on 20 October. The tables provided a great opportunity meet with members of other societies during breaks in proceedings. RF McKillop photo

UPDATE ON OUR RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS, Part 19

St Paul's Anglican Church on the corner of Fullers Road and View Street in West Chatswood celebrated its centenary in 2001. Its history, up until that date, has been well covered in two books written by Leslie Hicks and published by St Paul's Parish Council. The first, *A City on a Hill*, covers the first ninety years from 1901 to 1991. The second, *Changing City, Changing Church* covers the decade up to the centenary. They are concerned not only with church buildings and its religious and social activities, but also with some of the events in the lives of individual members of the congregation. Detailed too are the concerns the church has faced finding a suitable second rectory and the provision of adequate parking in what is a busy location. The present rectory is in View Street next to the church parking lot.

St Paul's currently has five ministers, a general manager and two part-time administrative staff, together with volunteers. The congregation numbers about 300 to 330. Its minister wants the church to remain flexible, adjusting its services according to its people's needs. St Paul's is concerned not only with its traditional congregation but also with the welfare of its Asian members. A senior assistant minister conducts separate services in Cantonese and Mandarin. As well as the traditional Sunday Services in English, there is a mid-week prayer-book service once a month after which a lunch is provided. Also there is a monthly business men's breakfast.

There is no choir. The electronic organ purchased in 1975 and mentioned in Hick's 1991 book 'died' and was recently replaced with an electronic keyboard that plays in either piano or organ mode. A band of modern instruments plays for services in English, while the Asians prefer their music from the piano. An assistant minister is responsible for

training and looking after the musicians, their rosters, and the selection of appropriate music for services.

The church has a substantial list of social activities, but a new senior minister has cut back over recent years, devoting more time to the training and teaching of his staff. There is input to high schools when invited and it also contributes to the Streetwork charity. St Paul's claims to be the initiator of that organisation, which now has its headquarters on the top floor of the old parsonage of the Uniting Church in Clanwilliam Street. Streetwork is supported too by other churches and organisations in the municipality.

The children's playgroup, Jelly Bean, is attended by about 30 families and there is a waiting list of approximately

double that number. Bible study groups at St Paul's are called Community Groups. Some meet at the church, others in private homes. A Line Dancing group once a week attracts about 80 people, mainly Asian women but also some men. There is table tennis twice a week attended mostly by retired Asian men.

The church is also involved in both national and international organisations. These include 'Youth Surge', which helps struggling churches interstate and in Singapore, and an interdenominational organisation 'Kingdom Ministries Worldwide'.

My thanks to Debby Gould for the time she took from her busy church schedule to talk with me.

Mollie Shelley



The Anglican St Pauls church at the corner of Fullers Road and View Street in Chatswood.
St Pauls Church photo

THE CHAFFER FAMILY STORY, Part 2

This is the second instalment of a speech given by Arthur Chaffey at the Centenary Dinner for the Chaffer tannery at the Manly Pacific Hotel on 16 October 1987.

Production of vegetable tanned leather for saddler, harness and footwear trade continued with Walter installing the latest machines then available. For example, in 1904 he installed the first roller-type fleshing machine in Australia. A Babcock water-tube boiler feeding a Tangye steam engine had previously been installed to power the plant. As an indication of forward thinking, Walter also installed a small alternator, driven by the steam engine to provide electric power to drive pumps and other small items of plant that were required in positions remote from the line shaft.

During World War I lots of Chaffer leather was used to equip the armed forces, particularly the Australian Light Horse Regiment. By the 1920s the rapid spread of the automobile led to a serious decline in demand for saddler and harness leathers. Faced with this challenge, the new generation of Chaffers set about diversifying production.

By the late 1920s they introduced chrome tanning, which made possible a substantial throughput of garment leathers and other special lines. In 1928 the business was incorporated under the name W Chaffer & Sons Limited with an authorised capital of £20,000.

The ready acceptance of the new production lines considerably assisted in the re-equipment of the tannery with whole hide machinery. This was necessary to implement the family's long term plan to become the sole producers of upholstery leather in New South Wales. The onset of the Great Depres-

Chaffers Chatswood Tannery in 1983.

Photo courtesy Chaffer family



sion slowed down these plans, but by 1936 the re-equipment was completed and upholstery leather became Chaffer's main production line.

Following the passage of the 1936 NSW Companies Act, the business formally became W Chaffer & Sons Pty Limited. The onset of World War II interrupted the firm's innovative growth when the hide and leather industry was brought under strict government control.

Walter Chaffer, then aged 86, died on 7 July 1943. Up to the outbreak of war, he regularly attended the weekly hide auction held in the Wool Exchange each Friday.

In the post-war era PVC synthetics had come to the fore as an alternative upholstery material, seriously undermining the market for upholstery leather. To meet this challenge, Chaffers now concentrated on supplying the handbag and leather goods trades. At the

peak of this period, the company catered for 75 per cent of Australian leather used in these trades.

During the 1960s the third generation of Chaffers began to exert influence on the direction of the company. This resulted in the establishment of a decentralised wet blue operation at Aberdeen in the 1970s and in 1985 the finishing operation was moved from Chatswood to Kingsgrove

Looking back on the success of the company in a century of operations, I think the main reason was the solid foundation and outstanding example set by Walter Chaffer in the formative years of the company. He had a simple business philosophy—produce the right article—do the right thing by everyone concerned and you must get a share of the business offering. Walter had pride in his good name; he had pride in his business; and he had pride in his skill to make good leather.

FROM THE ARCHIVES



In keeping with our forthcoming presentation on the North Shore Railway (see below), we offer this 1907 view of a train approaching Artarmon station from Chatswood. This postcard is from the Isobel Hammond collection held by the WDHS.

CONTACTS

WDHS Management Committee:

President: Paul Storm (9419 7354)

Vice-Presidents Mary Thom, Judy Baird

Treasurer: Bob McKillop

Committee Members: Joan Antarakis,
Betty Doggett, Harry Fox

Patron: Pat Reilly, Mayor of Willoughby

Newsletter Editor: Bob McKillop

Willoughby Museum

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

Opening hours: 1-4pm each Sunday.
Admission \$5 adults; \$4 concession; \$2
child, \$10 family.

NOTE: The museum will be closed from 3
December 2012 to 26 January 2013.

COMING EVENTS

Members' Meetings

At the Willoughby Room, Willoughby Library at The Concourse, commencing at 2.00pm.

Saturday 9 February 2013: Bob McKillop, will speak on the *North Shore Railway: Sydney's first suburban line*. He will cover early European settlement in the region and the political intrigue in the decision to construct the line in 1855. The line from Hornsby to St Leonards opened on 1 January 1890, with the extension to the ferry terminal at Milsons Point following three years later. The key role of the North Shore Railway in shaping urban development in Willoughby, particularly its impetus on the suburbs of Chatswood and Artarmon, will be explored. The event will also include our Annual General Meeting.

Tours & Events

We conduct tours to places of historical interest each even month of the year. Friends and members of fellow historical societies are welcome. Forthcoming events are:

Saturday 8 December: Members Christmas Party at the Willoughby Museum 58 Johnson Street, Chatswood, from 2.00pm. This is our annual get-together for members and special guests to enjoy a social outing with a participatory event and a special afternoon tea. Harry Fox is organising 'Kim's Game' as this year's entertainment and members are asked to bring a plate as a contribution to the afternoon tea. Please contact us as per the details in the box to confirm your attendance.

Helping at the Museum

We are looking for volunteers to assist at the museum in the following areas:

Museum guides, collection management tasks, website administration and writing articles for the newsletter.

Please contact us by phone or email if you can assist or have friends who may be interested.

WILLOUGHBY DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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STOP PRESS

Note: the photo on page 2 is of Tempe House and was taken by Bob McKillop.