

KU-RING-GAI HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

(Including Ku-ring-gai Family History Group) • Patron: The Mayor of Ku-ring-gai

November 2021 Newsletter Vol. 39 No. 9

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the **President's message**

How good is it to be enjoying a little more freedom!

We have re-opened our research rooms on Tuesday and Friday mornings.

However, owing to the one person per four square metre rule, which is in place until December, we will not be holding any face-to-face meetings until next year.

Our October meeting, the first held using Zoom, was most successful thanks to our hosts John Cameron and Judith Godden, and, of course, also to our guest speaker Chris Edye for his presentation of *Alfred Wright's Autograph Book*.

I will look forward to you joining us for our next Zoom meeting on 20 November, our last for the year, when historian Carol Liston AO will present *Untold Stories: women transported from Britain to New South Wales*. As before, the link will be forwarded to all members during the week prior.

I am pleased to advise that the restoration has been completed to the front façade of 'our home', the former Gordon Public School, and the scaffolding removed. This significant heritage building is a local landmark and was the first public building constructed in the Ku-ring-gai area.

Following requests received from local State members of Parliament for suggestions for inclusion in the Blue Plaques Program, we have nominated this historic building for consideration.

The program, recently announced by the NSW Government, fosters curiosity in our heritage by recognising the places, personalities and major events that matter to communities. It is inspired by the internationally recognised UK scheme and co-ordinated by Heritage NSW.

The plaques will be linked to a digital interface, allowing access to the detailed stories behind them.

I will let you know in due course if the nomination is successful.

Enjoy the freedom and take care,

Lorna Watt

The Next Zoom Meeting

2pm Saturday 20th November 2021

*Untold stories : women transported from Britain
to New South Wales*

Presented by Carol Liston

Carol Liston AO, BA (Hons), PhD, FRAHS is an Australian historian who specialises in the history of early New South Wales (1788-1860). She is an Adjunct Associate Professor at Western Sydney University and a Fellow of both the Whitlam Institute and the Royal Australian Historical Society.

Carol is President of the Royal Australian Historical Society, a position she has also held in 1988-92, 2002 and 2014-18. She is also President of the Board of the Biographical Database of Australia, an online resource for historians and genealogists made up of profiles of deceased persons born in Australia, including Aboriginal people, as well as people who arrived as convicts or immigrants.



In 2016, the History Council of NSW awarded Carol the Annual History Citation in recognition of her extensive contributions to community and local history organisations as well as to history and heritage.

In 2017, Carol was made an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for 'distinguished service to the preservation and documentation of Australian history and heritage, to professional societies, and to education as a teacher and mentor'.

Join us via Zoom for this meeting.

Details for joining the Zoom meeting will be provided to all members prior to 20th November.

Abbotsholme

After nearly four months, Sydneysiders were well and truly tired of lockdown! But did you know that this wasn't the only time we'd been locked down during a pandemic?

Throughout the Spanish Influenza epidemic of 1919, Abbotsholme College, a private school in Killara – also known as 'The Open Air School' – was the only school in this area to be exempted from closure, but it was placed in quarantine for many months, with prefects acting as pickets at the school gates.



Abbotsholme - cnr Lynwood Ave and Werona Ave, Killara

Strict observance was certainly the rule: students weren't allowed any visitors at all, gauze masks were worn and all letters were fumigated. During this time, open air church services at the College temporarily replaced the weekly march to St John's Church at Gordon.

The history of Abbotsholme is very intriguing. The school's founder and owner, John Fitz-Maurice, helped earn it a strong, positive reputation and social prominence over its seventeen years of existence from 1909 to 1925.

John Fitz-Maurice had a very interesting background that was never really understood or known locally. A junior master at the time wondered whether perhaps he may have been the younger son of a titled family in England who may have been displeased with him when he came to Australia in 1900. What is known is that Abbotsholme was very successful – so it was surprising that after Fitz-Maurice passed away, the school closed down.

In 1967 dormant memories came to light. During that year Harold Holt disappeared in the sea at Portsea and amongst the thousands of words written about him, it was mentioned that he served two terms at Abbotsholme before proceeding to Wesley College in Melbourne. There were quite a few other well-known public figures who were found to have attended Abbotsholme too, including William McMahon.

Just five weeks earlier, a Sydney University lecturer had appealed through the letters page of the *Sydney Morning Herald* for former students and staff of

Abbotsholme to make contact. Almost fifty did so, and their collective reminiscences started to reveal the intriguing story.

As a result of this awakening, it was discovered that John Fitz-Maurice had been buried at St John's Cemetery in an unmarked grave. In 2005, members of the Ku-ring-gai Historical Society, Masonic brethren and parishioners gathered to dedicate a headstone, newly placed on the plot.

The above is only a very brief summary of the amazing article written in 2012 by John Lanser, and reprinted in the Ku-ring-gai Historical Society's journal, *The Historian* (vol. 41, no. 1, November 2012).

For our recently joined members who may not know, *The Historian* series offers a vast range of articles of local interest and a volume is published most years. It was not published in 2020 or 2021 due to the constraints on COVID, but details of how to obtain earlier copies can be found on our website: www.khs.org.au/the-historian

Neil Falconer

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Frederick 'Skeeta' Smith

'One story says that Frederick came upon a man and his horse with his cart bogged. The man was flogging his horse with a whip trying to get the horse to pull the cart out of the bog. Frederick calmly strode over, grabbed the whip out of the hands of the owner, patted and calmed the horse down, got hold of the wheel stuck in the bog and with all his strength, forced the wheel to turn and with a gee up to the horse, together they pulled the cart out of the bog. Then he calmly returned the whip to the owner with a word of warning that if ever he saw him whip a horse again, that he – Frederick – would use the whip on him.

Because of this 'Skeeta' became known as *The Strongest Man on the North Shore Line*.'

We have received an enquiry, from interstate, enclosing the above story, asking if we are able to supply any further stories or incidents about this man, who was born in 1895, died 1958, who was one of the fourteen children of Edwin and Mary Ann Smith of St Ives.

? CAN YOU HELP ?

If you can, contact the Family History
Research Group at:

khs@khs.org.au

Ride a Cock Horse.....

In the Patrick White exhibition at the State Library, I was amazed to see the picture of him as a small boy on a rocking horse. Memories flooded back as I knew it was a Roebuck horse - and we have one, proudly standing in our lounge room. Matthew Jones, the exhibition curator from the National Library, said he had had many enquiries about the horse and was pleased I knew the history.



Tommy Dodd (the author's grandson) on a Roebuck rocking horse

In a previous life we had a toy shop, not filled with plastic rubbish I hasten to add but a treasure house of the finest toys we could find from around the world. We went to the great toy fairs in Germany, England and Scandinavia each year and imported the finest wooden and educational toys we could find.

We tracked down as many local quality toy craftsmen and women as we could and during our travels were honoured to meet Norm Roebuck in his fantastic workshop in old stables in Leichhardt. It was a woodworker's paradise full of amazing memorabilia.

Norm's grandfather, Fred Roebuck, arrived in Australia in 1880 from Britain, where his father John had been making rocking horses since the 1850s. In 1865 John had made a rocking horse for the infant Duke of York, who later became George V.

Fred opened a workshop here in the 1890s and would have made the horse which Patrick White is riding. He also made the horse that the then Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret are riding in that famous 1930s photograph.



He made it for their grandmother, the Countess of Strathmore.

Fred died in 1932 and his sons Frederick and Norman carried on. At its peak the workshop employed thirty men making rocking horses and other wooden toys. As the age of plastic dawned in the '60s the business tapered off and Norm said, "I won't carry on 'til I die in the sawdust".

In 1972 Norm retired and very graciously allowed us to have, for our own children, one of the last horses that he made. There was a sign in the workshop that said 'Roebuck horses are not a product. They are an achievement'. They certainly are.

Where is Patrick White's horse now? Our Roebuck will carry on through many generations to come - a tribute to the family which carried on a great tradition over a hundred and fifty years.

Patrick Dodd.

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Family History Group

If you are researching members of your family (particularly in the United Kingdom) you may be interested in a virtual conference being held on Friday 12 and Saturday 13 November by the Federation of Family History Societies. Many family history groups will be represented and may be able to assist your research. Tickets are £10. For full information please view www.fnf-reallyuseful.com

Our family history meeting for November has been cancelled as we are only allowed 25 members in the meeting room at this stage and several speakers were reluctant to use the Zoom platform. We have rebooked Judith Dunn and Clare Brown for early next year.

Our December meeting is usually a very informal one. This year we have decided to have a picnic afternoon tea in Gordon Park on 4th December from 2 pm. All members of KHS are invited to join us. The plan is to be together and to renew friendships. It will be BYO - bring your own drinks, coffee/tea, and something to eat. Bring a rug or a picnic chair to the park on Werona Avenue at Gordon (near the Railway Station). We will gather under the gum trees at the Werona end of the park. There is plenty of parking nearby. If it is wet the picnic will be cancelled. In the event of doubtful weather, Susan Alder (0409981605) or Joan Stebbing (04212617077) will be available to give you the final decision after 12 noon. We look forward to seeing you then.

Susan Holmes

Perisher Historical Society

Perisher Historical Society (PHS) was incorporated in 2007, with support and encouragement from both Perisher Resort management and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). The Society is interested in the history of skiing and resort along the Kosciuszko Road from the Thredbo River to the summit of Mount Kosciuszko.



Johnny Abbottsmith's SkiHavenTow at Smiggins Holes -1952

Our website at <https://perisherhistory.org.au> includes an eMuseum, which, like a physical museum, collects memories, photographs, videos, stories and articles about the Perisher Valley and surrounding area. Whilst a physical museum has not been a possibility, we do have a display case in the Perisher Skitube Terminal containing memorabilia and historic skiing film footage.

We have a small band of volunteers who produce a newsletter twice a year, develop the website, organise social events and carry out research for publication.

The society has published several history books which are available in the Bookshop section of our website.

Highway to Heaven: A history of Perisher and the Ski Resorts along the Kosciuszko Road, by Peter Southwell-Keely.

A History of the Early Development of Perisher Smiggins, by John Davis.

Hotel Kosciuszko: The history and legacy of Australia's first planned alpine resort, by Donald A. Johnston.

Soon to be published is a book on snowfields' pioneer Johnny Abbottsmith, who built the first ski tow at Smiggin Holes (now part of Perisher Resort) and ran the first oversnow transport with his dog team.

The first ski club lodges were built in Perisher in the 1950s, and there is a strong connection with the

Ku-ring-gai and northern Sydney area. Scout groups from Killara and Gordon were among those to build lodges in the 1960s, including Ku-ring-gai Alpine Lodge in 1962.

2022 will mark the 70th Anniversary of the first ski lift in Perisher, and Perisher Historical Society along with Perisher Resort will be marking this anniversary in a number of ways, with planning still underway.



Ku-ring-gai Alpine Lodge

The society would be interested to hear from any members of KHS who have photos or stories about the early days in Perisher.

Please contact us at history@perisherhistory.org.au or phone Jan Glover on 0419 256 038.

For those wishing to join PHS, you can be assured of a warm welcome and know that your membership will assist us to research and document the early days of the exploration and development of the Perisher Range area.

Jan Glover (Member of KHS and PHS)

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Tales from the Past

John Morris - Born 1804

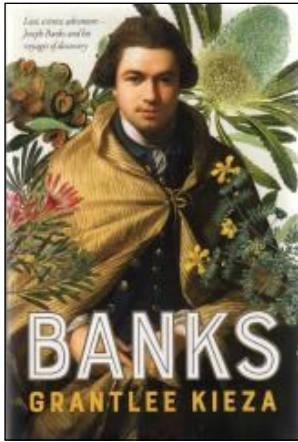
Ralph Hawkins in *The Convict Timbergetters of Pennant Hills* tells the story of John Morris. It can be regarded either as a tragedy or an account of achievement, depending on your view. John was convicted in the Middlesex Gaol Delivery, for being in a group that stole a pair of shoes worth 8 shillings. He was sentenced to death.

This in itself was not noteworthy for those days. What made it so was that John was 8 years old. Mercy was accorded him and he was given 14 years transportation instead and arrived in Sydney in 1814 aged 10. He stood all of 3ft 10" tall. Tragedy? Very much so on the face of it but what would happen to him if he had not been arrested? Probably he would have continued an ever-deepening life of crime with an even more tragic outcome.

As it was, he worked in the Lane Cove Sawing Establishment near Fiddens Wharf and is believed to be the John Morris who came to own a timber yard on Darling Harbour in the 1830s. He was one of many convicts who turned adversity into prosperity they could never have otherwise achieved.

Sir Joseph Banks

I have recently finished reading 'Banks' by Grantlee Kieza which I found extremely interesting. We all know about Joseph Banks accompanying James Cook on his voyage to the south seas, but there is so much more to learn about his life and times. Did you know that that voyage was not the only one he undertook?



Before he joined Cook's company, he participated in an expedition to Newfoundland and Labrador, where he collected many plant specimens and other items of natural history. His wealth was such that he could afford to effectively pay his own way on these expeditions and take his own staff and equipment with him. Not only was he well-heeled, but it is very interesting to read about his friendships, relationships and influences with so many people whose names are so well known to

us today. At the top of the list was King George III with whom he was quite friendly. Then there were such people as the Earl of Sandwich. Lord Sydney, Thomas Pennant, Lord Hawkesbury, Evan Nepean, Carl Linnaeus, Benjamin Franklin and many others.

After returning from Cook's voyage, Banks still wanted to see more of the world and one of the places he explored was Iceland, a place relatively unknown in those times.

The amount of research that went into the writing of this book is incredible. The bibliography at the end of the book extends to some 59 pages!

A read I thoroughly recommend.

Tony Spargo

Tour Report

Your KHS Tour Team met recently to review tour options given the State's COVID-19 restrictions.

We are pleased to announce that we have commenced examining and rescheduling our planned tour venues. For the next several tours we will concentrate on venues available via public transport and those that were cancelled earlier this year. All participants will need to be double vaccinated.

Our tour to the *Sub Base Platypus, Neutral Bay*, for June last was postponed on the eve of that tour due to the rapid increase in COVID-19 numbers and will now take place on 9th December. As the initial group will be attending on that day the tour has been fully booked.

Our tour plans for early 2022 are as follows:

January : No Tour.

February : Cockatoo Island, UNESCO World Heritage Site.

March : The Arms of Australia Inn, Emu Plains and Museum of Fire, Penrith.
This venue will be confirmed in the February Newsletter.

Tour Team

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Tales from the Past

Snowballs in Old Lane Cove?

The Sydney snowstorm of 1836

An early riser at Sydney's Bellevue Hill Boarding House and Day School, on the morning of 28 June 1836, was astounded to see a cloud of white particles descending from the sky. He deemed them to be white feathers, but when a Master was summoned to the window, it was pronounced to be - wonder of wonders - snow. It was not known that at 6am on that morning, the thermometer had dropped to 30 degrees Fahrenheit, an extraordinary event, as Sydney temperatures rarely go below 40 degrees. Apparently, from the newspapers of the day, snow fell for an hour or so, roofs were covered and about an inch of snow fell on the metropolis, reaching down to the harbourside beaches.



Residents of Sydney enjoying their first look at the wonderful snow fall.

Bathurst had a foot of snow and towards Parramatta, several inches were experienced. Snowballs were made in Sydney streets and the author Thomas Alexander Brown, (pen name - Rolf Boldrewood), saw children disporting themselves with snowballs at suburban Enmore. As late as 28 June 1913, a journalist writing in The Sydney Morning Herald under the heading: Progress in the Suburbs - Chatswood to Hornsby at p18, said,

"in the early days the residents had a heavy fall of snow, and for the first and only time local residents indulged in snowballing".

New Member

In September we have had a new member join our Society. Welcome to the Society.

Greg TAYLOR from West Pymble

We hope you will find your membership rewarding, and look forward to your participation in the many activities we have to offer once we recover from this current lockdown.

KNOW YOUR MUNICIPALITY

Ku-ring-gai

European settlement in the Ku-ring-gai area dates from 1814 when land was settled next to the Lane Cove River. Land was used mainly for timber-getting and saw-milling, with many farms and orchards established from the 1840s, and market gardens from the 1870s. Residential subdivision and growth occurred after the opening of the North Shore railway line in 1890. Some growth took place in the 1920s and 1930s, spurred by land subdivision and increased access brought about by the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The area remained semi-rural until the 1940s, with a population of 40,000 in 1947.

The most significant development took place during the post-war years. Substantial growth occurred between 1950 and 1980, when the population doubled from 50,000 to 100,000, with the most rapid growth during the 1950s and 1960s. During the 1970s population growth began to slow down, with the population being relatively stable during the 1980s. The population fluctuated slightly between 1991 and 2006, between 99,000 and 100,000. Growth took place from 2006, with the population increasing to nearly 118,000 in 2016. Council estimate in 2018 was 126,046. Much of the recent growth has been in areas where urban consolidation (medium and high-density housing) has occurred, such as Gordon, Killara, St Ives, Turramurra and Wahroonga, particularly along the Pacific Highway and near the railway stations.

ANCESTRY

Ku-ring-gai Council area - Total persons (Usual resi- dence)	2016		
Ancestry	Number	%	Greater Sydney %
English	38,388	32.5	25.3
Australian	29,484	25.0	23.5
Chinese	20,879	17.7	10.1
Irish	12,181	10.3	8.6
Scottish	10,924	9.3	6.4
German	3,808	3.2	2.5
Indian	3,418	2.9	4.0
Korean	3,335	2.8	1.3
Italian	2,930	2.5	4.2
South African	2,763	2.3	0.6
Dutch	1,544	1.3	0.9
Iranian	1,493	1.3	0.5
New Zealander	1,235	1.0	0.8

EDUCATION

In 2016, 47.9% of people in Ku-ring-gai Council area had a bachelor or higher degree qualification, higher than Greater Sydney (28%). This represents an increase of 7,557 people since 2011.

SCHOOLS

In 2020, St Ives North Public, with 959 students, was the fifth best school in Sydney, followed by Hornsby North Public School as reported by www.ellastlist.com.au/about-us, in January 2021. A publication, reported in the SMH, has a great impact on real estate prices. Median price in the catchment area is \$2.5 million (2021.)

AGE STRUCTURE

There were 4,036 people (3.4%) over the age of 85 living in Ku-ring-gai Council area in 2016, (compared with 2.0% in Greater Sydney). The largest age group being 45 to 49 year olds.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

\$2,633 per week compared with \$1,745 for Greater Sydney and \$1,431 for Australia

MORTGAGE

37% of households had a mortgage with a median weekly repayment of \$714, compared with \$495 for Greater Sydney and \$409 for Australia.

FAMILY

47% of couples had children compared with 35% for Greater Sydney and 30% for Australia.



Filling out the 1966 census.

EMPLOYMENT

54,920 people living in Ku-ring-gai Council area in 2016 were employed, of which 62% worked full-time and 36% part-time.

There were more professionals in Ku-ring-gai Council area in 2016 than any other occupation:

Managers 11,587 (21%) (GS 13%)

Professionals 21,590 (39%) (GS 26%)

Technicians and trades 2,809 (5%) (12%)

The major differences between the age structure of the workforce in Ku-ring-gai Council area and New South Wales were:

A smaller percentage of local workers aged 25 to 34 years (17.4% compared to 23.1%)

A smaller percentage of local workers aged 35 to 44 years (18.5% compared to 22.3%)

A larger percentage of local workers aged 45 to 54 years (23.9% compared to 21.3%)

A larger percentage of local workers aged 65 years and over (8.3% compared to 4.3%)

There are more resident workers (all industries) qualified in management and commerce in Ku-ring-gai Council area than in any other field.

HOUSING

At June 2018, Ku-ring-gai Council area had a median house valuation of \$2,074,539; \$1,334,095 higher than the median house valuation for New South Wales.

INCOME

Ku-ring-gai labour force have a higher proportion of people with higher incomes, \$1,750 or more, per week than NSW. 11,620 (21%) people earn more than \$3,000 per week. In the rest of NSW 5.8% earn more than \$3,000 per week.

The major differences between the weekly income of the resident workers in Ku-ring-gai Council area and New South Wales were:

A larger percentage of resident workers earned \$3,000 or more (21.2% compared to 5.8%)

A larger percentage of resident workers earned \$2,000 - \$2,999 (14.0% compared to 9.0%)

A smaller percentage of resident workers earned \$800 - \$999 (7.3% compared to 12.3%)

A smaller percentage of resident workers earned \$650 - \$799 (5.3% compared to 10.2%)

RELIGION

Type		%
Anglican	22,251	18.8
Roman Catholic	22,239	18.5
Uniting	5,578	4.7
Presbyterian	3,467	2.8
Judaism	3,161	2.7
Buddhism	3,113	2.6
Hinduism	2,257	1.9
Baptist	2,194	1.8

CREDIT RATING

In September 2021, the Sydney Morning Herald reported that five Sydney northern suburbs feature at the top of the country's credit-scores list, the leader being Ku-ring-gai.

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

In Ku-ring-gai Council area in 2016, 4,911 people who spoke a language other than English at home, reported difficulty speaking English.

Material used in preparation of this Article was sourced from the ABS, Ku-ring-gai Council and .idcommunity or as identified. Most of the data comes from the 2016 Census.

The results of the 2021 Census will not be available until late 2022.

Morrison Hammond



DIARY DATES

NOVEMBER 2021

Saturday 6 : **2pm - Family History Meeting**

Cancelled

Saturday 20 : **2pm - General Meeting - By Zoom**

Untold stories : women transported from

Britain to New South Wales

Presenter : Carol Liston AO

DECEMBER 2021

Saturday 4 : **2pm - Family History — A Day Out**

A picnic in the park (see FHG report)

Thursday 9 : Sub Base tour

JANUARY 2022

Saturday 15 : **2pm - General Meeting**

Out of the Dark, Into the Light

Presenter : Laila Ellmoos

Note

As meetings may have to be cancelled or postponed at short notice, please check the KHS website for any changes.

For correspondence :-

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 KHS website ~ webmaster@khs.org.au
 Treasurer ~ treasurer@khs.org.au

Treasurer's Report

Our income for September was strong from Membership Fees and Research (both Family History and Built Heritage).

Our bank account details are:

Ku-ring-gai Historical Society

Westpac Bank

BSB: 032-083 Account No: 248971

Please keep safe and well.

Marilyn van Eerde

ADMINISTRATION

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	Jean Smith	9498 4468
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	Pam Tout	9488 9807

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Research Centre

The Research Centre has re-opened on Tuesdays and Fridays between 10 am and 12 noon.

khs.org.au

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