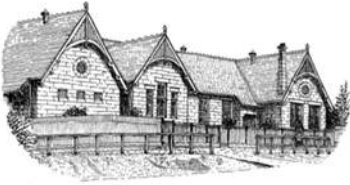


# KU-RING-GAI HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.



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

**June 2022      Newsletter      Vol. 40 No. 5**

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## *the* **President's message**

The last meeting of the Family History Group on 7 May was in the style of a forum, with a number of members contributing their stories on 'Who was your first ancestor to set foot on Australian soil?'

This was a fun afternoon enjoyed by all, and showed how important these get-togethers are as a way of interacting with others and sharing stories.

What a shame these Family History activities are no more.

On first making contact with the Society, it is usually to seek assistance and information, and quite quickly we realise the availability of the vast resources that have been collected due to the efforts of volunteers over the past 59 years.

The more we become involved we learn of all the fringe benefits available, such as learning new skills, connecting with others who have a similar interest and the friendships to be made along the way.

Isn't it a case of the more you put in, the more you benefit? A bit of give and take.

As I mentioned, our Society would not be what it is today without the continued effort of others.

This is why it is most important for you to think about how you can help to restart and re-energise the Family History Group which has been an integral part of the Society since 1998, organised by very knowledgeable, willing and able volunteers.

*If you think you are too small to be effective,  
you have never been in bed with a mosquito.*

(Betty Reese)

Take care,

**Lorna Watt**

## General Meeting

2pm Saturday 18th June 2022

**Dr Reinhard Ronnebeck**

### *Grace Cossington Smith – A Ku-ring-gai Local*

Reinhard's talk will explore the life and work of Grace Cossington Smith, a quiet pioneer of modernism who practised her art in Turramurra. Reinhard's many presentations to University of the Third Age (U3A) and the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts (SMSA) draw on his life-long interest in art history.

Reinhard was born, grew up and went to school in Berlin. His tertiary education took place in the USA and he holds a PhD in Clinical Psychology. Before his retirement he was head of the Department of Psychology at Royal North Shore Hospital, and Principal Clinical Psychologist with the NSW Department of Health. His book on child psychology, *7000 Days*, was published by the ABC.



*Grace*



*Reinhard Ronnebeck at the van Gogh Museum*

As part of his tertiary education, Reinhard completed several courses in art history and this has remained a life-long interest. He has made numerous presentations on a variety of artists to the (U3A) and at the (SMSA).

Two very happy meetings for family historians were held in May.

The morning Workshop 'An Achievable Way to Compile and Print your Family History' was led by Clare Brown who showed us over 20 family history books she has had printed. Clare's message was that when you feel satisfied with the result of your research you should have it printed and put it on your shelf and distribute to interested parties. It may not necessarily be a thesis; perhaps a collection of memories, overlapping stories or letters or it could be full of genealogical facts and details. The main thing is to write it down so future members of the family can read about their ancestors. Do not feel intimidated as it can be amended later if more results come to hand. Clare shared many of the pitfalls and stumbling blocks that she has encountered and gave many great clues to improve the outcome.

In the afternoon members participated in a forum discussing 'Our First Ancestor to Set Foot on Australian Soil'. Ten people told of their ancestors whose arrivals dated from September 1791 to 1949. Each of the new arrivals came from a different background and made a success of their lives in a new country. What a story each of them could tell and what would they say about the Australia we live in today.

*Sue Holmes*

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### April Family History Meeting

... an update ...

Sue Holmes and Susan Alder had prepared the morning session on the New Trove as both have extensive experience in using it. They used the following headings: -

What is Trove? Why is it called Trove? How to find Trove. Searching Trove. Home Page of Trove. Simple Search. Advanced Search. Importance of Accuracy of Search Information. Components of a Result. Refining Your Results. A Note about the Date Range Filter. Tips for Searching. Sorting Your Results. Saving Your Search.



*Trove - Australia's Digitised Newspapers*

The final hint was to 'play' with Trove before starting actual research, a useful way to start using any new aid.

Sue Holmes welcomed everyone at the afternoon April meeting, and especially the speaker, Patrick Dodd, his wife Gillian and family. Sue mentioned that the morning May workshop would be Writing Family History with Clare Brown and in the afternoon members would be invited to give a short presentation on their first ancestor to arrive in Australia.

Sue also told the meeting that there had been no nominations for the 2022-2023 Family History Group committee so the KHS committee will have to decide what to do about this. The outgoing committee is willing to organise the next meeting as announced.

Sue Holmes then introduced the speaker, member Patrick Dodd whose subject was '**The Dreadnought Boys**' of whom his father-in-law, David Alexander Hogg was one.

He firstly spoke about the scheme that he came to Australia under, known as Ten Pound Poms. In 1945 when World War Two ended, Australia's population was small with 30% having been born overseas. The Government adopted the slogan of 'Populate or Perish' and offered a subsidised fare to British migrants. Employment opportunities and hostel accommodation were also offered as incentives to come and live in Australia. Patrick was one of the 80,000 who took up the offer when he sailed to Sydney and soon found his feet. The scheme continued until 1969.

Earlier schemes included the many convicts who arrived from 1788 onwards - free settlers who came as assisted migrants and Caroline Chisholm's scheme that brought out 11,000 single women free of charge. Altogether there were over sixteen different schemes, some of which earned a bad record in their treatment of child migrants. A 2014 Royal Commission exposed many cases of mistreatment especially in Western Australia and the Catholic Church had to pay \$276 million in compensation to the victims. Other schemes included Big Brother and Fairbridge Farms, David Hill coming out under the latter. Both the British and the Australian Governments had known of the abuse but had allowed the schemes to continue.

The Dreadnought Scheme started after World War One with happier outcomes for the young men who came out from England on a ship called *Dreadnought*. Groups of fifty came out to work on farms and Gillian's father was one of these. His mother had died and he had been brought up by his strict aunts. When he finished his schooling there were no places available at university so he applied to come to Australia under the Dreadnought Scheme. He was sent to the farm of a Scottish migrant and treated as one of the family. He started a wool

classing course in 1931, met his future wife and was married in 1938. He ran a farm, moved to a timber mill, progressed to the office, started to run the mill school, built the one teacher school there and developed into a very talented teacher. The Dreadnought Scheme ended in 1939 having given a new start to many young men.



*The plaque in Argyle Street, The Rocks.*

During questions Patrick said that there is now a commemorative plaque to the scheme in Argyle Street where the Dreadnought ships docked.

*Jean Smith*

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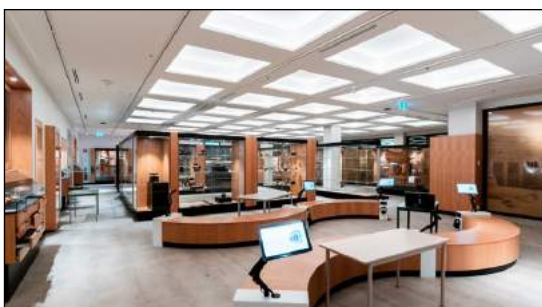
### Tour Report

Our tour program is being redeveloped for the later part of this year. Several typical venues have introduced new exhibitions that look to be quite interesting.

Three currently under consideration are:-

#### Macquarie University:

This university has recently opened a new museum. This brings together collections formerly housed in the university's Australian History Museum and the Museum of Ancient Cultures. The Australian History Collection focuses on six key themes: Indigenous Australia/Immigration/War and Society/Women's Studies/Social History (with a focus on domestic and working life) and Cultural Heritage.



*The Australian History Museum, Macquarie University*

#### The New Chau Chak Wing Museum:

"find the unexpected: art, science, history and ancient cultures" housed at a new purpose-built space at the University of Sydney.



*Chau Chak Wing Museum at Sydney University*

The third new exhibition being reviewed is the **National Trust Museum, Old Parliament House, Parramatta:**

The new exhibition is entitled *Convict Artisans in Exile.*



Full details will be available in the July Newsletter.

#### Current Schedule:

**Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June: Madame Tussauds**, details in this Newsletter. (See page 4)

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> July: Powerhouse Museum -Ultimo.** (NB: change of day for Powerhouse trip from Thursday to Wednesday).

*Tour Team*

#### New Members

In April we have had 3 new members join our Society.

Welcome to the Society.

Ruth & Manuel Karunakar from Gordon

Ann Lisle from Mortdale

We hope you will find your membership rewarding, and look forward to your participation in the many activities we have to offer going forward this year.

*Annet Latham*

## Florence Fizelle

The story of Dorothy Mort, who killed her lover and physician, Dr. Claude Tozer in 1920 in the leafy middle-class suburb of Lindfield, is perhaps not as well-known as it might be, despite the uproar it caused at the time, and despite the excellent account published in a book by Suzanne Falkiner in 2014.

Dorothy Mort was the wife of Harold Mort, who was related to the Mort's, of the firm of Goldsborough Mort & Co. Dorothy had two children, and at the time of the murder was living with her husband and children in what is now Tryon Road in Lindfield.

She was arrested, tried and convicted for the murder of Dr. Tozer and spent nine years in prison, after which she returned to her husband and died at the age of eighty-one.

A minor role in the saga was taken by the lady's companion to Mrs. Mort, Florence Fizelle who, incidentally, was the younger sister of the Australian artist Rah Fizelle. Miss Fizelle first discovered Mrs. Mort in her bedroom covered in blood after she unsuccessfully tried to commit suicide with the pistol she had used to murder Dr. Tozer. Miss Fizelle appeared in court as a witness in the trial of Mrs. Mort, after which she disappears from the story. But not quite.

Suzanne Falkiner, the author of the book *Mrs. Mort's Madness*, accidentally came across the fact that the painter Rah Fizelle was born in Baw Baw, near Goulburn. She remembered that Florence Fizelle was also born in Baw Baw and eventually tracked down a lady who turned out to be the daughter of Florence Fizelle. Falkiner didn't know that Florence had married, however, the daughter told Falkiner that she was the daughter of Harold Mort, and that she was born in 1933. She only discovered that her father was Harold Mort when, at the age of twelve, she needed a birth certificate before sitting an examination. She was thus conceived in 1932, nearly five years after Dorothy Mort had been released from prison and returned to her husband and was living uneventfully with Harold Mort until he died in 1950.

What Falkiner did not reveal was the answer to the question of whether the relationship between Mort and Fizelle had continued from the time Fizelle left the Mort home in 1921 or whether the contact had been renewed some time before the daughter's conception. This may have been because by the time Falkiner had discovered the liaison both participants were dead and could not be asked, or whether Falkiner had chosen not to reveal the truth out of a wish to avoid a sensitive matter, since Falkiner's book was published in 2014 and Florence's daughter died in 2019.

Whatever the case, Harold Mort continued to visit Florence and his daughter, to take them out on

excursions, while ostensibly living with his wife, Dorothy Mort. He also provided Florence with two pounds a week, which was all he could afford without arousing suspicions.

The daughter regarded him as her father even before she discovered that he was, but as she said, she assumed they were married, although she sometimes wondered why they did not live together. In her childish innocence, she thought they must be married, as people could only have children when they were married.

Since all the participants are dead, we shall never know when the liaison actually commenced (unless Falkiner



*Florence Fizelle's tombstone* knows, but isn't telling).

I am indebted to Suzanne Falkiner and her book *Mrs. Mort's Madness*, whose detailed research led me to wonder about the mystery.

*Gerry Cohen*

**Editor's note:** The story of Dr Tozer's murder is in the November 2020 newsletter and a follow up story in the December 2020 newsletter.

## KHS Tour for June

MADAME TUSSAUDS at Darling Harbour

Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2022

This will be a very interesting exhibition which includes: people who have shaped Australia such as Arthur Phillip, Captain Cook, Ned Kelly and Banjo Patterson; world leaders (political, spiritual and historical); glitz and glamour of fashion; royalty; film and TV stars; sporting heroes and much more.

We will meet at Madame Tussauds, Darling Harbour at 10.45am.

The cost for members is \$40 and non-members \$50.

Travel will be by train and ferry (with a flat 10 minute walk to Madame Tussauds) or by train to Wynyard or Town Hall and a 15-20 minute walk to Madame Tussauds.

Lunch at City Extra, Circular Quay (at own cost) close to Customs House and Sydney Museum in Bridge Street.



*Madame Tussaud*

If you would like to join the KHS travel team on this occasion, please contact Yvette at [yreeve@optusnet.com.au](mailto:yreeve@optusnet.com.au) or phone 0414 249 737 by Friday 10<sup>th</sup> June.

## PRISONERS OF WAR IN AUSTRALIA

### *Part 5*

#### *St Ives POW Hostel - - - Two Returnees*

##### Francesco Barbera

Francesco Barbera, one of 11 children, was born on 27 December 1919 in Aterrana, near Naples. He had little schooling and worked on the family farm from 9 years old.

He was drafted into the Italian Army in 1940, serving as a gunner. In 1941, when his battalion ran out of ammunition, he was captured at Badaea, in the Sudan, North Africa. Barbera was then sent to Egypt for three weeks, to India for three years and finally on to Australia in 1943, where he spent time in a POW camp in Liverpool for one week, then Cowra for three weeks, Tumut for two years and finally St Ives in 1946 where he remained until repatriation in September 1946. In that camp a prisoner wore maroon trousers and jacket, with a grey shirt. As there were no men from his village, he did not form any longstanding friendships in the camp.

The St Ives camp was fenced off with barbed wire, but as there were few guards he could sneak out through a hole in the fence and work as a labourer on a fellow Italian's farm on the weekends. While in the camp Francesco received a pay of one shilling and threepence a day, which was supplemented by 5 cigarettes. When prisoners were repatriated, they were given lira in exchange for money saved in Australia. He received 14,000 lira.



*Francesco Barbera as recruit and older man.*

*(Photos: Ku-ring-gai Library)*

Barbera found conditions in Italy hard and he felt that he could not fit in. While in St Ives he had a friendship with Nick Salerno, a farmer. It was he who sponsored Barbera for his return to Australia as an assisted migrant on *MV Ugolino Vivaldi* in February 1950.



*MV Ugolino Vivaldi*

On his arrival in Australia Barbera boarded with Salerno, sleeping in a horse stable. He found employment at a roof tile factory in St Leonards where he worked for over three years. After approximately one year, he went to board with Salvatore Maiorana near Warrimoo Avenue, where he slept with three other Italians beside Salvatore's truck in a garage.

Barbera worked hard for 12 hours a day, seven days a week to save funds to bring out Maria Abignano from his home village. They were married on 28 February 1953 and continued living in the garage. Maria worked as a cleaner in the Royal North Shore hospital.

In 1952 he bought land for 300 pounds at 176 Warrimoo Avenue and established a small market garden. He bought a flat-pack timber and fibro house for 996 pounds and erected it with help from friends. Barbera moved in in April 1953. He lived there with his wife and family. At that time there were several market gardens in Warrimoo Avenue. To supplement income, Barbera worked at Benjamin's terra cotta pipes. Some years later, they demolished that house and built another.



*The first house at 176 Warrimoo Avenue*

*(Photos: Ku-ring-gai Library)*

Francesco Barbera worked for the Main Roads Department for 21 years.

##### Sources:

*Trove* and documents held by the Ku-ring-gai Library, particularly an interview of Francesco by Katya Grynberg, 1st October 1993.

Information in the *North Shore Times* 25th April 2014 page 11, about some POW camps in NSW.

## Rick Pisaturo

Rick Pisaturo was born on 24 April 1922. At the age of 17 he enrolled in the Italian Army and was sent to Libya. His story begins on the battlefields of North Africa in World War II, where he was captured as a prisoner of war in Benghazi. He was eventually sent to Australia. At the time of repatriation in 1946, Rick Pisaturo was in the POW hostel in St Ives and the thought of eventually returning to a decimated Italy after the relative freedom of life on an Australian farm held little appeal.



*Rick Pisaturo in Libya, 1940 - as a prisoner of war*

For Rick, the best moment of the war for him was being captured by British and Australian forces. With a few thousand other Italian soldiers, he was eventually sent to Australia on the converted Queen Mary, as a prisoner of war. It was during this time as a POW that Rick's love affair with Australia began. He was 21 when the war ended.

As the Australian soldiers returned, the POWs were sent back to the camps to await repatriation.

Two years after repatriation, Rick returned to Australia, initially to the Badgerys' farm, at 'Wongonbra', Sutton Forest, NSW, where he had worked for eighteen months while a prisoner. The Badgerys sponsored him and paid his fare. He then went to Sydney where he tried to make a go of it. He made timber crates during the week and tended gardens on the weekends. He saw an opportunity to make a little extra money on the side, designing and planting a garden for a new hospital at Kogarah.

Working day and night, Rick made enough money to buy a small cottage in Marrickville, which he improved and sold. Within a year or two he had improved and sold 18 houses. He then purchased a

Kings Cross apartment block. With a real estate licence, he was not only buying and selling houses, but building hundreds of homes in Sydney's western suburbs.

His success in real estate gave him the means to purchase 300 acres of land on Mamre Road, in the western districts of Sydney, where he established Mandalong Stud. Later he bought another 300 acres. In just a few short years Rick was being recognised as a pedigree beef stud cattle breeder.

His contribution to the Australian cattle industry was so significant that in 1990, almost 50 years after Rick had first arrived in Australia as a POW, he was awarded the OAM for his service to the cattle industry. In 1991 he received an Ethnic Business Award by the National Bank, also awards from the City of Penrith, Australia Day Association as an Australian Achiever and many other awards and certificates for contributions to the community.



On 27 December 1994, he received L'Ordine Al Merito Della Repubblica Italiana Onoreficenza Di Cavaliere.



For further details on Rick consult:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-02-28/from-enemy-pow-to-oam-rick-pisaturo-migrant-story/8306000>

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/earshot/rick-pisaturo/8252766>

### Sources

Prepared from *Trove* and other historical sources & the ABC.

This is the final article on Italian Prisoners of War in Australia in WWII.

*Morrison Hammond*

# Ku-ring-gai... Then... and Now

by Dick Whitaker



A rare photograph of the shopping strip on Pittwater Road (now Mona Vale Road) St Ives, between Denley Lane and Memorial Avenue. The actual date is unknown but likely the 1950s. Perhaps our vintage car experts may be able to date it more precisely? You can just make out a St Ives Real Estate sign in the building on the left. It looks as though you could park there by pulling off the road into a wide space backing on to the front of the shops.

The same view in recent times, courtesy of Google Street View. It shows the left side of Mona Vale Road, now with a footpath and shops. The first shop on the left, no. 184, was occupied for many years by Dunn's Hardware.

Do you have any 'Then & Now' photos of Ku-ring-gai? We'd love you to share them with us!

Send them to [editor@khs.org.au](mailto:editor@khs.org.au) along with their descriptions. If possible, please also tell us where the photos came from, so that we can attribute them to the appropriate photographer or source.

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## Tales from the Past

### RAILWAY ACCIDENT NEAR SYDNEY

... Twenty-five trucks and breakvan escape ...

*The Adelaide Advertiser, Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> March 1907*

A goods train which left Milson's Point for Hornsby last night was the cause of a sensation early this morning. The train had picked up freight along the route until Turramurra was reached, when the engine was shunted, 25 trucks and the breakvan being left standing.

There is a slight gradient from Turramurra, which extends down to Lindfield, and the trucks began to run down this grade. Before anything could be done, the rolling-stock had gathered way, and when Pymble was neared it was travelling at a fair rate of speed.

The gates across the line were shut, and into these the runaways dashed, smashing the gates to pieces. Down through Gordon and Killara the trucks went, until Lindfield was approached, where an up-grade was met. This proved just sufficient to bring the train to a standstill.

If the up-grade had not checked the trucks there is no doubt that an accident of a serious nature must have happened.



*Warrawee Station at the time of the accident*

## DIARY DATES

### JUNE 2022

Wednesday 1 : **Tour** - 80th Anniversary of Sydney Harbour submarine attack cruise.

Saturday 18 : **2pm - General Meeting**  
*Grace Cossington Smith - A Ku-ring-gai Local*

**Presenter : Dr Reinhard Ronnebeck**

Thursday 23 : **Tour** - Madame Tussauds - Darling Harbour

### JULY 2022

Saturday 16 : **2pm - General Meeting**

*More Australian Inventions*

**Presenter : Ian Thompson**

Wednesday 20: **Tour** - Powerhouse Museum - Ultimo

### AUGUST 2022

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

*Pine Gap*

**Presenter : David Rosenberg**

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Every Tuesday : The Research Rooms are open from 10am to 12 noon for Built Heritage and general enquiries.

Every Friday : The Research Rooms are open from 10am to 12 noon for family history research.

## Treasurer's Report

The hand-over is now over and I have attended my first committee meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> May as your treasurer.

Income for April was from 3 memberships, sales of photographs and books, whilst expenses included our liability insurance, copying and printing costs and the meeting room hiring fee to KMC for our bi-monthly meetings. A small deficit resulted for the month, whilst we are still in surplus year to date. It is expected that we will have a small surplus for the 2022 year.

The budget for the 2023 year was approved and it was resolved not to change the current membership fees.

Bank account details are:-  
BSB: 032-083 A/c No: 248971.

Until next month.

*Ken Bromley*

## ADMINISTRATION

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