Celebrating 60 Years \$\pi\$1963 - 2023



Ku-ring-gai Historical Society

April 2023 NEWSLETTER Vol. 41 No. 3

Patron: the Mayor of Ku-ring-gai

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Our General Meeting on 18 February was well attended when our guest speaker Emeritus Professor John Ramsland presented *Peter Finch: Australia's Player King.*

We were most grateful to John who travelled by train from Newcastle to be with us on such a hot day.

Thanks to the efforts of Lorraine Henshaw and Jenny Joyce, the family history workshops held on the second Saturday of the month are proving quite a success, with many members attending.

At the last one, held on 11 March, Martyn Killion from the Museums of History New South Wales guided us through ways to navigate the new internet site, and shared tips on how to search the State Archives Collection. His relaxed and friendly presentation was enjoyed by all.

As the second Saturday in April is Easter Saturday there will not be a workshop held that day.

The next one will be on 13 May commencing at 10.30am when Gay Hendriksen will be talking about the Female Factory.

These mornings are a great way to get to know other members, have a good chat and experience the companionship.

My thanks and appreciation to the dedicated volunteers who, by their efforts, make all these occasions possible.

Our dwindling army of volunteers would welcome the assistance of other members joining them so as to help with spreading the work load.

Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much – Helen Keller

Take care

Lorna Watt

General meeting

2pm - Saturday 15th April

The Mighty Sunderland ~ in War and Peace

Denis Smith OAM

The guest speaker for April is Denis Smith, OAM, a former President of Lane Cove Historical Society. His interest in Sunderland flying boats was through his uncle Percy Smith, who was in the RAAF from 1938. In 1939 just prior to WWII, his uncle was part of the 10 Squadron RAAF which went to England to fly 9 Sunderlands back to Australia where they were to be stored at Rathmines near Newcastle.

War broke out just as they arrived in England, so Australia loaned all 9 Sunderlands and their crews to RAF Coastal Command where they would seek and destroy U-boats mainly in the North Atlantic. Denis will show actual film footage of the crew arriving in England, flying Sunderlands and sinking U-boats. Following the end of the war, the planes were flown to Australia where they spent a lengthy peacetime career based at Rose Bay.



The Sunderlands were then used on a series of routes and the Kangaroo route was among the first flights commenced by the planes. It left Rose Bay in May 1946. A trans-Tasman service had began in April 1940 which, at its peak, saw a fleet of four Sandringhams making the seven hour crossing to Auckland. Services to Lord Howe Island, Fiji and Tahiti were introduced using Sandringhams, Hythes, Solents, Sunderlands and Catalinas.

The final commercial flight from Rose Bay – an Ansett service to Lord Howe Island – left on 10th September 1974, closing a brief but important chapter in Australia's aviation history. The site of the Rose Bay flying boat terminal is today used by a company offering joy rides in a float plane.

WEST HEAD ~ Ku-ring-gai Chase

Resumption Requested

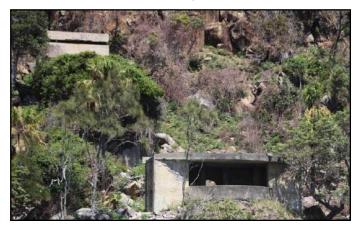
In 1934 a deputation from the Ku-ring-gai Trust asked the Minister for Lands to acquire 640 acres of land at West Head, known as Lawson's grant, in the Pittwater area, and add it to the lands of the trust. The Minister admitted that the land rightly belonged to Ku-ring-gai Chase, and he regretted that the Government had not acquired the land before it was purchased by the syndicate which now held it.

He promised to ascertain the cost of resumption. The whole of the facts would be placed before the Cabinet. http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article17046878

GUN EMPLACEMENT

It is strongly recommended that the reader consult the various web addresses when they appear in the text. This will improve the flow of the story, and give finer elements.

In January 1941 a group of young men were sent to West Head, overlooking the mouth of Broken Bay and Pittwater to install two Q.F. 4.7" Mk IV seveninch naval guns to protect that part of the coast from invasion by enemy forces during WWII. A Major taught them the art of repository which, in artillery terms, meant the ability to move heavy weights with relative ease, using basic materials. All their work was done by hand, and they used block and tackles, levers and wedges etc.



The site had been cleared by the Fortress Engineers before the men had arrived. They had installed the cutting, the gun emplacements, a vertical railway line, and a horizontal railway line between the two gun positions. The huts had also been installed by that time. The men were tasked with moving the guns from the top down to the bottom of the cliff and then installing the guns and making them operational.

Their first job was to get one of the 7.5 ton gun pedestals off the truck onto a platform on the railway line. Once it was off the truck, they used wooden rollers to move it onto the platform. When it arrived, it was too late for them to attempt to move the pedestal to the bottom of the cliff. Unfortunately, on the next day the brake failed and the gun pedestal went to the bottom at an uncontrolled speed and a 2.5 ton concrete counterweight came to the top of the hill at the same speed which caused the Major to tell the men to scatter. The concrete counterweight became airborne for a short while and speared into a gantry. The gun pedestal flew off the platform and had to be recovered. This caused a few weeks' delay in their program. They used a dolly on the horizontal line to move the pedestal to the gun site.



An old gun emplacement — Barrenjoey headland in the distance.

The first gun that was installed was fired five times, to test it to make sure it was properly installed. This is called a 'proving shoot'. This was done at night-time in conjunction with testing the searchlights. When the guns fired, a lot of houses in Palm Beach turned their outside lights on despite the blackout restrictions.

A report by the 5th Australian Anti-aircraft and Fortress Company RAE (5 Aust AA & Frt Coy RAE) indicated that the gun emplacements at West Head had scrim camouflage netting and mock rock installed for camouflaging the gun sites.

It would appear there may have been a Bofors Anti-aircraft battery on the Bairne track near the West Head Battery.

https://www.pittwateronlinenews.com/west-head-army-track-opened-may-2016.php

https://www.pittwateronlinenews.com/uncoveringthehistoryofwesthead.php

The main defence complex comprised of:

- a horizontal railway.
- two covered concrete gun positions with 4.7" guns. Number one gun being about 75m north of the bottom of the inclined railway.
- about 20m further north is the ammunition magazine which is cut into the cliff, the southern emergency exit of the magazine is blocked by a fallen boulder.
- a further 20m north was a Picquet Hut that provided accommodation for that part of the garrison on duty at the guns, only the dry laid sandstone foundations of this building remain.
- 60m north of the Picquet Hut is Number 2 gun, at this point the horizontal railway ends.
- About 30m directly behind number 2 gun, near the cliff face is a two-storey concrete Battery Observation Post. The whole area is about 185m long.
- Beyond the main area about 160m north is the Northern Searchlight Position, the remains of this building consist of a steel frame, a roof of thick timber planks with waterproofing on top and corrugated iron sides.
- The Southern Searchlight Position is about 50m from the bottom of the inclined railway in the opposite direction. The concrete building that housed the light has had its roof crushed by a falling boulder.
- To the south of the southern searchlight was the anchor point for a steel net that extended across Pittwater to Barrenjoey.
- Power and communications came to the WHF via underwater cable from Pittwater.
- Further to the south, below what appears to be a concrete guard post, is evidence in the rocks of a jetty, the use of which must have been extremely difficult because the water is usually very choppy.

The Inclined Railway

Nothing is left to determine how the railway actually looked and despite best efforts no official drawings or plans have come to light. We knew there were no motors or winches, the railway was worked by counterweight', the counterweight and trolley had a 3.5 ton concrete block attached. There were two parallel railway lines, the transport line was about 150m long, the counterweight line was half that length so how did that work? At first it was thought that by the rope passing around the head wheel two and a half times, this provided a 2:1 ratio, but once the first drawings were done the fallacy of this proposal became obvious. Then it was thought a gauntlet rail system might have been used with the counterweight line diverting on the main line via a set of points. The answer was 'No'. A retired officer of the Royal Artillery Assoc. NSW finally came up with the solution which, in hindsight, was so simple but that had everyone bamboozled for so long. The wire rope was anchored at the top of the cutting and then passed around a pully attached to the counterweight before returning to the top of the cutting and then passed around the head wheel and so a 2:1 gear ratio was the result.



The inclined railway

https://www.4hresearch.com/west-head-battery.html

This track winds down West Head's eastern face in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. Some parts are so steep that scaling ladders is necessary.

Much of the original wartime track-work still exists, uncovered by NPWS and West Head Awareness Team volunteers during track upgrades. But the real reward for history buffs is the destination. Perched above the shoreline, the army battery once hosted two 4.7" ex-naval guns supported on 800kg pedestals, an observation post, ammunition storage and 2 searchlights. (continued on page 4)

Today, the silent structures are a fascinating reminder of the days when heavy equipment was transported down the track via a purpose built railway. Take a moment to wonder at the strength of the soldiers who built the steps and carried materials down to the site.

TOUR IN MAY

With - NSW National Parks and Wildlife

Learn about the historic significance of the gun emplacements at West Head on this challenging, 2 hour walk in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park.

When: Sunday 7 May 2023, 9am to 11am.

Where: West Head Lookout, Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park.

Accessibility: No wheelchair access.

Grade: Hard. Suitable for adults and children 15 years and over. There are some steep sections. Includes climbing 452 steps and a sturdy, steel ladder.

Price: Adult \$15 per person. Concession (Student, Australian Pension, Veterans Affairs and Seniors card holders) \$10 per person. Child (15 – 17 years) \$10 per person. Family (2 adults, 2 children) \$40.

Entry fees: Park entry fees apply.

Meeting point: West Head lookout.

Bookings: Bookings required. Phone 1300 072 757 for

information or book online.

Morrison Hammond
-----Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I was not born in Australia, coming to Ku-ring-gai in 1969. I have been a member of KHS for several years, and through that membership learnt a great deal about Australia and the area in which I live.

I would like to thank the speakers at monthly meetings and, in particular, the many contributors to the monthly Newsletter who have contributed to that understanding. I recognise the amount of research time that has gone into the preparation of the articles. What an asset Trove is to that work.

I am sure that my thoughts are common to other members of the Society.

J Kammond

A donation from Sandi Joelson

In late 2022, some photographs dating back to 1975 / 1976 were received from Sandi Joelson. The photos were of the Wahroonga Sports Club teams and the accompanying team photo is of the Wahroonga Tigers. Sandi's brother-in-law was the coach of the team. In 1980, the Editor's son started playing with the Tigers for the following 3 years.

Thank you Sandi for the donation to KHS.



Tales from the Past

Wahroonga Reservoir - £70,000 Undertaking. The Sydney Morning Herald Tuesday 17th February 1925

The construction of the reservoir at Wahroonga, which will amplify the water supply to North Shore line suburbs, is nearing completion.

The reservoir has a depth of 30ft and a capacity of 10,000,000 gallons. The estimated cost is £70,000, and another £3,000 was spent on the alteration of mains.

Officials of the Water and Sewerage Board expect that the reservoir will be brought into operation about October next, upon the completion of the Ryde-Wahroonga rising main.



The reservoir, under construction, on the Pacific Highway, Wahroonga, between Neringah and Woonona Avenues

REMEMBERING FORMER PRESIDENT MAX FARLEY

Many members have joined the Society to research the history of the house where they live. Some stay on and actively contribute to the Society's work, and fortunately for us, so it was for Max Farley in the early 1990s.

Having researched and written the history of his family home in Dudley Avenue, Roseville, Max's interest was piqued, and he went on to document the history of his street. He didn't stop there as his idea for a suburb-by-suburb history of the Municipality would come into being as *Focus on Ku-ring-gai* (1996). A best-seller which recouped its costs within months. *Focus* became a standard reference work and continues to be in demand today.

An economist by training, Max mainly worked in State and Federal industrial relations. Always a community-minded person, in retirement he became an Easy Care gardening volunteer, and this is where former Vice President and FHG leader, Jo Harris, met him more than thirty years ago.

I worked closely with Max as my Presidency fell between two periods he spent in that role between 1995 and 2002. I also knew him as Secretary and Newsletter Editor, in these, just some of the demanding jobs he took on with his usual energy and thoroughness. I still have the job description he wrote for the role of the speakers' program co-ordinator.

Max's ability to get things done was a boon at a time of considerable change, not the least being the arrival of the internet age. However, foremost among the difficulties facing the Society at that time was our 'homelessness' following closure by the Council of the Local History Centre. It was only once the Society had a base, in what are now the Research Rooms, that we were able to consolidate our collection and open to the public, albeit for a mere one-and-a-half hours on a Tuesday morning.

A period of healthy increase in membership numbers can be traced to a higher public profile once we had a home, and to the setting up of the family history research group in 1999. The FHG - which would later blossom under the leadership of Jo Harris - was a cause Max had long advocated for, not only for its innate value, but also as a means of attracting new members. He saw family history and local history as intertwined, a view not necessarily shared by all at the time.

A considerable fillip to the Society's activities came from major projects undertaken in these years. *Focus* (1996), and *Women of Ku-ring-gai - A Tribute* (1999), edited by former President, Helen Malcher, were both written by members of hard-working, collaborative teams, and Max was there, his organisational and writing skills.



Max Farley

A KHS web presence also dates from this time, and Max became a long-term compiler of Search Ku-ring-gai, a very extensive database available for use on the intranet in our Research Rooms, now, staffed for longer opening hours.

As a Roseville resident Max had a special place in his heart for Firs Cottage in Roseville

Park. He championed this cause long and hard. However, it's a story in its own right and I'll re-tell it on another occasion.

Always a man with a project, or two, in hand, wherever Max saw that something could be done, or improved, or was simply worthy of being helped along, he would devote his considerable energies to it. As President for two terms, Secretary, Newsletter Editor, a contributing editor and writer for KHS publications, an avid researcher, journal contributor, compiler, advocate, speaker, author in his own right, administrator, manager and leader.... Max's work was long and sustained, as well bringing benefits for the Society's development and to its reputation in the community.

In *Our First Fifty Years* 1960-2013 (Helen Whitsed Davies, 2013) he is rightly commended for his *body of writing and contributions, philosophical and practical, to the Society...*

Following his KHS days Max continued researching and writing local history: his *Yarramalong Valley history notes* was published in 2015, and his last article for the Wyong District Pioneers' Association was posted online only months ago.

Google his name and you'll find him.

Beverley Dunstan

Speakers Program 1998-President 2000-2001



The commemoration of Anzac Day is always a reminder of the extraordinary achievements of our proud forebears - 105 years ago.

The Ku-ring-gai Historical Society produced, over a six-year period, the multiple award winning four-volume series Rallying the Troops: a World War I Commemoration.

Throughout April 2023, Ku-ring-gai Historical Society is making this wonderful series of books available at specially reduced pricing.

For details and special April 2023 pricing, see www.khs.org.au/rallying-the-troops where you can also preview the entire series, including Table of Contents, Index and Sample Pages for each volume.

The Indexes include Personal Names, Detailed Battles & Campaigns, Place Names, Schools, Colleges & Universities and much more.

This project was supported by grants from Ku-ring-gai Council and the Federal Government.

Buy or order online up until 30th April 2023 to receive specially reduced pricing at www.khs.org.au/rallying-the-troops

It is with pleasure that Ku-ring-gai Council, on behalf of the 1/18 Battalion and the 2/18 Battalion (Ku-ring-gai Regiment) Associations, extends an invitation for you and your members to attend an ANZAC Commemorative Service:

When: 11.00am, Sunday 30 April 2023

Where: Anglican Church of St John the Evangelist,

754 Pacific Highway, Gordon

We would also extend an invitation for you to formally participate by **laying a wreath or book** as part of the Order of Service.

Please RSVP regarding attendance and/or your intention to lay a wreath or book, by **Monday 17 April.** For contact details, please see the invitation adjacent.



by Dick Whitaker



Image: RMS Archives

Image: Google Street View

Then:

Looking north west along the Pacific Highway towards the Gordon Shopping Centre, 1959.

The building marked with a red dot was the Gordon branch of the Commonwealth Bank.

The car nearest the camera is a Dodge Coronet, and an FJ Holden is approaching.

The coloured dots indicate structures common to both images.

Now:

A similar view today. The Commonwealth Bank Building still stands but is a medical centre.

Kerbside parking is difficult - as it was in 1959!

Do you have any 'Then & Now' photos of Ku-ring-gai? The Editor is waiting to publish them.

Peter Finch ~ Australia's Player King

At our meeting on Saturday 18 February, Em. Prof. John Ramsland, gave a most fascinating talk on the life of Actor Peter Finch.

Having been abandoned by his parents, Peter was living with his father's sister in India where he was being trained to be a Buddhist Monk until she decided to send him to elderly relatives in Sydney. No relatives came to pick him up so an elderly man took him to his home in Mosman until he was later collected by relatives and taken to Greenwich Point where he went to the local public school and then to North Sydney Intermediate High School.

Peter wrote a play, 'The Fall of the Romanovs', when he was only 13 and it was performed at a theatre in Chatswood. At 16 he got a job as a cadet at the Sydney Sun and decided to leave home. He was then sacked from his job and became a swagman over New South Wales but he came back to Sydney and got serious about acting, with his first job on a radio serial. Peter became a star at the Macquarie Network and the ABC.

Peter served in the war and on demobilization he founded a troupe to go around and present plays. One of these plays was attended by Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh.

Laurence Olivier enticed Peter to go to England. Peter was 32 when he arrived in London.

His first major role was in The Rats of Tobruk. His favourite film was *The Shiralee* in which he played a swagman.

Peter won 2 Academy Awards and 5 British Academy Awards as well as many other international awards. He had a generosity of spirit with female actors and many received Academy Awards because of his thoughtfulness for them.

Thank you John for the insight into Peter Finch's life and career.

Marilyn van Eerde

New Member

We extend a warm welcome to the following member who has recently joined the Society.

Jill **Rodgers** from Terrey Hills

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

DIARY DATES

APRIL 2023

Saturday 8 : Easter Saturday ~ no Workshop

Saturday 15: 2pm - General Meeting

The Mighty Sunderland

Presenter: Denis Smith

Monday 17: 1.30pm – German SIG Meeting

MAY 2023

Saturday 13: 10.30am Family History Workshop

The Female Factory

Presenter: Gay Hendricksen

Saturday 20 : 2pm - General Meeting

Sydney's Planning History

Presenter: Prof. Paul Ashton

JUNE 2023

Saturday 10: 10.30am Family History Workshop

Saturday 17: 2pm - General Meeting

The Story of Surry Hills

Presenter: Dick Whitaker

JULY 2023

Saturday 8: 10.30am Family History Workshop

Saturday 15: 2pm - General Meeting

Historical Guide to New South Wales

Presenter: Phillip Simpson

The Research Rooms

The research rooms are open every Tuesday and every Friday from 10am to 2pm for research and general enquiries.

KHS bank details are as follows:-

BSB ... 032-083

A/c No. ... 248971



"FACEBOOK FRIENDS DON'T COUNT AS CREDIT REFERENCES."

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Newsletter Details

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