



Celebrating 60 Years  1963 - 2023

# Ku-ring-gai Historical Society

August/September 2023    Newsletter    Vol. 41 No. 6

Patron: the Mayor of Ku-ring-gai

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## General Meetings

2pm - Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> August 2023

### Dead & Buried

*A curious history of Sydney's earliest burial grounds*

Warren Fahey OAM

2pm - Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2023

### *Australia & the Pacific: a History*

Dr Ian Hoskins

Warren is an Australian folklore collector, cultural historian, prolific author, actor, broadcaster, record and concert producer, visual artist, songwriter, performer of Australian traditional and historical music, and occasional ABC 'talking head'.

Specialising in the 'curious' side of history, he is well-known as an informative and entertaining speaker. He has been honoured with the Order of Australia, Prime Minister's Centennial Medal, Advance Australia Award and the nation's highest award for lifetime achievement in music, The Don Banks Music Award. He prefers to say he is "a graduate of the Dingo University!"

Warren's latest book looks at Sydney's three earliest cemeteries; The Old Burial Ground on George Street, Devonshire Street 'Sandhills' Cemetery and the grand Victorian Rookwood Necropolis – all of which document the social history of Sydney from the arrival of the First Fleet through to the present time.



As a slice of Sydney past, the material concentrates on the earlier side of the history with tales of tragedies, murderers,

colonial notables, poets and politicians, artists and dreamers, gallant heroes and, because it is a Sydney history, a goodly number of eccentrics, ratbags and rabble-rousers.

In digging up Sydney's early history Warren Fahey relates tales of notable burials and the good, bad and ugly of Sydney city.

*Dead & Buried* is 700 pages with rare photographs and illustrations, and copies will be available for \$35. Credit/debit cards accepted.

Our guest speaker for September will be award-winning author and professional historian Dr Ian Hoskins.

Ian has worked as an academic historian, a curator and a professional historian in Sydney for more than 30 years. He researches and writes when he is not working as the North Sydney Historian, where he researches and interprets the local area.

Ian is passionate about history (both local and abroad) and landscapes (both cultural and natural) along with the architecture, modifications and



plantings that make up those places – and the literature and artwork created to represent them.

In his most recent book, *Australia & the Pacific: a History*, Ian examines a timely subject

– our place in the Pacific and our relations with the myriad Pacific island nations, as well as those with larger players – from our ties with Papua New Guinea and New Zealand to our complex connections with China, Japan and the United States. *Australia & the Pacific: a History* is an ambitious book which covers the watery routes between Australia and the Pacific Rim; for example, San Francisco and Southern China during the gold rush and Korea in the 1950s.

This revealing, sweeping narrative history begins with the shifting of the continents to the coming of the first Australians and, thousands of years later, the Europeans who dispossessed them. Concluding with the offshore detention of asylum seekers and current debates over climate change, Hoskins questions Australia's responsibilities towards our increasingly imperilled neighbours.

As I have commented before, there have been a number of obstacles in producing our journal, *The Historian*, one of which was, of course, that dreaded Pandemic. Kindly printed for us by Ku-ring-gai Council, I am very pleased that all members have now finally received their copy. My sincere thanks to Vice President and Membership Secretary, Annet Latham, for organising and printing the mailing sheets, and to members of the Committee and other dedicated volunteers who helped with the packaging and mailing. 'D Day', 6 June was certainly a busy and tiring day, but worth the effort.

I do hope you find this latest edition interesting reading.

It does not seem that long ago that I was involved in the organisation of our Golden Anniversary in 2013. How time flies!

Ten years on, the Committee is excited to be planning a dinner to celebrate our Diamond Anniversary.

**Sixty years**, what an achievement!

The dinner will be held at the St Ives Club, Killeaton Street, St Ives, on Tuesday 21 November, so please mark the date in your diary.

I am sure it will be a very enjoyable evening for everyone and an opportunity to reminisce with friends. We will keep you updated as we organise more details during the next few months.

*Lorna Watt*

#### ***Postscript:***

Unfortunately, I have had to take a break from my duties at KHS whilst I recover from multiple facial fractures; the result of a fall.

Hope to be back soon.

#### **New Members**

We extend a warm welcome to the following members who have recently joined the Society.

Peter **Homan** from Woollahra

Helen **Matheson** from Pymble

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

## **The Story of Surry Hills**

Review of a talk by Dick Whitaker at the General Meeting, 17th June 2023.

Dick's enthusiasm for history is obvious. He not only is full of interesting facts on his chosen subject but injects such enthusiasm into his subject that you become embroiled and fascinated with what he has to say. Not only that, but the subject was peppered with wonderful pictures that illustrated the subject so well. There was no problem displaying them on the large screen as Dick was well adapted to that medium.

One thing I had not realised was how small is the area of Surry Hills. Maps too helped this facet of the story, as many streets were mentioned. This can be confusing if they have not been pinpointed as to exactly where they are. Dates abounded which made us well aware of the time and place when different events did occur.



*Children outside McElhone Place slums c 1930*

*Source: Sydney Theatre Co.*

In 1883 there was a smallpox epidemic, 40 died and a policeman was stationed in front of dwellings where someone had died, to make sure they maintained their isolation from those living nearby. That is something we never had to experience when in 'lockdown' recently. I wondered if neighbours fed them, or were they relieved from duty to have a meal. No suggestion from Dick if their duty roster included an all night vigil.

There was a Depression in 1893. This, combined with the collapse of the banks, resulted in food queues, industrial action and a proliferation of gangs and crime. In 1900 the Bubonic Plague devastated the area and horrifying pictures of the Rat Catchers were shown. To deal with the disease, the dead and the cramped housing conditions, the government just bulldozed swathes of land. It was a simple, drastic solution that worked. The corner of Riley and Albion streets were desperate and dangerous places, strongholds of criminals with many 'women of the night'. In 1926 the area was resumed to rid the city of this scourge.

Dick mentioned the book by Ruth Park 'The Harp in the South' which made me want to reread this Australian classic. In 2023 Surry Hills has become gentrified and the main police station has been built where life was once deadly and dangerous. Many thanks for your illuminating words on this small area of Sydney, Dick. Those who attended were given a terrific treat.

*Elizabeth Dokulil*



### **Sydney's Planning History**

At our General Meeting in May Professor Paul Ashton gave us an insight into the development of Sydney. Arthur Phillip did try to regulate building but no-one took any notice and so Sydney 'grew like Topsy'. Agriculture was not successful in Sydney so it was moved out towards Parramatta.

**By 1828** – Water was a problem so Macquarie had an area set aside which is now Centennial Park, however the water supply was no good. It was suggested that the rich should live in one area and those from the poorer areas should not see the rich people because they would be jealous. This was not carried out.

**By 1843** the general development of Sydney spread out, but there were no planning regulations.

**By 1870** the Mortuary Railway Station was there. The economy was driven by seasonal work. People were in and out of work. Sydney was dominated with Church steeples as building could only go to 150 feet. This was because the fire-fighter hoses would only go up to 150 feet. Fires were quite prevalent in the late half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

**By 1890** Circular Quay was called Semi-Circular Quay, Government House was a place people wanted to be invited to and Pyrmont Bridge had now been built. There was a depression in 1890 and this had an affect on development. There were, however, changes in transport. Steam now overtook sail on the water.

**In 1900** Windmill Street in Sydney was a very poor area when plague hit Sydney. By 1910 there was massive redevelopment of Millers Point with the building of the finger wharves.

**In 1917** The Soldiers Garden Village at Matraville was developed for returned service men and widows. This village was a disaster and was pulled down in the 1970s for redevelopment of Housing Commission accommodation.

**In 1951** the Council wanted to demolish Paddington but this did not happen.

**In 1962** the height limit of 150 feet changed and the first tall building was the AMP Building in Circular Quay.

**In 1980s** Darling Harbour was developed.

*Thank you Professor for enlightening us on how our city developed.*

*Marilyn van Eerde*



## Preserving our History

Before the Society was formed in 1963 Ku-ring-gai did not score well in recording and valuing its history. Only two exceptions of note come to mind.

One was an article published by James G Edwards in Sydney's Evening News on 18-22 July 1921. In it, using the pseudonym 'Jones', he tells of his recollections as a youth making the journey from Blue's Point to Wahroonga in about 1850. He writes of the sights along the way, of the people who lived there and of the lives they led. His article is reproduced in Kerrin Cook's *The Railway Came to Ku-ring-gai* and on pages 59 to 67 of the September 2000 issue of *The HISTORIAN*. The other was a talk on Ku-ring-gai's Early History and Development given in 1948 by our 'Tree Mayor', W Cresswell O'Reilly. His address to the Killara Community Services Club was later printed by Council. A copy is in the Society's Rooms.

It was not until a Ku-ring-gai Mayor, George Nicol, initiated the formation of our Society in 1963 that a concerted effort was begun to focus attention on the history of our area. Until then even Council staff adopted a cavalier attitude to the preservation of vital records. One often quoted example was a Council accountant who, in tidying-up mode, sent most of Council's Rate Books from 1906 to 1930 to the tip.

Fortunately there were some who took a more enlightened view. One such was Stuart Doyle who spoke to us in 1997 about those 'bad old days'. Stuart, a member of the Society, was employed by Council in senior positions for many years and has always had a deeply held understanding of the importance of its history to any community. A summary of his talk is in *The HISTORIAN* of March 1997. The Rates Book tragedy alerted him to the certainty of tragedies to come so he started, as he put it, to "squirrel things away", the things being historic photographs, records and memorabilia. Knowledge of his concern led to the public giving these to him personally for safe keeping.

When Council set up its Local History Centre in the mid 1980s, Stuart passed a lot of material to its custodian, Margaret Wyatt, in the belief that at last there existed a place where they would be safe from the "Philistines" as one Council librarian called some of his Council colleagues at the time. Sadly, as we know, a less concerned Council shut down the Centre in 1996 notwithstanding the loud and lengthy protestations of the Society. This action by Council rang alarm bells in Stuart's head and he therefore still retains "another 'Rinso' box or two". Happily the Society has come a long way since 1996 and Stuart has willingly co-operated with us by loosening the locks on the "Rinso" boxes.

Understanding our past would not be possible without the foresight and vision of the civic minded Stuart Doyles of this world joined by the many family historians who themselves have 'squirreled away' countless records about their own families. These records have amongst them irreplaceable information about the communities in which those families lived.

It is our responsibility to see these records are preserved and available to those who seek to put them to good use.

Any reader who has material of historic value to our community is therefore urged to contact us so that, together, we can take the steps necessary to see it is preserved for future generations.

*Acting Editor: Max Farley*

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Huon Park is now generally known as notable apartments along part of Bobbin Head Road, North Turramurra, favoured particularly by the elderly. How many, though, have wondered why it carries the name Huon and whether it has any connection with the Huon pines of Tasmania. The answer is that the name Huon Park certainly does have a connection with Tasmania though the apartments simply 'borrowed' the name from the magnificent home built by George Bertrand Edwards in North Turramurra in 1896/1897.

The original Huon Park still exists. It is at 402 Bobbin Head Road on the opposite side of the road from the apartments, several hundred metres towards the highway. It was to become Nazareth House used as a convent by The Poor Sisters of Nazareth, and now operates as Southern Cross Care, which had its origins in the Knights of the Southern Cross. Though more modern buildings between it and Bobbin Head Road now hide much of its beauty, parts of it can still be seen.

Its first owner was George Edwards (not to be confused with J G 'George' Edwards of Killara) who bought 50 acres in North Turramurra in 1895 in the belief it would prove a good area to grow fruit. He built his Huon Park within the next year or two and came to live in it with his wife Mary Ann and children. Though his expectations regarding its fruit potential were not realised, this would have been of little concern to him because he was a man of substance in both the business

and political worlds.

George Edwards was born in Hobart in 1855 and became a journalist. He was an Australian Rules footballing friend of Henry (later Sir Henry) Jones who had taken control of a Hobart jam factory owned by George Peacock after Peacock retired. In the course of time the new company became H Jones and Company and later known throughout Australia as IXL. It happened that George Edwards had married Mary Ann Peacock, a daughter of the original George Peacock and had come to Sydney as a part owner of the new company with the responsibility of managing its Sydney operation.



*The entrance to HUON PARK in Autumn*

History Notes: In the political sphere he was elected in 1901 to represent South Sydney in the very first Federal Parliament. He was re-elected and held the South Sydney seat until health and business pressures caused him to resign in 1907. In 1910 the political world drew him again and he won the North Sydney seat. He was highly regarded universally both for his ability, skills and gentlemanly bearing. One of his parliamentary achievements was to have Commonwealth Parliament agree that decimal coinage should be adopted for Australia. That it did not happen for another 60 years in no way diminishes the vision he showed on this and other topics.

The unfair fickleness of fate however, has meant that it is not for his political nor business activities, nor even as the owner of Huon Park, that he is best remembered within Ku-ring-gai, but rather for the tragic manner of his death.

Ever keen to provide amenities in his home, he had a windmill to pump water from a well filled by water coming from the roof. The water went into a tank on the roof and was fed down by gravity for household use running water. This posed no problems but it was another initiative, of which he was exceptionally proud, that was to bring disaster. This was his acetylene gas generator to provide gas for lighting purposes and which operated very well for 14 years.

At breakfast on the fateful Saturday, 14 February of 1911, he remarked to his family that the valve on the gasometer, located in a nearby shed, had broken and that he would have to repair it. To do so he

called for assistance from a Scottish tiler from Newtown, Mr John Graham, who had been working on Huon Park's roof. John Graham had said he had some knowledge of acetylene gas installations. Exactly what happened will never be known because at about noon his daughter, who was sewing on an overlooking balcony, heard a loud report (said to have been heard as far away as Chatswood), saw the tank fly in the air and the iron roof on the shed scatter in all directions. Both George Edwards and John Graham were frightfully injured and pronounced dead by a Dr Blackwood who came quickly. The Sydney Morning Herald of the following day had a graphic description of the tragedy, together with statements from the NSW Premier (Mr McGowan) and Prime Minister Deakin.

His widow, Mrs Mary Ann Edwards, had planned to leave Sydney on the 23 March for London via Japan and America to attend the Coronation in London. A daughter, Marjorie, was to accompany them as far as Japan on her honeymoon. As it happened, George Edwards' widow chose never to live at Huon Park again.

*Max Farley (additional information from Evelyn Wyatt)*

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### **German Special Interest Group**

Our German SIG met on Monday 19 June 2023 with 14 frost-hardy members and two special guests present.

Tony Karrasch updated us on online German family history activity including a summary of the recent IGGP Conference, plus many informative news and social media snippets.

Christine Edwards updated members on progress with the group project, *German Ancestors of Ku-ring-gai Historical Society Members*.

Jono Herrman gave an enthralling presentation on the Liffmann family history, including their migration to Australia via New Zealand during the turbulent 1930s. It was accompanied by images of many source documents, family photographs and memorabilia. Jono made frequent reference to the "special guests" mentioned above - his parents - to validate many of the historic facts.

The meeting concluded with a first-rate, healthy afternoon tea. The next meeting is planned for Monday 14 August 2023. Visitors (and suggestions for agenda items) welcomed. For more information, see [www.khs.org.au/german-sig](http://www.khs.org.au/german-sig)

*Peter Stehn*





*Australia*



*Census*



*Cemeteries*



~~~~~ The Library has a vast array of books for all types of research ~~~~~

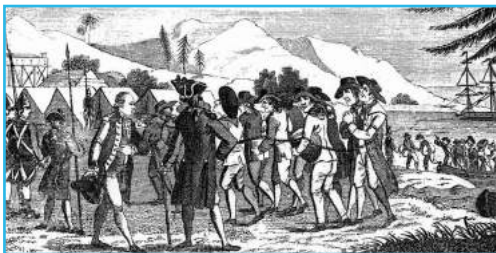
Our **Library Catalogue** contains numerous reference books and not only about Ku-ring-gai. Among the books are biographies, architecture, cemeteries, pioneer registers and much, much more. A white paper index hanging on the shelving, lists the major categories and their position in the shelving.

All the books in the library are alphabetically listed, by their titles, in the computers.

You can search our Library Catalogue at [www.khs.org.au/society-library](http://www.khs.org.au/society-library)

~~~~~ There are 3901 items in the Library; 60% are books, as well as binders, folders and maps ~~~~~

**Convicts + Military + Shipping** are some of the categories



**Shipping**

Initial journeys in the late 18th and early 19th centuries between Great Britain and Australia took between 70 and 110 days. As maritime technology improved through better ship design and improved navigation, long-distance maritime journeys to and from Australia were much quicker.

**Convicts**

Convicts lived under very strict rules and any breaking of those regulations could result in punishment such as whippings, the wearing of leg-irons or solitary confinement. Serious crimes could result in sentences to hard-labour prisons such as Port Arthur or Norfolk Island.



**Military**

The Australian Light Horse was a skilled formation of mounted infantry of the Australian Imperial Force. The men fought at Gallipoli without their horses and mostly served in Egypt and the Middle East. A number of Australian light horse units are still in existence today.



The KHS Library is one area of research that can be of benefit to your family history research.

Your investigation into locating forebears from the census records, the cemetery books, biographies or the many other extensive titles in the library could be a great source of discovery.

The Research Centre is open every Tuesday and Friday between 10 am and 2 pm.





Image: RMS Archives



Image: Google Street View

**Then:**

Looking up Pymble Hill, 1959. A Ford Prefect heading away and a Wolseley 6/80 approaching.

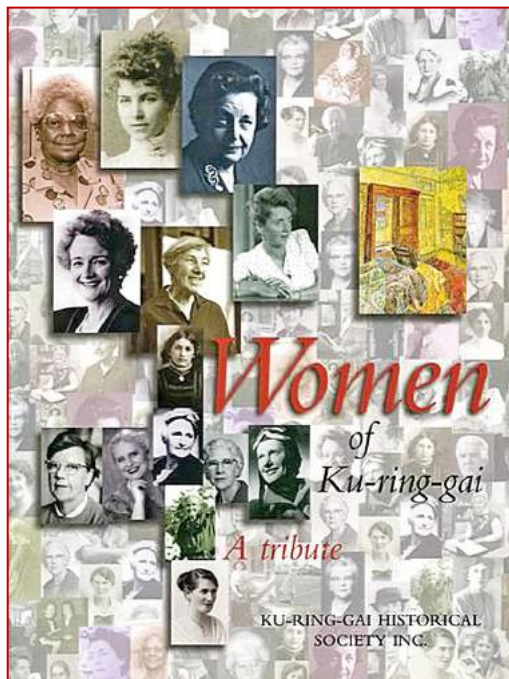
On the right is the Pymble Post Office, rebuilt in the mid 70s. The Pymble Hotel is on the left.

**Now:**

A similar view today. Several buildings on the right are visible in the 1959 image indicated by the red dot.

Have you any old 'Then & Now' photos of Ku-ring-gai hidden in old albums ?  
Get them out and send to the Editor who is waiting to publish them.

## Women of Ku-ring-gai - A tribute



In 1999 the Ku-ring-gai Historical Society published this book which was edited by a past President of the Society, Helen Malcher.

The book tells the story of many women of achievement in this area, redressing the balance of recorded history being largely written by and about men.

In general, the editor has chosen women who lived in the area for over 15 years, and who were either over the age of 65 or were dead. This excludes the many younger women who were achieving in a wide variety of fields, who could be the subject of a later edition. Due to lack of sufficient information some women were excluded, particularly earlier women who could have been featured.

*Women of Ku-ring-gai* is not only interesting in itself, but is also the basis of further research on 'our' women. We are all too aware of the extent of further research that can be done, to flesh out existing entries, to augment the number of women acknowledged as significant to the area.



Dame Joan Hammond



Ethel Turner

The book has over 100 stories about the *Women of Ku-ring-gai* and is a great read. Some of the well known women are Betty Archdale, Valerie Taylor, Nancy Bird Walton, Faith Bandler and Grace Cossington Smith to name a few.

The book is available on our website for \$24 with P&H \$15 per book within Australia.



Bee (Bea) Miles

## DIARY DATES

### AUGUST 2023

- Saturday 12 : **10.30am Family History Workshop**  
*The Parramatta Female Factory*  
**Presenter : Gay Hendriksen**
- Monday 14 : **1.30pm - German SIG Meeting**
- Saturday 19 : **2pm - General Meeting**  
*Dead and Buried: Sydney's Earliest Burial Grounds*  
**Presenter : Warren Fahey OAM**

### SEPTEMBER 2023

- Saturday 9 : **10.30am Family History Workshop**  
*Enhancing Images in Microsoft Word*  
**Presenter : Lorna Watt**
- Saturday 16 : **2pm - General Meeting**  
*Australia and the Pacific: a History*  
**Presenter : Dr Ian Hoskins**

### OCTOBER 2023

- Monday 9 : **1.30pm - German SIG Meeting**
- Saturday 14 : **10.30am Family History Workshop**
- Saturday 21 : **2pm - General Meeting**  
*Lucy Osburn : Controversial Nursing Founder*  
**Presenter : Dr Judith Godden**

### NOVEMBER 2023

- Saturday 11 : **10.30am Family History Workshop**
- Saturday 18 : **2pm - General Meeting**
- Tuesday 21 : **KHS 60th Anniversary Dinner**

### 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:-**

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