

# North Shore Historical Society Inc.

Celebrating North Sydney's Heritage

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Affiliate Member of Royal Australian Historical Society



## BULLETIN FOR MARCH 2025

### NEXT GENERAL MEETING

**6.00pm Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025**

To be held on 2nd floor, Stanton Library, 234 Miller Street, North Sydney.

**Commencing at 6pm, our meeting will finish around 7.30pm- the library closes at 8.00pm**

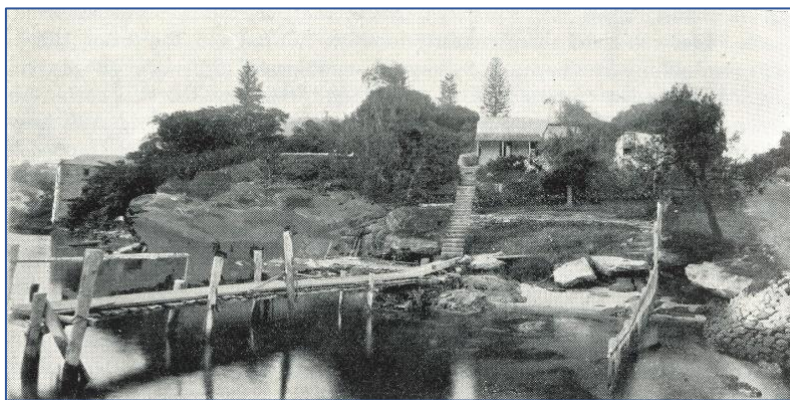
Note- The meeting is being held on the second floor of the library – take lift to level 2.

### March Guest Speaker: Dr Ian Hoskins

Dr Ian Hoskins has been North Sydney Council's Historian since 2003. During that time he has written and researched the local area extensively. This talk emerges out of research conducted for the website *At Home in North Sydney*, a revised heritage study of Neutral Bay in 2022 and his current work on a new history of North Sydney.

### Topic: The mysterious Mr Thrupp and the retiring Mr Robertson:

**A history of Neutral Bay and Cremorne Point from 1788 to 1940.**

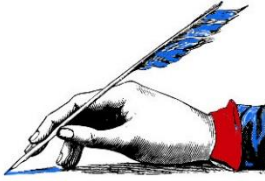


The names Thrupp and Robertson graced maps of Neutral Bay and Cremorne Point throughout the 19th century. Yet the residency of these two grantees is still somewhat mysterious. Nonetheless, the delayed development of their large grants greatly influenced the architectural character of the areas. Much has been lost but

a great many buildings survive.

*Photo: Thrupp's cottage*

**Welcome to new members: Elizabeth Collison and Robyn Leslie**



## February 2025 report by Don Napper

### Dr. William Redfern – *Truth Will Prevail*

By Andrew Redfern

Andrew commenced his talk by pointing out that although a 'Redfern', he was not a direct descendant of the subject of his talk, Dr William Redfern. Indeed, there are no direct male descendants of William today. Andrew said that he is a descendant of William's brother, Richard Redfern. He also said that the name 'Redfern' was adopted by the family in Cromwellian times to replace their Irish name, 'O'Neil', in the hope of keeping their land in Northern Ireland from being confiscated.



William Redfern (left) was born in the early 1770s and grew up in Trowbridge, Wiltshire. In 1797, he qualified as a surgeon, surgery being the overwhelming aspect of medical practise in those days. Redfern was then commissioned as a surgeon's mate in the Royal Navy. He was assigned to the *HMS Standard*, whose crew just a few months later were to take part in the fleet mutiny at the Nore Sandbank anchorage in the Thames Estuary. Redfern urged his sailors to remain united during the mutiny, which resulted in him being included amongst those charged by court martial. He was sentenced to death but because of his age, he was reprieved and spent the next four years in English jails. He found the conditions, especially the food, so unbearable that he requested transportation to NSW.

This request was acceded to in 1801 when 3 convict ships, the *Nile*, *Minorca* and *Canada*, left England on the 7-month journey to Sydney. Redfern arrived in Sydney in December 1801 on the *Minorca* on which he had been able to assist its surgeon. Almost immediately, he was sent to Norfolk Island where he served as the island's civic Assistant Surgeon. The excellence of his medical skills attracted the attention of its Lieutenant-Governor, Joseph Foveaux, and Redfern soon received a conditional pardon. He was to receive an absolute pardon from Governor King in the following year.

Redfern lived on Norfolk Island for 7 years, acting as both a doctor and a farmer. In 1808, however, the Island was abandoned and any residents transferred to Tasmania, William returning to Sydney via Tasmania. On arrival back in Sydney, he was appointed the NSW Assistant Surgeon by Foveaux, who had himself become the NSW Lieutenant-Governor in place of Governor Bligh. However, as Redfern had no documentary evidence of his professional qualifications, a three-person Board of qualified surgeons was set up to examine his medical skills and knowledge. Redfern passed this examination with flying colours and so he is considered to be Australia's first medical graduate. The examination set a precedent followed for many years for testing anyone who wished to practise medicine in the Colony.

Redfern was soon conducting a daily out-patient clinic for men from the convict gangs, alongside his rapidly expanding private practice and his work in hospital wards. As he was concerned with convict health, he was asked to investigate the dire mortality rates suffered in 1814 on the transportation ships *Surry*, *Three Bees* and *General Hewitt* (on which Francis Greenway arrived in Sydney).

The mortality rate on the First Fleet had only been 3% whereas on the Second Fleet it jumped to 25%. High mortality rates had continued on many subsequent transportations. Andrew said that one of the major issues was that the shipping contractors (e.g., the former slave trading company

Camden, Calvert & King) were paid on the basis of the number of convicts who embarked onto their ships in England and not the number who arrived safely in Australia. As a result, an inadequate supply of poor-quality food seriously affected the health of all convicts on board ship.

Redfern's report made important recommendations that put an end to these abuses and thus subsequently saved thousands of lives. His recommendations related to improving the ventilation, cleanliness and fumigation of the ships, as well as upgrading the diet and clothing that convicts required. Other major recommendations related to the need to allow convicts significant time on deck and to providing a surgeon, Navy-style, on each ship.

Redfern was the most popular doctor in the Colony. His services were widely sought as evidenced by the fact that he was the family doctor for both the Macarthurs and the Macquaries, who took contrary sides on the controversial emancipists issue. Redfern attended John Macarthur's daughter when she fell ill in 1809 and earned her father's deep gratitude for his professional skills. He also became widely regarded as the best obstetrician in the Colony and attended the birth of Governor Macquarie's son, Lachlan, in 1814.

Redfern was closely involved in the construction and running of the first Sydney General ('Rum') Hospital in 1816. As the Assistant Surgeon, he occupied the southern-most of the three new buildings, the former Mint now used as a museum. When D'arcy Wentworth resigned as Principal Surgeon in 1818, it was expected that the senior medical position in the Colony would pass to the Assistant Surgeons in order of their seniority. To prevent William Redfern, a former convict and a friend of the emancipist Macquarie, from assuming the position, the Prince Regent in 1819 intervened and instead appointed an English surgeon, James Bowman, as the NSW Principal Surgeon. Redfern resigned immediately after 17 years of public service.

William Redfern was granted 70 acres of land, which along with another 30 acres adjoining this grant that was given to his wife by her mother as a wedding gift, became the suburb of Redfern. He came to own much land (23,000 acres) at Bathurst, Cowra and Airds, where he built his home, *Campbell Fields*, on the Georges River. He died in 1833 in Edinburgh, where he had taken his son, William Lachlan

Macquarie  
Redfern to be  
educated.

William  
Redfern  
deserves to be  
better known  
in the  
community-at-  
large if only  
because he is  
now widely  
recognised as  
the father of  
medicine in  
Australia.  
Andrew's  
instructive talk

will greatly assist in adding to this much-needed recognition.



Don Napper

Above – Redfern Cottage, Minto

## History Essay Prize Presentation

The winner of our History Essay Competition together with the runner up, were presented their award at the February meeting



Ella Fraser's winning entry '*Recluses and Runaways*' was considered a well-written essay about the 'other side' of Cammeray, acknowledging the homeless people who were part of North Sydney's social history around the mid 1800's.

The judge's runner up prize was awarded to Gill Napper for a family story called '*Two North Sydney Men*'. An interesting story about two men who contributed to the fabric of North Sydney in the 19th and

above- Ella, Fraser & Gill Napper with President Gaynor Austen 20th Century.

## March 2025 Outing

**St. Patrick's Church, The Rocks**

**10.30 AM Wednesday 19th March 2025**

Meet at the church at 10.30 am. Guided tour will last approximately an hour. Cost is \$10.00 per person; this includes a complimentary cup of coffee or pot of tea at the coffee shop. **Maximum number 15.** Pay on arrival.

Bookings [sjwade1648@gmail.com](mailto:sjwade1648@gmail.com) (please note Susan Wade's new email address).

**Bookings essential** – put your name down February meeting or contact Susan Wade at [sjwade1648@gmail.com](mailto:sjwade1648@gmail.com)

**Please note susan's new email address**

The St Patrick's Catholic Church is the oldest surviving Catholic church in Sydney. It is also known as St Patrick's, Church Hill or St Pat's Church Hill. The property is owned by the Trustees of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney. The Marist Fathers, a religious order, have administered the parish since 1868.

Built in the early 1840s, St Patrick's stands in Sydney's historic Rocks area, with a history reaching back to the very beginnings of Catholic life in Australia. Inseparably linked with St Patrick's history is the name of William Davis, an Irishman transported for his part in anti-British uprisings in Ireland in 1798. Davis obtained land in The Rocks in 1809, and in the early years of the colony, when there was no resident priest in Sydney, his home became a centre of Catholic prayer.

## Report on Society heritage activities in 2024

**Gaynor Austen, President**

The Society is active in encouraging the preservation and maintenance of heritage within the local North Sydney area. In 2024 we were involved in the following heritage matters:

**State Heritage listing of the Orpheum Theatre** – The Society provided a submission in January strongly supporting the proposal to list this iconic theatre on the State Heritage Register. We were delighted to be subsequently advised that this listing had been approved.

**MLC Building** - We were also pleased to note early in 2024 the re-listing of the North Sydney MLC Building on the State Heritage Register. The Society had written a number of submissions on this matter, and on an earlier proposal to demolish this important part of North Sydney's heritage.



*Photo above: MLC building 1960 – by Geoff Huntington*

### **NSW Heritage Strategy**

In February, on behalf of the Society, I completed a survey issued by the NSW Government on the proposed NSW Heritage Strategy

**Paraween Street Cottages** - In April we were pleased to be notified that a set of late Victorian and Federation cottages in Paraween Street, Cremorne, had been added to the Council's Local Environment Plan as a heritage item. We had previously provided a submission supporting a campaign by a group of local residents for this heritage listing. These cottages had been proposed for demolition by a developer.

**19-21 Northcliff Street, Kirribilli** – the Society registered an objection to a Development Application for an unsympathetic alteration to two locally heritage listed buildings at 19-21 Northcliff Street, Kirribilli. We were subsequently advised that this application had been withdrawn.

**Berrys Bay Precinct (Carradah Park)** – In September we were advised that the State Government was considering listing of Berrys Bay Precinct on the State Heritage Register. On behalf of the Society, I prepared a short submission strongly supporting this listing.

The Society also continues to be concerned at the lack of local heritage listing of early twentieth century buildings within the LGA. We have been investigating some of these, with a view to requesting consideration by Council of the merits of such listings.



## Wading through the Archives

Susan Wade

Edition No 95

For this Bulletin I have collected a variety of correspondence from the 1930's which I believe reflects some unique aspects of life during this decade.

Firstly I have located an interesting letter from The Ratepayers & Citizens' Association of North Sydney in February 1935 to the Town Clerk, Council Chambers North Sydney stating "The danger to human life particularly of women and children and elderly folk, at the street crossings where traffic is rapid, heavy and dangerous to pedestrians, is the reason for asking Council if any provisions are being made by it or by other bodies such as the Main Roads Board or the Railway Department to construct **subways** within this municipality at:

1. The Pacific Highway opposite the Orpheum Theatre
2. The Pacific Highway crossing from North Sydney Railway station, and Station Hotel at Walker Street at the corner of Junction Street
3. The crossing at the junction opposite from the North Sydney post Office at the intersection of Mount St.

While such work will entail fairly heavy expenditure it cannot be denied that the rapid increase of traffic on the main road from the bridge to the whole of the North Sydney district makes crossing very dangerous to pedestrians, and where the personal safety is concerned, this Association feels that some foresight could be used in providing for these necessary works at the earliest possible date".

Response from the Town Clerk noted their letter was placed before Council at its last meeting. It was noted that the matter was mentioned some years ago, but owing to then large cost involved, Council could not see its way to authorise the work. It was also considered that the provision of subways across Main Roads was a matter for the Main Roads Department.



### What is a pedestrian subway?

A pedestrian subway is designed for enabling pedestrians to cross from one side of a road or multi-road intersection carrying vehicular traffic to another side of the road or multi-road intersection, without interrupting vehicular traffic flow, comprising a tunnel beneath the road or multi-roads.

The Thames Tunnel London (image above right) was the first tunnel built for pedestrians. It opened in 1843 and was a marvel of construction. A lift at each end lowered 6 pedestrians at a time.



**Such a grand building! I wonder what happened to it. And do you know what there is now?<sup>1</sup>**

A letter from the proprietor of Hunter's Bakery, E.S. Taylor, stating he was in receipt of your notice of 10<sup>th</sup> instant under the Public Health Act, in relation to repairs needed to be carried out at 163 West Street North Sydney. I would appreciate it if you would grant me an extension of one month to enable me to collect the necessary estimates etc.

A note scribbled on the bottom of the page by the Health Inspector states, "an extension of one month would be granted".



Above - 167 West Street today

**A most topical letter! from August 1935 about Council rates!**

Firstly, a letter from the Municipality of Randwick seeking the co-operation of all other Municipal and Shire Councils throughout N.S.W. in an endeavour to induce the State Government to grant relief to the extent of 50% on all overdue rates owed by ratepayers, who through economic and other conditions find themselves unable to meet their financial obligations to Councils.

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<sup>1</sup> Known as the Great Northern Bakery, it was opened in August 1894. Owned by Butler and McKye, the building was significantly damaged by fire in November 1905

The Response from the Town Clerk of North Sydney was to state that " the resolution of Randwick Municipality was considered by Council at its last meeting, and I am instructed to inform you that this Council refused to co-operate".  *Hmm, rings a bell?? (Cheeky me!)*

**From the Australian Sea Cadet Brigade in December 1938** stating that with kind permission from Council they are now occupying the top portion of the old Lavender Bay Baths, as a depot for the training of Naval Cadets. Since being in occupation, we have done quite a lot of work to the interior and as soon as we are able to procure some paint, we intend to paint the outside of the building, with your permission.

It has been rumoured that the building is to be demolished for the purpose of making a park on the site. We would be pleased to meet any Aldermen to state our case, before any decision is made regarding the matter.

Response from Town Clerk stated that Council has not made any arrangements regarding the premises on the site of the old Lavender Bay Baths.

*The Lavender Bay Baths (1910), also known as Cavill's Baths, a tidal swimming pool, were once popular with swimmers, located in the area beside the ferry wharf. Wendy Whiteley created a garden adjacent to her home, in the area between Clark Park and the old railway line.*

### **Children's Trolleys**

A letter to The Inspector of Police, North Sydney, from the Town Clerk, drawing attention to the danger, not only to traffic using the road, but to the children themselves, caused by children's trolleys running on the roads of the Municipality.

It was stated at the last meeting of Council that two accidents occurred in Mount Street last, necessitating the removal of the children to the hospital. The Council would appreciate you taking action to suppress the practice.

### **Cut down the kerb**

A letter from a resident in Illiliwa Street Cremorne as Council to cut the kerb down to allow for a motor car to cross onto the road from his residence and enclosing a cheque to pay for same.

*Many people may not be aware that in the 1920.s and 1930's when not many residents owned motor vehicles, roads and kerbs were constructed without a crossing for cars and hence residents were required to fund a crossing into their driveway when they purchased a motor car.*

**And finally, in 1930, Australia was hit by the Great Depression**, which caused economic collapse and social distress.

#### Economic impact

- Unemployment rose from 10% in mid-1929 to 21% in mid-1930
- Factory output fell by almost 10% in 1929-30
- The government budget went from a surplus to a deficit

#### Social impact

- Many people struggled to find work, and some were evicted from their homes
- Shanty towns of homeless people appeared in many areas
- Many people relied on charity or the dole to survive

But on a happier note, Don Bradman scored 452 runs not out in a Sheffield Shield cricket match at the Sydney Cricket Ground and the racehorse Phar Lap won the 1930 Melbourne Cup.