



## MOSMAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER - April 2019

The last speaker meeting was held 13th March when Emeritus Professor David Carment presented **'The Adventures of *Waltzing Matilda*: the first civilian passenger aircraft to reach Australia from Britain after the Second World War.**

David stumbled upon an amazing story when reading the diary of his grandfather who was one of those wanting to travel to Australia from Britain as quickly as possible in 1946, when commercial transportation links for civilians were almost non-existent. It was an adventurous and dangerous flight on a converted Halifax bomber. Solving one emergency by using coconut oil as a substitute in the hydraulic system, necessitated low altitude flights to prevent the oil from solidifying.

### NEXT SPEAKER MEETING

Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> May at 7pm  
Downstairs at Mosman Library

Dr Paul Irish is an archaeologist and historian specialising in the history and heritage of Aboriginal Australia. He will talk about his 2017 prize-winning book, ***Hidden in Plain View: The Aboriginal People of Coastal Sydney***. He tells a powerful story of nineteenth century Aboriginal lives, and demonstrates that Aboriginal people did not disappear from Sydney as was often assumed. *See attached flyer*

### Local Studies at BARRY O'KEEFE LIBRARY

***Creative Characters & Blazing Sunsets*** 2 May 10.30am-1pm  
Family history writing workshop... *See flyer*  
***A Mosman Hall of Industry*** – exhibition 30 April to 26 May  
Iconic brands with Mosman connections... *See flyer*

### MOSMAN'S WAR TROPHIES.....continued.....

In response to our recent trophy gun article, photos were received from member Anne Dooley, and from Kapooka Army Heritage Museum of the Mosman 17th Battalion field gun (below). The fate of the Howitzer remains a mystery.



### Happy 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday to GAVIN SOUTER

Best wishes to our Patron on his upcoming birthday. Gavin is the author of many books and a former Walkley Award winning journalist with Fairfax. His *Mosman A History* was commissioned by Mosman Municipal Council for their 1993 centenary and remains the definitive history of our suburb.

### Now on TROVE – Mosman's early newspaper 'THE MOSMAN RESIDENT'

For many years, your committee has considered that the most important lasting contribution our Society could make to Mosman history would be the permanent conservation of the fragile and rare early local newspapers, enabling both our members and all researchers of the future to access these records of our early history. On behalf of our members, the committee has been working towards this achievement.

*The Mosman, Neutral and Middle Harbour Resident* is now available online in Trove, the National Library of Australia's digitised newspaper database. Trove provides free online access to around 1250 Australian city and country newspapers from every state and territory.

Although *The Resident* was published from 1904 until at least 1919, only issues from 30 July 1904 – 28 December 1907 and 1 February 1919 were known to have survived. Until now these were only available on microfilm. The digitisation of this local paper was initiated by Mosman Historical Society, supported by Mosman Council, Mosman Local Studies section of the Barry O'Keefe Library and the State Library of NSW.

We are now able to read, online, the news and ephemera of the time about Mosman and surrounding suburbs, for example:

**August 1904** "The accident to the Spit punt last Sunday shows plainly the danger and inconvenience of that antiquated ferry". An excursion steamer cut the cable, setting the punt adrift and stranding traffic on both sides of the Spit, and on the punt. Other boats assisted foot and bicycle passengers, vehicles waiting to cross had to take a very long detour home, and those vehicles already on the punt, including horses, were marooned there overnight.

**December 1905** Letter to the Editor from Disgusted, concerning Bathing and Sunday Dancing at Balmoral. "It is disgustingly immoral to see grown men running about the beach in almost a state of nudity in the presence of women and children." "The place is simply alienated by the Sydney larrikin and his girl, who come over ostensibly to participate in the dancing by day and the basest immorality at night".

**July 1906** Mosman takes a great interest in the Royal North Shore Hospital, "for it is our own hospital, and the Mosman Cot is kept up by the young people of Mosman" by holding bazaars, balls, collections etc. Staff at the hospital consisted of matron, two sisters, two nurses, 9 probationers, a resident doctor plus honorary medical staff. Includes photographs of the hospital.

**January 1907** Much of the foreshore land, including that at Balmoral, was privately held but not yet built on, thus giving the Government a window in which to claim Balmoral for the people. There was "a good deal of agitation" ... "in favour of resumption of some of the alienated foreshores".

The new digitised format will greatly improve access to this valuable historical resource for Mosman and surrounding suburbs.  
*A.Fernandez*

# ATHOL HALL

The picnic and pleasure ground known as Athol Gardens, near the Zoo at Athol Bight, was originally a grant of 4 acres made to Joseph Kay in 1831, then passing to Alexander Ferrier in 1836. Ferrier erected two houses on the property, a garden cottage for his family, and a substantial villa named Athol. When advertised for rent in 1845, the villa was described as “consisting of dining and drawing rooms, four bed-rooms, detached kitchen with oven, laundry and rooms above, also extensive garden” (SMH 27/2/1845). Later, servants’ rooms, outbuildings, kitchen garden, orchard and paddocks were added.

There was a steady turnover of tenants during the 1850s and 60s, probably due to its isolated position on the north shore. In the early 1860s it was reported as being used as a hotel, the unlicensed Athol Arms where, being outside the city, drinking was permitted on Sundays. Boxing and cockfighting also provided entertainment. In 1864 the lease was taken over by C.F. Hemington, who advertised that he would run the “beautiful mansion of Athol” as a pleasure ground. Steamers from Circular Quay would transport visitors across the harbour to be landed at a primitive wharf below the property, from where a steep path led up to the Athol Arms inn. From these beginnings, for over 50 years it was one of Sydney’s most popular recreation grounds.

In 1866 William Clark, who conducted a dancing academy in Elizabeth Street, took over the property and in 1872 was granted a publican’s licence, changing the name to Athol Gardens. Extensions were made and a dancing pavilion built. A visitor at the time described the hotel as being “pretty good”... with “a well furnished large parlour, also a dining and sitting room with a piano much out of tune. Liquors very good but twice Sydney prices”. He described two dancing saloons with sloping shingled roofs and open sides for ventilation. The hotel was plastered and painted white, with a small house of square stone blocks at the rear. The “gardens” consisted of a variety of fruit trees, with wildflowers and native roses in the adjacent bushland.



*Athol Gardens c1871 by G.B.Mason  
antiqueprinroom.com*

By 1880 the hotel had been renovated and refurbished. A fine new pavilion for dancing was a drawcard for visitors, and was also used as a luncheon rendezvous for the crews of yachts following weekend races to Athol. At Easter 1880 advertisements in the Sydney Morning Herald promoted a

special family picnic event, with “grand preparations for this great holiday”. There would be a band for dancing in the pavilion, another on the lawn, with sports and amusements all day. Mrs Clark would supply the best brands of wine, beer etc, with light refreshments and meals available – “a good dinner for 1/-”. Later that year the premises changed hands yet again, the licence being taken over by J.T. Coffill but under the supervision of Mrs Bates.

Unfortunately around this time such dancing establishments were gaining a reputation as places of rowdy and scandalous behaviour, resulting in stricter licensing conditions. Athol Gardens Hotel did not meet the standards required of new licensing laws introduced in 1881, which prevented Sunday trading and also controlled dancing and music. As a result it ceased to be a licensed premises, being renamed the Athol Temperance Hotel, with all intoxicating liquors and also dancing banned from the grounds.

Nevertheless on New Year’s Day 1883 there were 3000 visitors, the Herald reporting that “the temperance grounds at Athol were conspicuous for the order and good conduct maintained there” unlike other places where dancing and alcohol were still permitted. Later that decade dancing returned to the pavilion, but seemingly only during group picnics organised by such as the Hibernian Society and Shamrock Club. By the 1890s press reports show that dancing was again a feature of functions held at Athol Gardens by many clubs, work organisations and holiday makers.

Athol continued as one of the most popular picnic grounds around Sydney Harbour, especially on holidays, with extra ferries employed to transport the many visitors. In 1906 it was purchased from the Ferrier family by Sydney Ferries Ltd. Over the next five years this company made improvements such as the construction of new pathways and the erection of a new pavilion in 1908, the last of many on the site. This pavilion remains, now known as Athol Hall, the only reminder of Athol Gardens in its heyday. It seems that around this time the other structures, the hotel, garden cottage, earlier dance pavilions and various picnic shelters, still visible in a photo taken by Sydney Ferries in 1906, were demolished. Just some stone foundations behind Athol Hall and an outhouse remain.

Sydney Ferries Ltd. sold the site in 1911 to the Taronga Park trustees, and during this time the surrounding bushland, military reserve and animal quarantine station were resumed for incorporation into Ashton Park. Though Athol Gardens continued as a popular picnic ground, after the opening of the Zoo and its new wharf in 1916, the focus of visitors moved in that direction. The area was used by Zoo visitors for picnics, and the pavilion as a tearoom and kiosk, and was still being advertised as an ideal picnic spot in the early 1950s. The pavilion gradually fell into disrepair, but after being incorporated into the Sydney Harbour National Park in 1975, was restored and is now used as the Athol Hall cafe and function centre, on Bradleys Head Road.

*By P.Morris, Mosman Historical Society*

*SOUTER, Gavin. Mosman: a history. Melb, UP, 1994*  
*STURROCK, Rob. Pictorial history of Mosman, vol.1. Netley, Griffin Press, [1983]*  
*Articles from TROVE newspaper database*