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MOSMAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER - June 2019

The last speaker meeting was held on 8th May. Dr Paul Irish talked about his 2017 prize-winning book, *Hidden in Plain View: The Aboriginal People of Coastal Sydney*. He told stories gleaned from the records of the time, of the many Aboriginal people living in the Sydney region in the nineteenth century. Some caught fish or made shell trinkets, which they sold to the British. These stories counteract the general belief that Aboriginal people had largely disappeared from the area with the arrival and spread of the British.

NEXT SPEAKER MEETING
Wednesday 10th July at 7pm
Downstairs at Mosman Library

Speaker Lieutenant Colonel Peter Sweeney served 35 years in the Australian Army Reserve and is a military historian. His subject is *The Attack on Sydney Harbour 31 May – 1 June 1942*, which resulted in the death of 2 British sailors and 19 Australian. His talk covers the actions of the Japanese submariners involved and their subsequent activities.

See attached flyer

Local Studies at BARRY O'KEEFE LIBRARY

Two interesting displays are currently on view in the Mosman room until end of July 2019.....

1. A small *Archibald Mosman* display - including a sundial from his Mosman Bay house and some 19th century family photos.
2. *The Mosman Register of Notification of Infectious diseases 1898 to 1966* – which covers the period of the influenza pandemic. This has also been recently digitised and is now on TRACE.

Celebrating National Family History Month in August.....

1. 5-19 August. *Mosman Families in Black and White*, an exhibition of old Mosman family photographs.
2. Thursday 8 August 10.30 to 1pm. A class in *Using land title records for family and local history*, given by Assoc.Prof. Carol Liston AO. *Bookings essential – flyer attached*

NORFOLK ISLAND celebrations March 2020 230 years since the wrecking of HMS SIRIUS

Mosman has a special 'sister community' relationship with Norfolk Island because of the wrecking of the valiant little HMS Sirius there in 1790. Former Mosman resident, museum director and now Norfolk Island travel agent, Lisa Richards, has contacted MHS to let us know about a tour organized for the commemoration. A special guest presenter is Graham Seal, author of *Great Australian Stories*, and Don and Sue Brian presenting convict folk songs and poems. There will be numerous workshops, museum visits, talks and a special luncheon opposite the wreck site on the 19th March.

See attached flyer

DEAD CENTRAL exhibition
State Library of NSW – Exhibition Galleries
9am-8pm now until 17 November.....entrance free

Few Sydneysiders are aware that the area beneath Central Station was once a sprawling cemetery. It was bounded by Devonshire Street, Elizabeth Street and Pitt Street. The cemetery opened in 1820 and filled very quickly before becoming derelict and covered in weeds. In January 1901, when the state government announced its new plans for the area, it held 30,000 bodies.

The haunting story of the Devonshire Street Cemetery is told in a 35 minute audio recording using your own device.

ELIZABETH REIMER 1960s Australiana jewellery

Mosman Library Local Studies recently exhibited some of their 'treasures', including jewellery by Elizabeth Reimer who was a groundbreaking local artist in the field of costume jewellery. She started with medieval and ancient Egyptian themes as well as modern fashion styles, all with superb hand detailing, but is most renowned for her Australiana collection featuring native plants and flowers in art nouveau style. These were marketed in Australia and Japan under the trade name *Arcansas*, with a trademark dagger and are now coveted collector items both here and in USA.

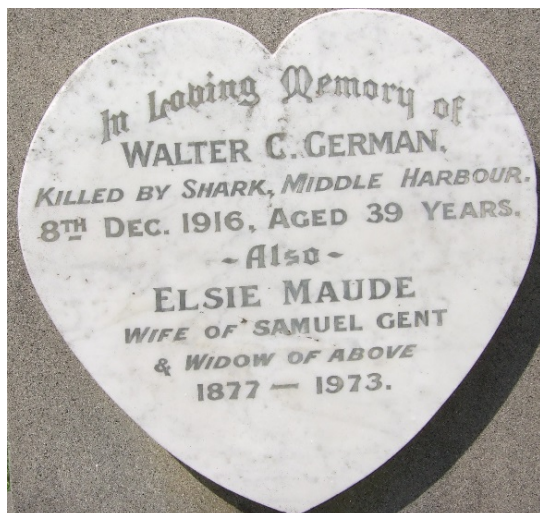
When visiting the *Trove and Treasure* function, a member of MHS recognised the style from pieces in her late mother's belongings which had languished unused for many years. Her collection of five Reimer pieces has now been added to the Local Studies collection where, our member says, 'they now have a new home and will be loved and cared for'.



Arcansas brooch, one of the new pieces of jewellery

Correction. The title of the feature article in March issue of the Newsletter should have read *Athol Gardens*. The author notes that Athol Hall was not built until c1908, was never a hotel and was not even known as Athol Hall until probably 1970s when it was taken over and restored by NPWS.

'bloodcurdling screams': SHARK ATTACK IN MIDDLE HARBOUR



I visited Waverley Cemetery in March 2018 and Walter C German's headstone caught my eye. 'Killed by shark, Middle Harbour' it announced. Who was Walter C. German and what were the circumstances of his attack and death on 8 December 1916?

The *Daily Telegraph* of 26 December 2014 began by describing Sydney Harbour as a 'sinister soup, swarming with giblets that kill'. Despite the age of 39 on his headstone, the article described Walter Cromwell German as a 41 year-old Torquay Point man who was swimming with his wife at nearby Middle Harbour when his left arm was bitten off above the elbow. His wife's screams alerted neighbours who helped drag him ashore. The *Telegraph* left nothing to the imagination, noting that two women could see his 'heart beating in his chest'. He died shortly after. Torquay Point, also known as Sugarloaf Point, is at Castlecrag.

The first known 'requiem attack' in Middle Harbour had been in 1907 when Henry Jones, Secretary of the Mosman Congregation Church tennis club was killed while swimming at Sugarloaf Point. Walter German was a motor engineer and died while swimming in front of his home near the same point in 1916. Gavin Souter's book describes several other shark attacks.¹

In 1916 a public wharf, the first in Willoughby Municipality, had been opened at Torquay Point (Sugarloaf Point) on 30 November and the vendors of Torquay Estate contributed half the cost of the structure. A motor launch service operated from The Spit two days a week for many years with passengers able to connect with the tram to Spit Junction and St Leonards or Milsons Point. The wharf was demolished in the 1950s.²

H.S. Hawkins, the City Coroner reported that on the day of his death Walter had been teaching his wife, Elsie, to swim when the attack occurred.³ Elsie's 'terrible experience' was even reported in the Bathurst newspapers where she was noted as 'extremely plucky for an elderly woman'.⁴ She was about forty! Perhaps to warn country people from swimming in Sydney Harbour or a fascination with being eaten by sharks, *The Guyra Argus* reported that 'the shallow waters of the quiet bays seem to be the favourite resorts of the man-eating types of shark'.⁵ The papers were fascinated and reports appeared in *The Farmer and Settler*, *The Maitland Mercury*, *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, the *Macleay Argus*, *The Singleton Argus* and as far away as the *Barrier Miner* in Broken Hill. The *Maitland Daily Mercury* reported that fishermen in boats had scoured the waters the day after the attack but were unable to land the shark.⁶

Walter was buried from the Mortuary Chambers of Mrs P. Kirby & Son Ltd, Funeral Directors, 7 Elizabeth Street, Sydney in the Church of England Cemetery, Waverley where his headstone still sits today.⁷

Who was Walter Cromwell German? He appears in the Sydney Directories 1886 to 1890 living in Manly and his wife, Elsie, is there after his death in 1916 until 1929. Elsie had remarried to Samuel E. Gent in 1928 but was buried with her first husband at Waverley in 1973, as noted on the headstone.

For readers' further interest there is a 'shark' file in Mosman Library Local Studies with a note from historian Gavin Souter listing fatal shark attacks in Middle Harbour, some of which have other information in the files:

21 Dec 1907	Henry Jones at Sugarloaf Bay
8 Dec 1916	Walter German at Sugarloaf Point
16 Jan 1942	Zieta Steadman at Bantry Bay
26 Dec 1942	Denise Burch at Bantry Bay
17 Jan 1955	John Willis at Edwards Beach
5 Feb 1955	Bruno Reutenberg at Sugarloaf Bay
16 Jan 1960	Kenneth Murray at Roseville Bridge
28 Jan 1963	Marcia Hathaway at Sugarloaf Bay

Dr Perry McIntyre April 2019

¹ Gavin Souter, *Times & Tides: A Middle Harbour Memoir*, Xoum Publishing, n.d., won 2003 Isbaella Brierley Prize.

² On line article on Castlecrag history, <https://castlecrag.org.au/wp-content/uploads/History-1879-to-1919.pdf>

³ *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 15 December 1916, p.4.

⁴ *National Advocate*, Bathurst, 15 December 1916, p.2. *The Bathurst Times*, 9 December 1916, p.3.

⁵ *The Guyra Argus*, 14 December 1916, p.6.

⁶ *Maitland Daily Mercury*, 9 December 1916, p.4.

⁷ Funeral notice, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday, 9 December 1916, p.11.