



"Bunk"

"History is more or less bunk"-

HENRY FORD, Chicago Tribune, 1916

Fitzroy Dock is at the centre of our maritime history

Diary Dates 2014

Museum Open

10am to Noon

Monday to Friday

Meetings At Museum

22 Alexandra Street

Hunters Hill

Thursday 27 February

10am for 10:30

Speaker: Dr John Warden

Practical Ways to Explore

Your Family History

See page 2

Come along and bring a friend

STOP PRESS!

On Wednesday 9 April
Peter Colthorpe of Friends of
Gladesville Hospital will be
leading us on a tour of the
Hospital grounds and buildings

MORE DETAILS IN APRIL
BUNK

KEEP THIS DATE FREE

Cockatoo Island is the site of Australia's longest operating dry dock, Fitzroy Dock. It operated for over 130 years, from 1857 to 1991. It represented the desire of Governor George Gipps that the colony provide the Royal Navy with the capability to dock ships, previously not possible in the South Pacific. Its construction was also strategic, in that it encouraged the British Navy's commitment to the defence of Australia.

It had been a long held dream to make Sydney an attractive port for the Royal Navy, and in 1845 Governor Gipps was asked to approach the British government on the advantages "to the Empire at large" of a dry dock at Cockatoo Island. Governor Gipps was followed by Sir Charles FitzRoy in 1846, and the dock was subsequently named after him.

Construction began in 1847. The dock was built by convicts, with many working in diving bells. While their labour kept expenses down, they had little incentive to work quickly. After five years of excavation, there was still 180,000 cubic feet of stone to be removed.

When it was finally opened in 1857, the dock and its workshop and pump house were the most advanced in the colony.

But by then, Fitzroy Dock had become embroiled in argument and embarrassment, attracting five investigations and a no-confidence motion in the Legislative Council. With the discovery of gold, Sydney's merchants and shipowners gave up waiting. Thomas Mort began building a private dock in Balmain, and finished it in 13 months.

The Sydney press blamed the delay in construction on lazy convicts, but there was another

problem. While other docks have been built into solid rock, Fitzroy was situated on 45 feet high cliffs, all of which had to be removed. Sixteen feet down, they hit a layer of shale, which was porous to water. The dock had to be moved in from the shoreline, cutting even deeper into the cliff. Six of the ten years it took to build were spent on excavation.

There were also problems with management. There were arguments between the Civil Engineer, Gother Mann,

and the Cockatoo Island Superintendent, Charles Ormsby. Ormsby withheld convict labourers and generally hindered work. He was repeatedly criticized by government committees, but kept his job. Building the dock was turned into a farce.

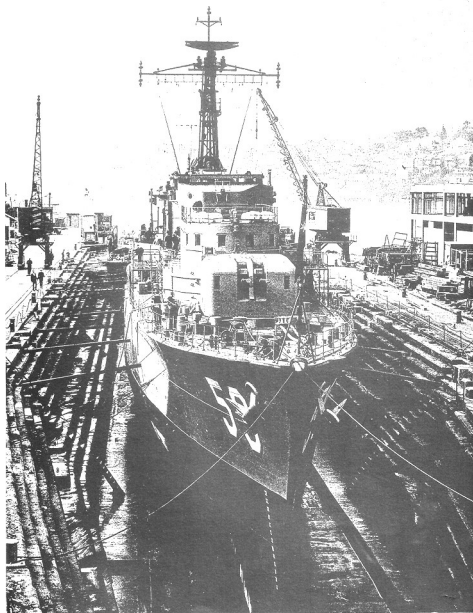
In 1853 and 1854 the dry dock's personnel expanded. They were a mixture of government appointed mechanics, foremen and gentlemen engineers under the command of the Civil Engineer. They were skilled but independent

workers who had little respect for Ormsby's authority, not wanting to be treated as little more than prisoners on the island.

Fitzroy Dock is the only remaining dry dock built using convict labour, and includes original service buildings, including the pump house and machine shop, and is one of the largest convict-era public works surviving in Sydney. It contains the earliest, most extensive and most varied record of shipbuilding, both commercial and naval, in Australia, as borne out by extensive documentary evidence in the National Archives.

Picture: HMAS Anzac in Fitzroy Dock

April 1970



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Blacktown Historical Society visits Hunters Hill

Thirteen members of Blacktown Historical Society, led by their President, Sharyn Wicks, visited the Hunters Hill Museum on Sunday 10 November last year. The weather hadn't started out very well, but had just about cleared up by the time their bus arrived at 10am.

Members of the Historical Society Committee made our visitors welcome with morning tea, and President Ian Adair gave a talk on the history of Hunters Hill, with emphasis on early settlers who had a profound influence on the way this suburb developed, such as Mary Reibey and the Joubert brothers.

After the morning tea and talk, our visitors were to go on a bus tour of Hunters Hill, in the company of our tour leader, Graham Percival. As it happened, Life Line was having their annual Book Fair in the Town Hall, and some of our visitors were waylaid between the museum and the bus. We eventually rounded them up, and Graham took us on the tour, at the end of which our visitors retired to the Hunters Hill Club for lunch.

Changing Times

My earliest memories concern the 1914 war. The launching of a warship at Cockatoo Island, a camouflaged boat tied up to one of the wharves. Stalls in Martin Place to aid the Red Cross, elderly ladies exhorting young men to fight for "King and Country" and above all sinister talk of atrocities committed by soldiers. Then something called "The Armistice" and everyone was happy because the war that was to end all wars was over and the men would be coming home. Did I say everyone? No. One small girl in Woolwich was terrified. Soldiers indulged in "atrocities" and from the shocked tones in which the word was uttered, I gathered they were something very dreadful, especially where little girls were concerned. Nobody bothered to ask why I was frightened, and I was taken to task for my extremely ungrateful behaviour. One day, a young man, a bit more enlightened or concerned than the others, quietly cornered me and gently asked why I was upset and heard the awful story of "atrocities." Taking my hand he explained that he personally had never done or seen anything shameful, and he was positive that no one else from Woolwich had, either. So forgetting my fears I was able to give "those gallant young men" as the papers fulsomely called them, the welcome that was certainly their due. After every upheaval life goes on and the 1914 war was no exception. The men appeared to take up civilian life without undue fuss, the women to continue the daily

Sharyn Wicks, President of Blacktown Historical Society, with Graham Percival



round, and children to be good, bad or indifferent according to their temperament. Although outwardly the insular existence of Hunters Hill went on, there were distinct tears appearing here and there in the established fabric of the community.

This is an excerpt from More Memories of Hunters Hill, by Margaret Oliver. Her booklets are available from the Museum for \$4.

2013 Christmas Banquet

Over 50 people attended our Christmas Banquet at the Grandview Restaurant. As usual, the menu was outstanding. Our guest speaker was the irrepressible Gregory Blaxell, who gave an animated exposition of Christmas carols over the years. He even got us to sing!

FEBRUARY SPEAKER

DR JOHN WARDEN

PRACTICAL WAYS TO EXPLORE YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

Dr John Warden brings practical ways to research your family history.

He will cover readily accessible sources such as birth, marriage and death records, internet sites and digitised newspapers, as well as outlining some of the traps in using other people's work.

COME ALONG AND HEAR HOW YOU CAN OPTIMISE THE RESULTS OF YOUR FAMILY RESEARCH.

BOOKS FOR SALE

We have just received a new supply of **HERITAGE OF HUNTERS HILL**

(The Green Book)

This is the book you need to have if you want to know about the historic houses of Hunters Hill and Woolwich

Cost: \$20

We also have

THE RIVER

Sydney Cove To Parramatta

by Gregory Blaxell

Cost: \$60

W.A. WINDEYER

Not Idle But Useless? Not He!

by J. B. Windeyer

Cost: \$30

Also a selection of booklets by Margaret Oliver telling stories of Hunters Hill in the old days

Cost: \$4 each

Prices do not include postage & packaging