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"Bunk"

"History is more or less bunk"

HENRY FORD, Chicago Tribune, 1916

HUNTERS HILL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Diary Dates:

We welcome you to the

Christmas Lunch to be held on Wednesday December 4

at the Gladesville RSL Club

12noon for 12.30pm.

Food and drinks to be paid for at the lunch
Please advise your attendance to Tony Saunders

contact@huntershillmuseum.org.au

Huntleys Point history book launch

A book on Huntleys Point's history, written by the late John Anschau, will be launched on Thursday November 21 at The Henley Community Centre from 10am to 12noon.

"The Secret Suburb" explores the history and development of Huntleys Point, landmarks around the suburb including the Gladesville Bridge and Huntleys Point Wharf from their beginnings to the present.

The book launch is being organised by

John's much-loved wife Jann.

She said the book was carefully curated during the Covid-19 pandemic by John who resided in Huntleys Point for many years up until his passing in November 2022.

Jann knew John's wish was to have his book published so she has devoted her time to fulfil this.

Jann welcomes those interested in history to attend the launch.

Huntleys Point House at 34 Huntleys Point Rd (right photo) built by Alfred Huntley who bought a portion of land from the Crown in 1851. A grand house of the suburb.

Society shares stories of the past at Moocooboola Festival

Members of the HHHS operated a stall at the Moocooboola Festival recently with a 1923 20hp Rolls Royce owned by local resident Richard Jones creating much interest as shown by the newly re-elected Mayor Zac Miles.

Gladesville Bridge celebrates 60th birthday

The Gladesville Bridge has just celebrated its 60th year on October 2 so we look back on its history.

It was opened by Princess Marina on 2 October 1964 to much fanfare, replacing a low-level multi-span truss bridge that carried tram and road traffic. It was listed on the State Heritage Register on October 1 2014.

Engineering marvel

The Gladesville Bridge is an iconic example of mid-20th-century engineering and architecture. Built from 1959 to 1964, this arch bridge spans the Parramatta River, linking the suburbs of Gladesville and Drummoyne. When it was completed, the bridge held the title of the longest concrete arch span in the world, stretching an impressive 305 meters. Designed by the engineering firm Anthony Gee, G. Maunsell and Partners and Eugene Freyssinet, it was a trailblazer for its time, showcasing adv1ancements in concrete technology and bridge construction. It was built by a consortium of Reed and Mallik (UK) and Stuart Bros (a local firm since absorbed into John Holland)

Architectural significance

The bridge's architecture is a testament to the era's modernist design principles. Its elegant, sweeping arch and sleek lines reflect the mid-century fascination with clean, functional forms devoid of excessive ornamentation. This aesthetic, coupled with the bridge's sheer scale, creates a striking visual impact that has made it a beloved landmark. The design also incorporates practical considerations; its width accommodates multiple lanes of traffic, helping to ease congestion between the northern and southern suburbs of Sydney.

Post-war boom bridge

The construction of the Gladesville Bridge was part of a broader post-war infrastructure boom in Australia. The 1960s were marked by rapid urbanization and an expanding population, necessitating improved transportation links. The bridge was a critical component of these efforts, enhancing connectivity and facilitating the economic growth of Sydney's suburbs. Its completion was celebrated as a significant achievement, reflecting the nation's growing confidence in its engineering prowess.

Linking communities

Over the years, the bridge has played a vital role in the daily lives of Sydney residents. It has not only provided a crucial transport link but also served as a scenic route with stunning views of the Parramatta River. The bridge has become a symbol of the city's commitment to progress and innovation. It stands as a testament to the transformative impact of infrastructure on urban development, illustrating how a single structure can shape the growth and character of a region.

A legacy to be preserved

Today, the Gladesville Bridge remains a critical artery in Sydney's transport network. Its historical and architectural significance has been recognized by various heritage organizations, ensuring its preservation for future generations. Efforts to maintain and celebrate the bridge's legacy highlight the importance of preserving engineering land.marks as part of the cultural fabric of a city.

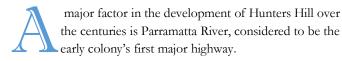**Rod Stewart President**

BUNK review *by Rod Stewart*

"Leaving Saint-Denis on an open boat: Creole Migration to the Pacific" Dr Karin Speedy

Local historian and writer Beverly Sherry drew our attention to this recent paper by Dr Karin Speedy. Many members will remember Dr Speedy's address to the general meeting on 3/11/2022 when she spoke about the translation of Lise Joubert's diary, which is now on the HHHS website. The diary was the first indication that Didier Joubert's business interests went beyond the building of charming houses in Hunters Hill.

This paper is about the migration of Creole people from Reunion (a French island in the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar and south-west if Mauritius) to New Caledonia in the 1860s and 70s.Its link with Hunters Hill is with the Joubert name which crops up first in the main paper where she quotes a letter in 1871 in which a Creole migrant says he has a job with "Monsieur Joubert à Koe". (Koe is a place in New Caledonia). This was Numa Joubert who managed his father's (Didier Joubert) sugar plantation. There are also several references to them in the notes, including an attribution to the Diary, Bev Sherry and the HHHS.

If, like me, you thought that "Creole" was all in the Deep South in the USA, it is interesting to discover the true meaning of the term and how it was applied. It also "beggars belief" that anyone would leave Réunion, a tiny island near Madagascar in the Indian Ocean, in an open boat, to find a better life in Nouvelle Calédonie.

Parramatta River highway for people and produce

A major factor in the development of Hunters Hill over the centuries is Parramatta River, considered to be the early colony's first major highway.

A specific Australianism is to add the word "the" to Parramatta River. While colloquially acceptable, the use of the definite article is grammatically superfluous.

Hunters Hill lies almost halfway between the population centres of the city of Sydney and Parramatta. It also marks the distinction between the 20-kilometre-long river itself and Port Jackson (Sydney Harbour). The dividing line is roughly around where Lane Cove River runs into the main waterway. Parramatta in the local indigenous language means "place of the eels" and eels can still be found in the upper freshwater reaches of the river. Around the Hunters Hill peninsula, bull sharks are still known to inhabit the estuarine waters. Occasionally, over the years, humans have fallen foul of their predatory behaviour.

Since colonial times, Parramatta River has been a significant thoroughfare, with waterborne transport providing the means to convey people and goods to places along its length. For instance, the most significant colonial building between the city and Parramatta lies within Hunters Hill's boundaries and is adjacent to the river. It is the government-architect designed local sandstone facility, Gladesville Hospital (initially known as the Tarban Creek Lunatic Asylum), constructed in 1838. As industry developed along its banks, because of easy access for delivering raw materials, Hunters Hill saw its share of manufacturing facilities base themselves in its area; a shipyard and a smelting works to name just two.

Early European settlers envisioned the river as an antipodean version of the Thames in England. Hence, the naming of suburbs such as Henley and Woolwich after locations along the River Thames.

Parramatta River's aesthetic appeal was recognised by Europeans in the 19th century and, as well as industry, recreational pursuits quickly flourished. As well as swimming and sailing, a stretch of the river off Henley became famous for its rowing regattas. As many as 45 world championship races were held on the river over several decades.

Gradually, industry was responsible for its own demise. Pollution of the river led to a growing public demand for environmental controls. Eventually, industry moved out, finding more suitable

locations elsewhere. For instance, Woolwich, once an artisans' and workers' village, grew into what is now a salubrious residential suburb. The late 20th century saw even greater anti-pollution measures put in place, with authorities established to plan and police the river to improve its natural wellbeing. The result in Hunters Hill, as elsewhere, is a renewed optimism for clean swimming locations and shoreside recreational amenities.

While bigger and better bridges spanning the river have made motor transport the primary means of conveyance, ferries remain an essential mode of passage as they have done since the 19th century. In the skies above Parramatta River, helicopters and seaplanes use the waterway as a safe flight route as they navigate their way around the city.
Chris Schofield
A Conrad Martens painting (above) of the Parramatta River.

First suburban telephone exchange opened 1884 in Hunters Hill

Gone are the days when the home telephone was an essential piece of domestic equipment, linking us to the outside world. Now the mobile phone reigns supreme as our communications link to just about everywhere on earth.

The introduction of the telephone in NSW dates back to 1880. By 1882, the phone's popularity had steadily increased, and the amount of subscriber lines in Sydney city had risen to 50. A year later, the number had grown to over 400.

With the metropolitan service expanding rapidly, there was a demand for it to be extended to the suburbs. Not surprisingly, given the number of professionals and business leaders choosing Hunters Hill as their familial retreat from their working day in the city, the exchange here was the first suburban one to be opened in 1884. Three years later, it had 42 subscribers.

It was a manual service; the operator being an essential element in connecting calls. Telephonists, as they were called, were exclusively female. They worked both day and night. To be appointed to the job, they had to pass an examination which covered spelling, handwriting, arithmetic and, most importantly, diction. It was not until 1914 that telephonists started to be replaced by automatic exchanges in Sydney; the first being in Newtown. But it took a long time after that for automatic exchanges to fully take over. Hunters Hill's automatic exchange is currently located in John Street. A directive in early telephone directories was for users to

"speak clearly, not loudly" - something which it seems many callers took a long time to act upon!

Even when the invention was being rolled out locally, not everyone was happy. For instance, in 1897, the then Hunters Hill Mayor, Alderman Schleicher, led a council delegation to meet with the Postmaster-General to complain about the damage being done to trees in the municipality caused by the erection of telephone wires.

Among the earliest phone numbers in Hunters Hill were Hunters Hill Ice Works – Hunter 31, and Hunters Hill Fire Station – Hunter 36. The first inter-capital city telephone lines were established in 1907, when a trunk link was established between Sydney and Melbourne. Overseas calls from Australia became possible with the start of a radiotelephone service to England in 1930.

Just over 100 years since telephones were introduced here, mobile phones started to make their appearance in Australia in 1981, and that spelled the beginning of what appears to be the slow demise of the home telephone.

As the Sydney Morning Herald commented in 1901: "The telephone, when working smoothly, is undoubtedly a great convenience, but when from any cause the system becomes disorganised, it is a most fruitful source of annoyance". Everyone would no doubt agree that such a view is as true today as it was back then.

Chris Schofield

Financial worries lead to suicide

A magisterial inquiry was held before Mr T. E. MacNevin last Friday at the Fig Tree Hotel, Hunters Hill, (ed's note: now the Hunters Hill Hotel), into the circumstances connected with the death of George Lionel Hember, whose dead body had been found on the previous afternoon in the bush opposite the hotel.

Dr. Sanderson-Lloyd deposed that he was Government Medical officer for the district of Ryde. He examined the body of the deceased. It was that of a well-nourished man, who had apparently been dead five or six hours. He appeared to be between 30 and 40 years of age. On examining, the witness found a hole in the roof of his mouth, large enough to admit the first finger. There was no other evidence of injury about the body. The injury might have been caused by the pistol produced fired in the mouth. The witness probed the wound, and found the probe passed right into the brain cavity. In his opinion the cause of death was injury to the brain from a revolver shot, probably self-inflicted.

Charles Cuneo, butcher, of Hunters Hill, deposed that about 2 o'clock on the afternoon of Thursday, 1 February, he was opposite the Fig Tree Hotel, gathering bushes to put in the bottom of his cart, when he discovered the body of a man lying on the ground on his back with a revolver in his right hand. Witness looked closely at the body and found that life was extinct. He at once reported the matter to Constable McDowell.

George William Saunders, blacksmith, of Hunters Hill, deposed that he had seen the body of deceased, whom he recognised as a man he had seen on Wednesday night, 31 January, in the bar of the Fig Tree Hotel. He was conversing with him the whole of the time and noticed nothing peculiar or strange in his manner or conversation, which was perfectly rational. He was perfectly sober when leaving the hotel about 10 o'clock. He said he had been at the races and had lost some money.

George McNair, clerk to Mr W. N. Willis, MP of Sydney, said he had seen the dead body on the premises, and recognised it as George Lionel Hember, late manager of Mr. Willis' property, known as "The Tarrion," Brewarrina. Last saw him alive on Thursday, 25 January.

The deceased was employed by Mr W. N. Willis MP since the beginning of last April, and, in his capacity of station manager, enjoyed Mr. Willis' full confidence. There were certain inaccuracies found in deceased's accounts, but nothing in his (witness') opinion that should have led him to take his life.

James Patrick Joseph Bell, a grazier, residing at Bondi, deposed that he had known deceased for about 11 years. He was a single man, a native of Bristol, England, and about 36 years of age. He had no relations in the colony, and witness did not know if he had left a will. Had heard that he had a share in a dredging syndicate on the Abercrombie River and believed that his mother was still alive and residing in Bristol, England.

Walter Rees, licensee of the Queensland Hotel, Erskine Street, Sydney, said deceased was stopping at his hotel for about three weeks, and he last saw him alive on Tuesday, 30 January, about tea-time. He left the hotel that night without giving any notice. He left his portmanteau containing clothes and some papers, and witness gave instructions to have them carefully secured. Received the letter produced, addressed to the deceased, on Thursday morning, 2 February. This letter was from the Bank at Brewarrina and was a reminder to deceased that his account had been overdrawn to the extent of £1 10s.

During the period that deceased was staying at his hotel, he appeared to be very much worried, and complained of being unable to sleep at night. Witness gathered that he was troubled over financial matters. Constable McDowell deposed that on the 1st instant he accompanied Charles Cuneo into the bush, about 100 yards from the Fig Tree Hotel, and there saw the

body of the deceased. It was lying on its back with both arms crossed on the body. In the right hand was a six chambered revolver. It was loaded in five chambers, the sixth having apparently been recently discharged. Blood was issuing from the mouth of the deceased, but life was quite extinct. The body was taken to the Fig Tree Hotel.

Mr. MacNevin found that the deceased had died from the effects of a revolver wound in the mouth, self-inflicted, while suffering from severe mental depression.

Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, 7 February 1900

Picture: The Figtree Hotel, now known as the Hunters Hill Hotel.