



Bunk

HUNTERS HILL HISTORICAL
SOCIETY INC.

Patron: Zac Miles, The Mayor of Hunters Hill

History is more or less bunk!

HENRY FORD, Chicago Tribune, 1916



Museum Matters...

In this issue of *Bunk*, we particularly give thanks and remember Rod Stewart's legacy at the museum. As Vice President to Rod, I was personally grateful for his invaluable stewardship and friendship. I look forward to working with the committee as President and helping the Hunters Hill community preserve its history and heritage so that it can be understood, valued and accessible to future generations.

Since our last issue of *Bunk*, we've continued with the digitisation project, hosted more than 100 visitors to the Museum during the week of the Art Show, attended the ANZAC memorial walk and service on 23 April, hosted a fun garden workshop making seed rolls at the Henley Community Garden, and enjoyed a fabulous talk by Megan Wurth and her brother Glynn about their time growing up in the grounds of the Gladesville Hospital. A unique experience!

On the subject of gardening, the Museum has a beautiful collection of Hunters Hill Garden Competition medals, dating from a time when gardening and gardens offered more than just a collection of flowers for a vase, but also necessary sustenance for the family table. This year, we will commemorate the *Hunters Hill - Rotary Open Gardens Day* by opening the Museum. Mark your calendars for 1 November, when we'll be looking for volunteers to help bring the museum to life for the day. Members interested in volunteering at the museum are encouraged to contact us.

With the year racing ahead, we look forward to seeing as many members as possible at our annual midyear lunch in July at the Hunters Hill Bowling Club. Also, please keep an eye out for updates on upcoming talks and walks.

Felicity McCaffrey
PRESIDENT

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of Hunters Hill and show respect to
Elders past and present

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Rod Stewart

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to Woolwich

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Hospital
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President Rod Stewart's Legacy to the Local Community

Written by Chris Schofield

When Rod Stewart passed away in April, the Historical Society lost not only its President, but also a valued friend and deeply committed member of the local community.

Rod remained actively involved in Hunters Hill until shortly before his passing. His remarkable knowledge, sound judgement and dedication to service were founded on a lifetime of experience gained through his distinguished careers as an Army officer and civil engineer in private enterprise.

Born in Sydney on 7 April 1937, Rod spent his early childhood in New Zealand before returning to Australia. During the Second World War, his father was killed in action in North Africa. After attending Cranbrook School in Sydney, Rod was accepted into the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 1955, marking the beginning of a long and distinguished military career.

After qualifying as a civil engineer, Rod joined the Royal Australian Engineers and served in several locations, including Malaysia, Papua New Guinea and Vietnam. His final Army appointment was as an instructor in military engineering at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, where he held the rank of Major.

In 1969, after resigning from the Active List, Rod embarked on a career in commercial engineering. He contributed to major design and construction projects in many parts of the world, including Western Australia's Pilbara region, Borneo, Indonesia, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Taiwan and Scotland.

By 1985, Rod and his family had established their home in Hunters Hill. Following his retirement in 2013, he was able to dedicate even more of his time and considerable expertise to voluntary service within the local community.

Rod served as both President and Vice-President of the Hunters Hill RSL Sub-Branch and remained an active member of its committee, advocating for serving and retired Defence personnel. He was also a member of the Hunters Hill Probus Club and, for the past three years, served as President of the Historical Society. In that role, he guided the organisation with great care, overseeing its management, meetings, activities and outings.



Rod's military expertise and lifelong passion for history found enduring expression in his work to uncover, research and communicate the remarkable depth of Hunters Hill's military connections across time — a contribution that greatly enriched the Society's understanding of the local community's role in Australia's military history.

On Australia Day, Rod received the 2026 Hunters Hill Council Citizen of the Year Award. This was fitting recognition of his extensive contribution to voluntary service and community life.

On behalf of all its members, the Historical Society extends its sincere sympathy to Rod's wife of 65 years, Dellane, and to all members of the Stewart family.

Although Rod is no longer with us, his legacy will endure. He will be remembered for his friendship, leadership, knowledge and invaluable contribution to the Hunters Hill community. His dedication enriched the lives of many, and his influence will continue to be felt for many years to come.

May he rest in peace.

From the Court of the Mikado to Woolwich: An Imperial Gift and its Story

Sitting quietly for many years in one of the Museum's glass cabinets, there is a Japanese porcelain vase, tall and richly decorated in the iron-red and gold palette characteristic of the finest Meiji-period export ware. The base of the vase carries the mark, "Made in Japan, Kutani ware", identifying it as made in a regional ceramic style of Ishikawa Prefecture, whose workshops dominated Japan's luxury export trade during the late nineteenth century.

It's a beautiful object in its own right, but the display label next to it makes its story even more extraordinary. It records that the vase was presented by the Emperor of Japan to a resident of Woolwich, on the occasion of the establishment of the wool trade between Australia and Japan in 1895.

That resident was Frederick Edward Espenhahn, who at the time lived in Gladstone Avenue, Woolwich. Who was Mr Espenhahn and how did he come to acquire such a gift?

Espenhahn was born in Sandersleben, Germany, in 1854, worked in a German bank, and was posted to London before making his way to Australia. At Winton in Queensland he married Florence Mary Tilbury in December 1873, the daughter of a London family. We know that he initially worked as an accountant and that by 1913 he was serving as a director of J.C. Ludowici and Son, the tanning and leather belting firm whose works stood on Tannery Creek at Burns Bay on the Lane Cove River — the first of many tanneries to establish in the area, and one that gave the creek its name. We also know that he travelled extensively for business to all parts of the globe and we can presume that he was a man of considerable commercial ambition and reach.

The vase arrived in Espenhahn's hands at a

moment of genuine historical significance. Direct trade in wool between Australia and Japan had been established only a few years earlier, when Fusajiro Kanematsu, a Kobe merchant who visited Sydney in 1887, returned in 1890 with his manager Toranosuke Kitamura to open the first Japanese trading office in Australia. In May of that year Kanematsu shipped 187 bales of fine merino wool from James Rutherford's Murrumbidgee station (near Dubbo) to Japan, the first direct consignment of its kind. By 1895 Australia was supplying a significant and rising share of Japan's wool imports, feeding the textile mills of a nation in the middle of one of history's most deliberate industrial transformations.

Espenhahn wasn't a passive beneficiary of this trade. In a newspaper interview given in 1938, returning to Sydney after a long stay abroad, he stated that he had been the first



man to introduce Australian wool into Japan and had visited that country for this purpose in 1900. Whatever the precise extent of his role - Kanematsu's 1890 shipment predates his Japan visit by a decade - it's clear that Espenhahn was an active participant in the relationship between Australia and Japan, and that by 1895 the Japanese trading community in Sydney regarded him as a figure worth honouring. Newspapers in 1895 record that the Japanese Consul in Australia, Mr A Marks, had just returned from an extensive visit to Japan. In the same year, Mr Kanematsu also returned to Australia after an extensive period back in Japan. Is it possible that either of these gentlemen may have arrived in Australia bearing the special gift of a vase from the Mikado (Japanese emperor) for Mr Espenhahn?

In the 1890's, the Japanese trading community was centred in remarkable proximity to the Espenhahn family home. The Japanese Consul, Hisakichi Eitaki, lived at a residence named "Garden Reach" in Viret Street, Hunters Hill - the first house recorded in that street. Each year Eitaki marked the Emperor's birthday with a garden party there, and the occasion was evidently a memorable one. The Cumberland Argus reported the 1899 celebrations in considerable detail: the spacious grounds were festooned with Japanese lanterns shedding a mellow radiance among the foliage, guests were treated to pyrotechnical displays during the evening, and on arrival each was presented with a sealed envelope containing a card with an enigmatic inscription and a number — the numbers corresponding to the souvenirs distributed before dinner. The holder of the card marked "Sunflower," for instance, was presented with a sunshade, the distributor remarking that "both open against the sun." The distribution, the paper noted, caused much merriment.

The guests at these occasions represented the inner circle of the Australia-Japan commercial world. The lists reported in the Sydney press in 1899 and 1900 include Kitamura of Kanematsu, Kanematsu himself on one of his periodic visits to Australia, and a Mr T. Yasuda, who lived in Gale Street, Hunters Hill. Yasuda, who also acted in an official capacity for the Japanese Government, died at Palser Street, Woolwich in

1906. Mr Espenhahn's daughter Christiana (Kitty) was still part of this same social world as late as 1913, when she appeared among the guests at a reception held aboard the Japanese warship *Adzuma* in Sydney Harbour. Frederick Espenhahn and the leading figures of the Australia-Japan wool trade were, quite literally, neighbours.

The vase was presented in 1895, the year the Sino-Japanese War ended, when Japan emerged as an undisputed regional power and its industrial ambitions became more explicit still. Japan's soldiers had marched to victory in woollen serge - much of it woven from Australian fleece. The wool trade would continue to grow. By the early twentieth century, Japan had become one of Australia's most important wool markets, and by 1930 had supplanted France for second place in the Australian wool clip. Kanematsu's Sydney office, which had struggled to ship 200 bales in its first season, was handling 100,000 bales annually by that year.

Frederick and Florence did not end their days quietly in Woolwich. In 1939, in their late-eighties, they travelled to Germany to visit relatives, arriving in Berlin just twelve days before war was declared. Frederick died there in 1942 and was buried on German soil. It wasn't until 1943 that Florence, aged 94, finally made her way home alone, through wartime Europe, having lived during the intervening years in Dresden. The cables announcing her safe arrival in Lisbon noted that she had been quite unmoved by the raids. She must, one imagines, have been a formidable woman in her own right.

The vase passed through three quarters of a century of family life in the same small corner of the harbour before coming to the Society as a gift from the estate of D. Espenhahn of Woolwich. It's a great deal more than a decorative object. It is a record of the moment when two economies found each other and of the people of Woolwich who helped build the commercial foundations of a young nation.

Written by: Daniela Turrin

Research sourced from Newspaper Reports in Trove

A Mystery in the Collection: Seven Men in the Water



The Society's ongoing digitisation project continues to yield surprises. Among the most significant recent discoveries are two photograph albums from the late 1880s, previously unattributed and lacking any donor records. They arrived in this collection having kept their secrets for some considerable time.

The albums centre on a small sailing yacht named *Vacuna*. Research through Trove and the State Library of NSW has identified them as almost certainly the work of **Robert Fellowes Hunt** (1830–1892), Deputy Master of the Sydney Branch of the Royal Mint, and his son **William Lewin Hunt** — one of colonial Sydney's most remarkable amateur photography partnerships. The State Library holds a companion album attributed to Robert containing an exact duplicate of another of our photographs — the *Vacuna* at anchor in Hunter's Bay (Balmoral), 1888 — thereby confirming the connection. Robert was a senior colonial public servant, Fellow of the Geological Society, Trustee of the Australian Museum, and a passionate sailor. William shared his father's photographic eye and his love of the harbour, and the album mounts bear both men's initials. Their story, and the full provenance of these albums, will unfold across future issues.

The albums document a vivid world of harbour leisure — picnics, sailing, and staged comedies on sandstone outcrops. One image, however, stopped us in our tracks. Collection Item number 00844-16, dated 1887, shows seven bare-chested men standing chest-deep in harbour water, the *Vacuna* moored just behind them. A wooded hillside drops steeply to the water. The men face the camera directly, composed, relaxed, and entirely unselfconscious.

What's striking is that they didn't just swim, they posed for a photograph doing it. This wasn't furtive. They're looking directly at the camera, comfortable and at ease. The *Vacuna* moored behind them is almost a social credential in the image.

Bare-chested photographs of middle-class Victorian men are actually quite rare in the photographic record. The expected modes were the formal studio portrait or posed and fully dressed family group. Social gatherings were occasions governed by codes of decorum that left little room for undress. Six bare-chested men in the water is an unusual survival, and it suggests the *Vacuna* cruises were understood by their participants as genuinely outside normal social constraints - a holiday world with its own rules.

Daylight bathing in NSW was prohibited under the Sydney Police Act of 1833, which forbade bathing in public view between six in the morning and eight in the evening. This wasn't imported English law but a colonial invention, reflecting Victorian anxieties about public decency, the scarcity of bathing costumes, and the absence of changing facilities. The law operated through municipal by-laws rather than uniform state-wide enforcement, making its application patchy but real. In 1898, three men were prosecuted in Newcastle simply for bathing within sight of passengers on the Stockton Ferry and were fined £1 each, with the magistrate noting drily that the sharks might punish them more severely next time.

The letters pages of the Sydney Morning Herald through the 1880s and 1890s document the social tension vividly. In September 1893, two gentlemen were fined for bathing at the remote Frenchman's Beach, provoking an outraged correspondent to question why the water police were harassing bathers at an anchorage with no ferry communication and no houses within sight.

That same week, a letter signed simply "*Vacuna*" appeared in the Herald. Whether it was written by William Lewin Hunt - the man almost certainly behind the camera in our photo - can't be confirmed. But the circumstantial case is strong: the intimate knowledge of the harbour, the progressive social argument, and above all the *Vacuna* signature - given that William Lewin was reported in the newspapers as racing the *Vacuna* with the Sydney Amateur Sailing Club in that year. All these clues are consistent with a young man who spent his Sundays sailing Sydney's waterways and knew exactly what the law was costing him.

It's also worth noting who was doing the transgressive bathing. The letters pages make clear that the offenders were frequently men of some standing - residents of Darlinghurst, Potts Point, Double Bay. They were not the working-class larrikins the law's framers had in mind. Those with access to a private yacht could choose their anchorage carefully, seeking out remote Hawkesbury coves beyond the reach of any water police launch. But not all harbour bathing was so discreet: " 'A Parent,' writing to the Herald in August 1892, described rowing with his wife to Parsley Bay only to find eight or ten young men bathing in a state of nudity in full view — in the middle of a Sunday afternoon!"

The law's end came not through heroic defiance but through embarrassment. On 13 November 1902, two police constables appeared at Bondi Beach and began taking the names of bathers in "small trunks." Among those named were a local clergyman and several professional men. The resulting furore was sufficient to make the police back down immediately, and the incident is considered by some as the turning point that broke the political will to enforce the law. Randwick Council permitted daylight bathing within days; Waverley Council followed in 1905.

The men in our image were swimming fifteen years too early to benefit from that shift. But the photograph records something more than a casual swim: a deliberate act, in a deliberately chosen place, by men who understood both the social conversation they were participating in and their own position within it. That somebody thought it worth photographing tells us something about the world the *Vacuna* inhabited.

The story of these albums continues in our next issue.

Written by Daniela Turrin

Research sourced from Newspaper Reports in Trove

The digitisation project has been made possible through the generous support of Hunters Hill Council and a Local Government Heritage Grant from the NSW Government.

The author wishes to acknowledge the dedicated contribution of the Hunters Hill Historical Society Digitisation Team, whose patient and methodical work made this discovery possible. Thanks to John Boast, Penny Doughty, Kevin Peters, Judy Pittaway, Kerry Willink, Jade Papworth and Chloe Pamaka.

A Childhood Behind the Gates: Gladesville Hospital Remembered



On 27 May, the Society hosted a well-attended talk on the history of Gladesville Hospital. Megan Wurth and her brother Glynn shared their personal memories of growing up in the hospital grounds. Their father, Dr John Collins, served as a psychiatrist and Deputy Medical Superintendent at Gladesville, and the family lived in a hospital house in Crown Street, Henley. The following is an edited version of Megan's talk.

Image: "Gladesville Hospital, 1883," Museums of History NSW – State Archives Collection. No known copyright restrictions. Sourced via Flickr Commons.

Megan Wurth: I lived at Gladesville Hospital from 1966 until 1977. My father was the Deputy Superintendent. There were about 16 families of doctors living in the 400-hectare grounds. Many of the children remain in touch and regularly have reunions at the Hunters Hill Hotel. I will focus on the industry, recreational facilities and community participation during those years.

I was a hospital social worker for 40 years, beginning with a student placement at this hospital. I worked at a number of mental health services and was an Official Visitor under the Mental Health Act at Concord Hospital.

The hospital was established as the Tarban Creek Lunatic Asylum in 1838. A humane new philosophy was emerging - that the mentally ill could be rehabilitated by pleasant, natural surroundings where they could work and wander. The patients cleared much of the original forest, were employed in the vegetable gardens, and were also encouraged to plant their own ornamental gardens. By the late 1860s, the Royal Botanic Gardens were regularly donating exotic plants.

The name was changed to The Hospital for the Insane in 1869, and again to Gladesville Mental Hospital in 1915. There were many other links with the

community, such as yearly fetes to raise funds for patient amenities. Sir Donald Bradman played regularly for the hospital cricket team. Gladesville Hospital was officially closed in 1993.

Two figures in particular shaped the hospital's early development. The first Supervisor was John Thomas Digby, who tried to improve the conditions for the mentally ill (Digby House was the last inpatient ward to close). Frederick Norton Manning became Medical Superintendent in 1868 and made major improvements. He minimised the use of restraints, improved the monotonous diet, and expanded patients' activities, including opportunities for gainful employment. Some patients recovered sufficiently to be discharged.

This more humane approach deserves to be remembered. Contrary to much popular opinion, most patients were well cared for at a time when there were no specific treatments for mental illness. I encourage you to walk around the beautiful, tranquil grounds, which are still used by community sporting groups, certain health services, and the Giant Steps Special School and greenhouse garden project. Buildings can still be seen which housed patient workshops, a pottery, a printing press, greenhouses, occupational therapy services, and a boat shed where sabot sailing dinghies were built by patients.

Two Visions of a Beloved Place



The Lake Isle of Innisfree

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

William Butler Yeats
1889

*Our thanks to Dr Beverley Sherry for
suggesting this poem, and the happy
coincidence that connected it to a treasure in
our own collection.*

This atmospheric watercolour, painted by Henry Peach in 1919, shares something essential with W.B. Yeats's *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* - that quality of mist and stillness, of forms half-dissolved in light, of a place held quietly in itself. Yeats wrote the poem in London in 1889, conjuring a beloved place from memory and longing: a retreat of bees and water and morning light, reached not by geography but by devotion.

Henry Peach, dentist and amateur watercolourist, found his own Innisfree in Hunters Hill. Retiring from a turbulent professional life around 1909, he devoted himself to painting his garden at Ferncliffe, 11A Ady Street, the house later renamed St Jude's of Innisfree (Source: Australian Dictionary of Biography).

His 1919 watercolour album, donated to the Society in 1991 by Mrs Kath Parker, is held in the Hunters Hill Museum collection and is currently being digitised. It captures the same quality Yeats conjures in his poem: mist, stillness, and a profound love of place.

Yeats read the poem aloud and introduced it with this:

"I am going to begin with a poem of mine called 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'. It is the only poem of mine which is very widely known. When I was a young lad in the town of Sligo I read Thoreau's essays and wanted to live in a hut on an island in Lough Gill called Innifree which means 'Heather Island'. I wrote the poem in London when I was about twenty-three: one day in The Strand I heard a little tinkle of water and saw in a shop window a little jet of water balancing a ball of the top – it was an advertisement, I think, for cooling drinks – but it set me thinking of Sligo and lake water. I think there is only one obscurity in the poem – I speak of noon as a 'purple glow' – I must have meant by that the reflection of heather in the water."

Innisfree is a small island in Lough Gill near the Irish town of Sligo, where Yeats lived as a young boy. Innisfree is an anglicization of the Irish Inis Fraoich, which means heather island.

Mid-Winter Lunch

Date: 23 July 2026
Start: 12 for 12.30pm

A reminder that The Hunters Hill Historical Society mid-winter lunch will be held at Lozzi Restaurant at the Hunters Hill Club. The cost is \$72 per head for a 2-course lunch. Beverages at own cost. Payment is required by **July 10** to confirm your attendance. See the bottom of this page for payment details.

August Tour

Visit to Willandra House, Ryde
782 Victoria Road, Ryde
Date: 5 August 2026
Start: 10:00am

Willandra is a Georgian-style home built by local magistrate, James Devlin, in the 1840's. There will be a talk on the history of the house and surrounding area by Ryde & District Historical Society, followed by a tour and morning tea. You will need to make your own way there, parking is available at the rear. Cost is \$10.00 per person. Numbers limited. Payment required by **July 30** to confirm your attendance. See the bottom of this page for payment details.

Our Next Meeting

Date: 26 August 2026
Start: 10:30 am

The Hunters Hill Historical Society 2026 **Annual General Meeting** will be held in the Hunters Hill Council Chambers. Join us for morning tea at the Museum beforehand, from **10:00 am**. Speaker yet to be announced.

Make History With Us

Could you spare a few hours? The Hunters Hill Historical Society is always looking for enthusiastic volunteers. Whether your interests lie in digitisation, research, leading tours and walks, or writing for our newsletter, there's a place for you — and a fascinating story waiting to be discovered. Email us! Contact details below.

Old Photos of Hunters Hill

Got old photos of Hunters Hill tucked away in a shoebox? We'd love to add them to the Museum Collection (happy to scan and hand back originals). Email us — details below!

Other News

Vienna Cottage and All Saints will be hosting the **Annual Heritage Lecture and Recital** at 2pm on Sunday 16 August @ All Saints' Church, Hunters Hill. Enjoy a talk by Theodore Ell on the topic of *Les Murray and the Heritage of Speech*. The recitalist will be Kian Chan, who will play the Bevington Heritage Organ. Tickets are \$25.00 and can be purchased on TryBooking:

www.trybooking.com/djmvvi

RDHS will also be hosting a tour of the **Field of Mars Cemetery** on Sunday 23 August from 11am to 12:30pm. For full details:

<https://events.humanitix.com/field-of-mars-cemetery-history-tours-with-ryde-district-historical-society-2026>

The City of Canada Bay Heritage Society is hosting a talk by Michael Thomson on the topic of **The Griffins' Canberra: The Promised Vision**. It will take place on Saturday 1 August 2026. For full details:

<https://canadabayheritage.asn.au/august-speaker-michael-thomson/>

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work. Become a member
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