

ASHFIELD AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

SERIES 4 NO. 96
DECEMBER 2020



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members

We have finally reached the end of 2020, an extraordinary year. Coping with the Coronavirus pandemic has taught us that we are a resilient society. This year we have postponed many of our meetings and learned to use Zoom, however we have continued to work diligently and arranged the release of two new magnificent ADHS publications. We remain a Society with an unyielding interest in local history.

We have prepared a draft Strategic Plan, setting a positive direction of ADHS for the years to come. There are plenty of opportunities for members to take action and contribute in any number of ways. View the Strategic Plan on our website and be part of the fun. As always, your feedback is welcome.

Have a safe and Happy New Year.

Regards
Mark
ADHS President

UP-AND-COMING EVENTS IN 2021

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: SUNDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2020

The Society's AGM will be held at Pratten Park Bowling Club, COVID-19 restrictions permitting. Committee member David Morgan will be our guest speaker, with tales of Augustus Alt, the first Surveyor-General of NSW and aristocrat, soldier, engineer...mercenary!

We warmly welcome nominations from Members who may be keen to join the Committee in either a nominated position or as a Committee Member. Please email the Society if you are interested.

Please also email adhs@ashfieldhistory.org.au if you have any ideas for activities in 2021.

RECENT EVENTS

TALK BY BOB IRVING: 18 OCTOBER 2020

Bob's fascinating talk was on Australia's First Real Building

Robert Irving OAM presented a talk on Sunday on 18 October 2020 at the Pratten Park Bowling Club. Bob was assisted by his son, Noel. With COVID-19 precautions in place, we had a most enjoyable afternoon.

Australia's first real building as we discovered from Bob's illustrated talk was on the site of the first Government House, and was erected for Governor Phillip. Bob noted that the pre-fabricated house was made from timber and oil cloth. It required 12 carpenters to erect it, without the help of any instructions. The house stood from 1788 until at least 1792, as evidenced by the earliest paintings of Sydney town. By 1794, it was decrepit and was demolished. Bob's assessment is that the building is significant as an important item of Australian history:

- It was the first evidence of the industrial revolution in Australia.
- The building was dismantled and re-erected several times within the curtilage of the First Government House in the tenure of Governor Phillip.
- The maker was Nathan Smith of Smith and Baker in London; other demountable buildings were made by the firm for shipping to other distant settlements.
- It was the first European private dwelling and administration building in the Colony and all the decisions and dispatches were made from here, including the naming of the County of Cumberland.

There were windows with small panes of glass, as can be seen in the picture below – the building is on the far right:



Image supplied by Bob Irving



Bob and Noel Irving
Photograph: HW

THE HISTORY OF ASHFIELD POOL

Following Bob's talk, **Lois Gray** and **Ann O'Connell** hosted the showing of a film from the January 1963 opening of the original Ashfield Pool, as part of the launch of the publication:

Taking the Plunge: The History of Ashfield Pool 1963 to 2018

The book, prepared for the occasion of the opening of the new Ashfield Aquatic Centre was written by **Mark Sabolch**, **Lois Gray** and **Ann O'Connell**, edited by **David Rollinson** and **Ann O'Connell** assisted by other Committee members.



Film and presentations on the day: Ann, Lois & Mark
Photographs: HW

Many stories and photographs were provided by the local community including the Ashfield Amateur Swimming Club, Wests Water Polo Club, the family of Warwick Webster; and from the archives of the former Ashfield Council. Inner West Council funded the publication.

There were a COVID-Safe 38 in attendance at the event, including relatives of the first swim coach Warwick Webster and polo players.

Committee members **Ann O'Connell**, **Mark Sabolch**, **Lois Gray** and **Alex Lofts** also attended the very small function held on 17 October 2020 for the official opening of the new Ashfield Swimming Complex. Ann spoke briefly about the book *Taking the Plunge* and tours were held of the new complex.

See link to the movie of the 1963 opening of Ashfield Pool:

<https://ashfieldhistory.org.au/past-events-2020/>



Except from the Film taken by Ashfield Council of the Opening of Ashfield Pool, 26 January 1963.
Source: Archival film by Ashfield Council

LAUNCH OF *PRESERVING THEIR NAMES*

The Society's journal commemorating those from Ashfield and District who served in WWI was launched on Sunday 15 November at the Mungo Scott Building, Flour Mill of Summer Hill.

This research project was begun by Society member **Kerry Ann O'Reilly** who located all Great War honour boards in the district and compiled a central list of names. Many other members expanded her research and developed the material into its published form as:

Preserving Their Names: 1914-1918
Ashfield History No. 22.

Guest Speaker **Brad Manera** the CEO and Senior Historian at Sydney's Hyde Park Anzac Memorial gave a moving talk on Australia's involvement in the First World War from New Guinea, then Gallipoli and the Middle East to the Western Front.

Throughout the talk Brad wove in the names of some of the locals listed in *Preserving their Names* along with others from his own research, placing soldiers from the Ashfield district at some of the most significant battles of WWI.





David with Brad Manera at the launch of *Preserving Their Names*, November 2020
 Photograph: CW

There was a fabulously informative question and answer session at the end of Brad's address. **Mark Sabolch** and **David Rollinson** offered the Society's thanks to Brad for launching the Journal and for his presentation.



Brad Manera and audience at the Mungo Scott building, Summer Hill, launching *Preserving Their Names 1914-1918*.
 Photograph: CW

FUTURE EVENTS

The Committee has discussed some ideas for future events for 2021:



The Clissold Family
 Image: ADHS Collection

- further walks along Victoria Street Ashfield
- talk by Chris Pratten on Frederick Clissold and *Glentworth*, Ashfield
- talk by Trish Skehan, co-author of *Frontline of the Pandemic* (see Book Review below)
- History Trivia Quiz, hosted by Mastermind contestant and professional quiz question writer (and Committee Member), David Morgan
- mid-week visit to the Caroline Simpson Library in Macquarie Street, Sydney
- visit to the cemetery of St John's Church, Ashfield
- a forum on heritage issues including approaches to the renovation of heritage listed houses

Following the AGM in February, the new Committee will organise a calendar of events for 2021, COVID 19 permitting.

Please check your email in-box for regular updates from the Society on up-and-coming events.

We will also contact members without access to email.

HERITAGE UPDATE

David Rollinson reports on recent Development Applications (DA) lodged with Inner West Council, which the Society will review. DAs have been lodged to:

- demolish a two storey Victorian dwelling at 5 Bruce Street Ashfield that has been used as a school and then flats (three and now two) for many years and erect a four storey residential flat building containing 16 flats. The property is in a heritage conservation area;
- demolish the remaining industrial buildings on Smith Street Summer Hill (nos. 55 to 63 inclusive) and erect a 'new generation boarding house' containing 105 bedsits spread over seven blocks in three terrace lines stretching back from Smith St. Each building is proposed to be three storeys including an attic level. A single basement level carpark for 58 vehicles plus bicycles is proposed. There are a number of heritage items nearby and the site is opposite the Quarantine Grounds Conservation Area.

If they go ahead, both proposals will have significant impact.

ACTIVITIES AT THE RESEARCH ROOMS

Committee Member **Clare Herscovitch** has been working this year on organising the collection of materials held by the Society at Thirning Villa.

Clare and **Jenny Broomhead** have undertaken the massive task of scanning the photographs in the Collection -all but one of the 33 photo albums have now been scanned. All of these images have now been loaded onto the Society's computer. The albums comprise just on 2000 photos.

There are approximately 5500 images in the filing drawers and albums. The database is now available for creating and editing records. This replaces the hard-copy card system.

Next year the aim will be to:

- create a data base for the images
- attach each the image to the data base
- scan a collection of transparencies taken by Bob Irving.

Many thanks to Clare and Jenny for undertaking this work.

Clare has also undertaken transcribing a cassette tape of an oral history recording of **Mrs Kops** of Victoria St, Ashfield. There are gaps and queries because of the very poor quality of the tape as it was recorded in 1975. The oral history of **Mrs Bollinger** of Carlisle St Ashfield has also been transcribed, recorded in 1977. The sound is remarkably good.

Clare advises from her experience that if anyone has any important cassette tapes, they should be digitised as soon as possible before they deteriorate too badly.

RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Ann O'Connell advises of recent acquisitions for the Society's Collection:

- a small brochure: *To all citizens of the Western Suburbs* in regard to subscriptions for the Western Suburbs Ambulance Service based at Summer Hill Ambulance Station. This was donated to the Society by member Philip Keady whose neighbour found the brochure in a wall during renovations in Smith Street Summer Hill. This donation will contribute to resources currently held for a future article on the Ambulance Stations of the district. Thank you, Philip.
- *Australia's First Real Building* by Robert Irving – an illustrated manuscript. This formed the basis for Bob's wonderful talk.

See Inner West Council's DA Tracker:

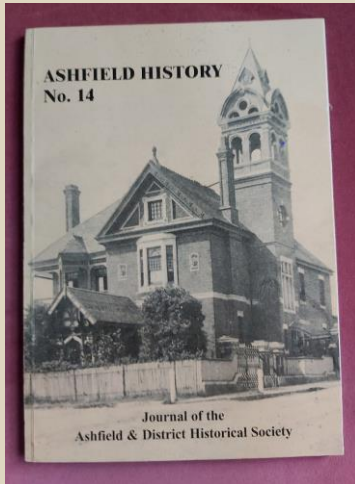
<https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/develop/development-applications/track-development-applications-das?ref=quicklinks>



Aldhame, former home of Mrs Kops

Source: ADHS Collection

*The ADHS Journal,
Ashfield History No.14
has a story about
Norman Selfe*



FIRE AT AMESBURY

On Tuesday 1st of December, Amesbury, the beautiful heritage listed house built in 1888 by **Norman Selfe**, was hit by lightning. The Tower burst into flames. Thankfully the fire was confined to the very top of the tower but the roof was severely damaged. Alt Street and Charlotte Street were blocked off and by Friday 5th of December scaffolding was erected around the tower at Amesbury.

Colin Webb was on the scene to take some phonographs. Colin writes:

The roadblocks in Alt Street and Charlotte Street have been removed and it is now possible to get close to Amesbury. This doesn't really provide any greater insight as the tower is still surrounded by scaffolding and heavy mesh.

A conversation with two of the workers revealed that the roof structure and the copper sheathing on the roof have been removed. The workers had been employed to assist with the 'clean-up'. The efforts to extinguish the fire resulted in some water damage.

There has also been a lot of ash transported into the tower and in other parts of Amesbury. A strong smell of fire also permeates the house and the workers were also employed to eliminate the smell. The new year should see the restoration and repair work commence.

Ann O'Connell advises that Norman Selfe had the home built for his family and the tower built to facilitate his interests, namely astronomy, but also so that he could watch Sydney Harbour to spot the ships entering that would deliver his imports. He was an engineer and inventor and would await many components from all around the world.

See more photographs at:

<https://ashfieldhistory.org.au/fire-at-amesbury/>

*Colin Webb took this
photograph of
Amesbury's tower
soon after the fire*



BOOK REVIEW

FRONTLINE OF THE PANDEMIC: AUSTRALIA 1919

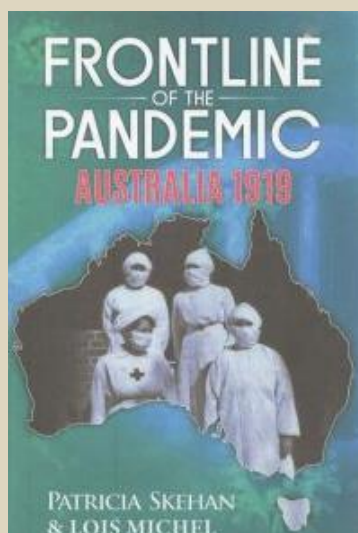
BY PATRICIA SKEHAN AND LOIS MICHEL

Foreword by Professor Dame Marie Bashir

P. Skehan Publishing, 2020. 168 pp. illustrated

A recommended

Iso Read



Bernadette Williamson writes:

Congratulations to **Patricia Skehan and co-author Lois Michel** for this enthralling and well-timed book. *Frontline of the Pandemic* is an anthology of primary historical documents from the 'Spanish Influenza' pandemic of 1919 in Australia and New Zealand. The selection is brilliant, striking a balance between short reports providing a wider context and private letters from patients and frontline workers. The illustrations are relevant and enhance the text.

It is the private letters that hit home to the reader. Among these are the letters of Jean Curlewis, a Volunteer Aide (VA) at the Walker Emergency Hospital, previously the Thomas Walker Convalescent Hospital at Concord. The daughter of Ethel Turner, 20-year-old Jean was a talented writer whose letters to her parents and brother bring to vivid life the hard toil, suffering and camaraderie of the closed world of hospital patients and staff. All was not gloom: the staff's diet was quite rich in chocolates given by patients' grateful relatives.

Skehan's Introduction tells how her research journey began with a chat at the Thomas Walker Hospital where she conducts guided tours for the City of Canada Bay Heritage Society. One of her guests turned out to be Jean Curlewis' niece, who later gave Skehan Jean's extensive letters from her time as a VA in 1919.

Of great interest are the comparisons between the 1919 *Spanish Flu* and the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. Transmission, treatment and methods of prevention, including mask-wearing, temporary closure of schools, churches and state borders, are very similar. Tragically, the mortality in 1919 was very much higher: 15,000 in Australia and an estimated 50 to 100 million worldwide.

I warmly recommend this book.

Available from www.frontlineofthepandemic.com RRP \$19.95

Trish contacted the Society to advise that she was to speak at the official 11 November 2020 Remembrance Day Service. The Sydney Morning Herald reported the event on the day (from the SMH website):

Perhaps the most poignant comparison between pandemics and the losses of World War One came before the service from Trish Skehan, author of The Front Line of the Pandemic speaking with MC Gareth McCray.

She told of a lichen-spotted headstone at the extensive Rookwood Cemetery. The grave contains the remains of 19-year-old Harriet Ann Ottaway, who died on July 2, 1919. The monument also commemorates her brother Henry James Ottaway who died of wounds in Belgium September 23, 1917, aged 21.

The text states: "While Henry was killed at the infamous Battle of Passchendaele, Harriet's headstone makes no mention of her own courageous combat with 'Spanish flu'. Everyone left Martin Place hoping next year would be different.

*Come and visit the
research Rooms in
Thirning Villa*

*Membership renewals
are due for 2021*

RESEARCH ROOMS

The Society's Rooms at Thirning Villa, Pratten Park in Arthur Street Ashfield are open to visit for research purposes. The Rooms are open twice a month on the second and last Saturday. We have hand sanitizer and we limit visitor numbers to maintain social distancing.

The next Rooms Open Day will be on 9 January 2021 from 11 am to 4 pm.

MEMBERSHIP

Please visit our website to renew your membership for 2021:

<https://ashfieldhistory.org.au/membership-application/>

CONTACT THE SOCIETY

Postal address: PO Box 20 ASHFIELD 1800

Email: adhs@ashfieldhistory.org.au

Website: <https://ashfieldhistory.org.au/>

*Wishing all Members a
happy, safe & peaceful
New Year*



*Summer Newsletter
contributors*

The articles and photographs in this edition of the Newsletter were by:

- Mark Sabolch
- Ann O'Connell
- Clare Herscovitch
- David Rollinson
- Colin Webb (CW)
- Lois Gray
- Bernadette Williamson.

Edited by Heather Warton (HW) December 2020.