

# Newsletter

DECEMBER 2021 I SERIES 5 I NO. 4



## President's message

Dear Members and Friends

On behalf of the ADHS Committee I wish you all a happy new year and we look forward to seeing you at our Society events in 2022.

As has been stated so wisely by Oscar Wilde "Anybody can make history. Only a great person can write it".

To find out more how ADHS members are contributing to our local history, and how you can get involved, you are invited to join us for our first event in 2022, our Annual General Meeting on 20 February 2022.

Regards

**Mark Sabolch**

## Upcoming events

20 February 2022

ADHS

### Annual General Meeting

The Society's Annual General Meeting will be held on:

**Sunday 20 February 2022**

**at Pratten Park Community Sports & Bowling Club**

**42 Arthur Street Ashfield**

**at 2pm**

The guest speaker will be **Lucille McKenna** OAM, who recently retired as an Inner West Councillor and was the last Mayor of Ashfield Council.

The Society's Committee for 2022 will be elected, so please come along and participate in the Meeting and nominate for the Committee.

Refreshments will be served. Drinks will be available at the bar.

Please RSVP to:

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

Information on future events for 2022 will also be placed on the Society's website.



ADHS meeting at the Pratten Park Ashfield Bowlo

## Historic Houses of Strathfield

We have received an invitation from the **Strathfield – Homebush Historical Society** to attend their *Historic Houses of Strathfield* exhibition at Strathfield Library.

The exhibition is presented by Strathfield-Homebush District Historical Society with support from Strathfield Council.

The Exhibition is running through to **6 February 2022**.

There is also a free lecture on Sunday 6 February 2022 at 12.30pm for the 1pm lecture.

***Historic Houses of Strathfield*** explores the rise of the mansion houses in late 19th century and their eventual fate in the 20th and 21st centuries.

The first Australia economic boom from the 1850s to 1890s coincided with the residential development of the Strathfield district. Many wealthy merchants and professionals viewed Strathfield as the ideal place to build large and lavish homes, supported by rail access to the City where their businesses were located

By the 1890s, Strathfield was considered one of the premium suburbs of Sydney. However, this was not to last. Decline commenced with the 1890s Depression followed by significant and continued economic and social change.

The exhibition features photos, maps and illustrations of the stories of the houses and their owners.

For further details, email Cathy Jones:

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[cathy.jones@optusnet.com.au](mailto:cathy.jones@optusnet.com.au)

Phone 02 96423145



## Past events

### St John's Cemetery Walk

On Sunday 28 November our Society finally managed to organise a gathering of members at an event which actually went ahead!

Although the weather had been inclement for days, it remained dry and the maximum number of members met at St John's Church of England cemetery for a guided walk.

St John's is a remarkable place which is steeped in history with the first person said to be buried there in 1845, being Frederick, the eleven-month-old grandson of Joseph and Elizabeth Underwood.

It is a beautiful and peaceful place and one of historical significance.



ADHS Committee members, **Ann O'Connell**, **David Morgan** and **Lois Gray** provided information about around 45 selected graves giving details of the lives of those interred there and pointing out the symbolism used in some of the monuments.



A great many interesting people from the early days of Ashfield and surrounding suburbs are buried at St John's some of them being publicans, aldermen, members of Parliament, landowners, butchers, industry leaders, gold miners, doctors, religious leaders, consuls, solicitors, public servants, soldiers, and so on.

Sadly, there are a large number of babies and children; and there are convicts and of course John Limebourn, our 'First Fleeter'!

Those who attended were impressed at hearing the many stories of 'lifetimes past' and said they'd certainly attend another cemetery walk to learn more.





Afterwards, participants enjoyed afternoon tea in the cemetery grounds and celebrated a wonderful afternoon and the beginning of the Christmas season.

Thank you to our 'guides' and Jan, Paul, Lois, Ann, Rachel and Bernadette who generously provided the delicious afternoon tea.

**Story: Ann O'Connell**

**Images: Jan Williams & Heather Warton**

## Italianate Style

### Presentation by Mark Sabolch held Saturday 30 October 2021

**Mark Sabolch**, President of ADHS, delivered an engaging talk via Zoom on the origins of the Italianate style, focusing on how the Italianate arrived in the Inner West. The session was hosted by the Marrickville Heritage Society, but in the spirit of sharing, it was open to ADHS members.

The agenda presented was:

- What is the Italianate?
- How did it originate?
- Early Italianate in Australia
- Italianate detailing in Sydney's Inner West.

The story began with a tour of the River Wye in South Wales by Rev William Gilpin in 1770.

Gilpin was a schoolteacher, educated at Oxford, but also a painter and traveller. Gilpin formulated ideas about what are the constituents of a “picturesque” scene and published them in a book along with his own pictures. This book became very influential, as it started nature tourism as a pastime and as an industry. The Welsh government continues to promote the Wye River for tourism today.

The chief legacy of Gilpin's work was the notion that buildings can be composed as an integral part of the landscape.

Three other important publications followed in 1794 by Sir Uvedale Price, Richard Payne Knight and Humphrey Repton, all progressing their theories and definitions of the picturesque, and how it is distinct from “beauty”.

This was manifested in Sir Uvedale Price's villa on the Welsh coast, where he asked the architect (John Nash) to create a building that emphasised the view of the coast and the headland in 1802.

The first Italianate building was at Cronkhill, when the architect John Nash worked in partnership with the landscape designer Humphrey Repton.



**The first Italianate style villa, Cronkhill, UK, 1803**

Real legitimacy for the Italianate style occurred in 1846 where Queen Victoria arranged her own holiday house on the Isle of Wight to be built in this style.

In Australia, the first Italianate dwellings were not in Sydney, but Tasmania. The first fully formed Italianate house was *Rosedale* at Campbell Town by ex-convict architect James Blackburne, finished in 1848.

But the grandest early Italianate dwelling was built by the Victorian Government to house the Governor of that state, completed in 1876. This building really set the tone for the establishment of the Italianate style in Australia.



When the Inner West developed as commuter suburbs, with the building boom of the 1880s, the Italianate style was well and truly entrenched. And what is clear is the enormous range of stylistic detailing that the Italianate allows. It is highly versatile and adaptable.



**Italianate style, Burwood Road**



**Italianate style, 20 Marshall St, Petersham**

It is hoped that through forums like this, owners of Italianate dwellings and all who enjoy our inner west streetscapes appreciate the heritage of the style and its detailing.

**Images: Mark Sabolch**

## **St John's Church of England Cemetery Ashfield**

**Ann O'Connell** who was a guide on our recent tour of St John's has researched one of the prominent families buried in the Cemetery.

### **The carved sandstone vault of the Comer and Neich families**

St John's cemetery, the Church, the original hall and the new building are all found within a park-like setting of several acres lying between Alt and Bland Streets, Ashfield.

The land was once part of the Ashfield Park Estate owned by Joseph and Elizabeth Underwood. In 1838 Elizabeth set aside one acre for a church to be built and a foundation stone was laid in 1840.

The earliest part of the church was completed and consecrated in 1845 and the first burial in the cemetery was said to have been that same year of Joseph Underwood's 11-month-old grandson, Frederick.

A large number of local people have since found their way to the graveyard, and many of them have stories worth re-telling.

One of the tombs of particular interest contains the remains of a total of nine members of the Comer and Neich families. The impressive and unusual carved sandstone vault is set within a large plot, enclosed by a high cast iron fence. There is no other vault like it within St John's cemetery.



**The vault of the Comer and Neich families at St John's Church of England cemetery**  
**Image: Ann O'Connell**

Teenager James Comer of Bath, England, was convicted of larceny at the Wiltshire Quarter Sessions in 1810 and was transported to Australia as a convict.

After Comer was 'Freed by Servitude' he married Ann Griffiths in 1818, had two children, Edward and Mary, and became a victualler (supplier of food stuffs and liquor).

The family settled in Burwood and built a small hotel on the corner of Parramatta and Burwood Roads which he called the *Bath Arms*.

When James Comer's daughter Mary married Emanuel Neich in 1834, Comer bequeathed the *Bath Arms Hotel* and fourteen acres of land surrounding it to the couple. Neich had previously worked in the hotel industry acquiring his first publican's licence for a hotel called *The Black Dog* in Cumberland Street in the Rocks in 1830.



**The *Bath Arms Hotel*, corner of Burwood and Parramatta Roads, Burwood was built by James Comer sometime before 1834**  
**Image: Courtesy of Canada Bay Heritage**

Emanuel Neich's story is interesting for several reasons. He was born Emanuel Danero in Genoa, Italy on 20 January 1807 and at the age of fourteen he joined the Merchant Marines and adopted the surname Neich, given to him by the captain of the ship on which he worked. Neich mistakenly thought that he was on his way to Holland but found himself in 'New Holland' nevertheless he stayed and became one of the first Italian migrants to Australia.

Throughout Emanuel Neich's life he prospered in the hotel industry and acquired over sixty liquor licenses over 63 years. During that time never had any charge made against him by the licensing inspector, maintaining an outstanding unblemished record which could not be claimed by any other licensee in the Colony at that time. Neich became a respected citizen of Burwood.

Emanuel Neich and his father-in-law James Comer each have streets named after them in Burwood and the men were instrumental in linking Parramatta and Liverpool Roads with a part of this original road being known as Neich Parade today.





**Emanuel Sebastiano Neich, owner of the *Bath Arms Hotel* from 1834 to his death in 1893**

Emanuel and Mary Neich had fourteen children but sadly Mary died at age 44 in 1863 and was buried at St John's, Ashfield. Her parents, Ann and James Comer, both died in 1870 and her brother, Edward died in 1874, aged 52 and they were also laid to rest in the tomb at St John's.

Emanuel married again and had a further ten children as well as another child born from a union outside wedlock, making a total of 25 offspring!

Emanuel Neich died at age 87 on 14 October 1893. His funeral cortege extended from St Mary's Catholic Church at Concord all the way to St John's at Ashfield where he joined his first wife Mary (nee Comer), four of their children, his parents-in-law, James and Ann Comer and brother-in-law, Edward Comer in the tomb.

Emanuel Neich's obituary stated that he was one of the oldest Catholic colonists and that he enjoyed the reputation of being a pioneer publican of the colony.

He was an enthusiastic sportsman, famed as the champion quoits player of NSW and it was said that he could not be beaten at skittles. He once played the skittles champion of Victoria for £200 and won easily!

He had a kindly nature and a generous hand and although he died a wealthy man he had always helped the needy.

After Emanuel died, his second wife held the licence to the Bath Arms until her death, after which his son, Mr Burwood Neich held it until October 1919.

Given Emanuel Neich's expertise at quoits and skittles, it seems that his exceptional hand-eye coordination was passed down through his family. Neich's great grandson, Don Bradman, inherited his skills to become the greatest batsman in Australian cricket history. The Bath Arms Hotel is still operating today in the same location and like Emanuel Neich, it has a long and interesting history.

## Treasures of the Rooms

**Carolyn Carter**, ADHS Hon Treasurer has been working at the Rooms, sorting out material. Carolyn writes on progress so far:

*We have some amazing 'stuff' hidden in our rooms at Thirning Villa.*

*Even though I was reassured by our experienced researchers that I would be able to learn the research skills, I always felt overwhelmed by the amount of information stashed in the Rooms.*





*I have no experience or expertise with family history or tracking the lifeline of a building but I felt I had plenty of time on my hands during lockdown so wanted to do something useful.*

*When Ann suggested starting with adding to the index cards which record some of the ephemera we have, I thought this would be a good start. I tried, but there have been multiple people who have added index cards and when I looked at the existing cards for guidance, I thought I would not be able to identify the critical items which needed to be recorded.*

*Then I realised what I could do was electronically list the contents of our ephemera folders which I had been trying to write index cards for. I set up some Excel spread sheets and began.*

*I tried a couple of formats before I settled on a method where I recorded all names, addresses, house names, occupations, and any other item somebody may want to search for.*

*I didn't have to be selective. I ran some preliminary versions past Ann and she seemed to think it could work so I ploughed on. I have completed the ephemera folders and moved on to the more specialised folders.*

**Photo to right: A sample of the research material held by the Society, top to bottom:**

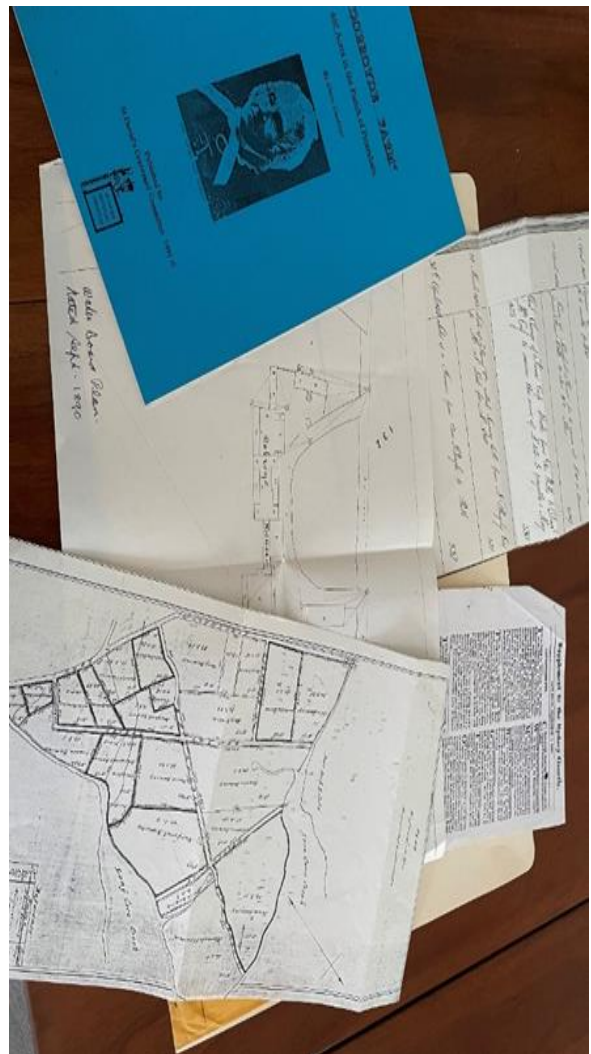
- **Booklet on history of Dobroyde Farm**
- **1890 Water Board plan of house built on the land**
- **Extract from 1805 register for sale of the land**
- **Sydney Gazette 1816 with ad for lease of the land, map showing subdivision of the land after 1860.**

**Images: Carolyn Carter**



*My plan is to work my way through some of the inaccessible boxes of information and move them to suspension files in the empty filing cabinet. The result will be that the files about families and houses of the district will be more easily accessed by researchers.*

*Thank you to all those members who have passed on suspension files so I can do this.*



# Henry Lawson in Ashfield

**Mark Sabolch** has been researching the life of Henry Lawson and his Ashfield connections:

The current period represents a centenary of the time Henry Lawson lived in Ashfield. According to a biography written by Colin Roderick, Henry Lawson was born at Grenfell, NSW, on 16 June 1867.

Lawson commenced working for the *Boomerang*, a Queensland weekly that was following the format of Sydney's *Bulletin*, in 1890, at a time when Australia's national spirit was maturing.

Lawson suffered a cerebral haemorrhage on 14 July 1921 (aged 54 years) and was taken to the Coast Hospital at Long Bay (later named the Prince Henry Hospital at Little Bay - now a matured Landcom residential redevelopment). When he was discharged from the hospital on 23 September he went to *Denistone House*, a convalescent hospital in Earlwood. When he left *Denistone House* he went to board with Mrs Ethel Brown at **16 Thomas Street, Ashfield**, until Christmas 1921.

The house is still there today:



Image: Mark Sabolch

Henry Lawson died in September 1922 (a year later, at Abbotsford), and his funeral (a State funeral no less) took place on Monday 4 September 1922.

Again, another demonstration that anyone who was anyone was at Ashfield at some time in their life.

Ref: *The Real Henry Lawson*, Colin Roderick (1982).

## Heritage report

**David Rollinson** provides this update on heritage happenings in the Inner West.

A steady flow of development applications for two storey rear additions to dwellings continue to be lodged at Inner West Council.

Increasingly, a Pre-DA is lodged first, with concept plans and documentation for a preliminary discussion (and advice presumably) from Council staff on whether the proposal is 'on the right track'. Pre-DAs are not advertised for public comment but followers of the Council's DA Tracking webpage can pick them up. Current Pre-DAs include three Summer Hill properties: **20 Morris Street, 17 Moonbie** and a 'boutique hotel' for **32 Edward Street**.

Of course, Council's staff need to be careful here for fear that such initial advice may not prove to be appropriate or is taken as a tacit 'OK' to what is proposed.

Council's DCP is comprehensive with regards to heritage matters so it is disappointing sometimes when the resultant DA that is advertised does not seem to accord with the specifics let alone the intent of these controls.

On the Society's behalf submissions have been made to Council concerning DAs for a two-storey pavilion addition at the rear of **16 Drynan Street** and a black Colorbond-clad first floor addition over a double garage at **104 Smith Street** both in Summer Hill.



The hearing of the Court appeal for the former Commonwealth Bank site at **34-36 Lackey Street Summer Hill** took place on 15-17 December while a development with amended (but still unsatisfactory) plans for a block of apartments at **5 Bruce Street Ashfield** was in Court on 13-15 December.

## Family history

**Janette Williams** writes about her family history research on her father **Henry Rush**:

We all have a store of “old papers” relating to family history and in many cases some of our forebears lived amazing, interesting lives. Sadly much of the information remains hidden as we busily live our daily lives, always hoping to find the time!

The Covid pandemic and the associated isolation period has allowed me to open “Pandora’s” box marked “NAVAL MEMORABILIA”.

My father, Henry John Rush was born 1911 and at the age of fifteen he joined the Australian Navy, remaining in service for twenty years. He experienced a remarkable life whilst in service and much of this has been documented both in written and photographic form.

In 1911 the British Government by Royal Proclamation handed over to Australia the responsibility of maintaining its own Navy, and to meet the anticipated needs of an Australian Fleet, the Commonwealth purchased *Sobraon*, an ex English cargo-passenger clipper used by the NSW Government as a training ship for “delinquent” boys. She was renamed HMAS. *Tingira* (an Aboriginal word meaning “open sea”) and commissioned as a Naval Training Ship.

In all, 3,158 boys, enlisted between ages 14½ and 16 years, spent 10 months on *Tingira* in training and were then drafted to the sea-going ships of the fleet.

HMAS. *Tingira*, referred to as the “cradle of the Royal Australian Navy”, was decommissioned in June 1925, and replaced by direct entry as naval recruits at Flinders Naval Depot, Victoria. My Father was an HMAS *Tingira* Boy.

During the intervening years before World War II my father in his role as Telegraphist/Radio Operator, undertook Naval Voyages and exercise regimes in numerous ships of the fleet. Each of these he has documented in albums with route maps and significant accompanying photos of the fascinating ports of call and the interesting people inhabiting these places.

One of these voyages was the World Exchange Cruise 1934-1936 on the newly commissioned HMAS *Australia* (the second ship to bear that name) with HRH Henry, the Duke of Gloucester (younger brother of Edward VIII, and George VI) on board. Together with the many photos from this cruise there is a selection of editions of the Ship’s Magazine, conveying accounts of the events and daily occurrences on board, such as the frivolity of the ceremonial celebration “crossing the line”.



**HMAS Australia, with the Duke of Gloucester somewhere on board**

We have in our possession my father’s enlistment papers, and early documents from this period, discharge papers together with the albums and data. Such a wonderful collection of memorabilia and remarkable old photographs from a period no longer in existence.

We have made contact with the Navy Heritage Centre on Garden Island regarding this well-preserved collection, and considerable interest has been shown. A representative from the Navy will soon make a visit and examine our collection.

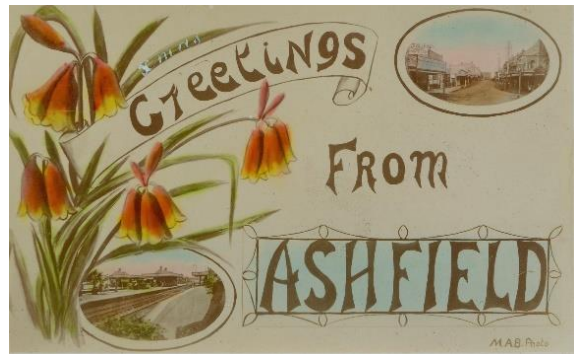
**Images: Jan Williams**

## Offer to members

The Society has a slide viewer, excess to our needs. It is a Cabin 900A, a truly vintage piece of equipment. The lamp works(!) and the viewer is good. However, the finer details of its operation are unclear and there are no accompanying instructions. Ann O'Connell says it once belonged to Nora Peek and was 'inherited' by ADHS after her passing.

See eBay which has one advertised at present - [https://www.ebay.com/itm/Vintage-Cabin-900A-Slide-Projector-/143575959691?\\_ul=IN](https://www.ebay.com/itm/Vintage-Cabin-900A-Slide-Projector-/143575959691?_ul=IN).

Please email [adhs@ashfieldhistory.org.au](mailto:adhs@ashfieldhistory.org.au) if you are interested in giving it a good home.



## Research Rooms

The Society's Research Rooms at *Thirning Villa*, Pratten Park, Arthur Street Ashfield are open to visitors for research.

**The Rooms are open on the second and last Saturdays of each month from 11am until 4pm.**

Please bring a mask.

## Contact the Society

Please visit our website for membership information:

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

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**Email:** [adhs@ashfieldhistory.org.au](mailto:adhs@ashfieldhistory.org.au)

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