

Newsletter

SEPTEMBER 2025 I SERIES 5 I NO. 19

President's message

Welcome to another jam-packed newsletter. Many thanks, to Heather, for editing and compiling the content and to those who have contributed a range of informative and interesting articles. Please see the list of contributors towards the end of the newsletter.

At the time of writing it is a beautiful spring afternoon with a wispy windblown sky - but there are dark clouds on the horizon. I'll come back to that.

The Society has some wonderful events to come. This coming Sunday September 28th, we have The History and Drama of Callan Park, led by Friends of Callan Park President and well-known local identity, **Hall Greenland**. Then, on the 25th of October, which is the 198th anniversary of Riot Day, a tour of the Parramatta Female Factory,

(Despite the auspicious anniversary, it is not required that you misbehave). On November 16th, we will hold our own Antiques Road Show, something in which all can participate. So, dig out those heirlooms or collectables, or simply some nostalgic piece for display or to talk about. Finally, our annual Christmas party will be held December 7th. Details of our coming events are in the following pages.

I've really enjoyed our recent events as have many of you. Under the Big Top, a presentation by Dr **Mark St Leon** was a thoroughly researched history of circus in Australia.

While our attitudes to animals used for performance or display has thankfully changed, that romance, skill and risk by human performers in contemporary circus remains.

President's message

For those interested there is an excellent series streaming on SBS, The Language of Light about Australian photography. In particular, the episode on **Ponch Hawkes** examines her images of circus performers at that moment of commitment to risk, and the inevitable injuries they suffer.

Another excellent presentation, To the Rescue, Celebrating Seventy Years of the SES was given by SES volunteer **Pilar Lorenzo** and former local Commander **Peter Kaye AMESM**. Another example of highly trained people, who are willing to take risks, in this case for people in need.

On a darker note, our Heritage Officer, **David Rollinson**, reports on the Inner West Council's 'Our Fairer Future Plan' which aims to significantly increase dwellings and density in our Local Government Area.

While it must be acknowledged that Heritage Conservation Areas, so long fought for, have, in the main, been left intact, the Federal-Fyle HCA is affected and concerns for local character and heritage also need to be more protected.

In my view, although I have children of my own who are concerned about ever being able to own or rent somewhere they can afford, I remain unconvinced that a supply side, developer, or market driven plan will provide younger people and others with the affordable dwellings they seek.

As I've said, perhaps too often, battles seem to be won. But they return to be fought again.

Alex Lofts

A Fairer Future?

ADHS Committee Member and Ashfield resident **Kerry Barlow** attended the Council's forum on Monday 22 September at the former Ashfield Council Chambers. Kerry writes:

The YIMBY movement was very vocal and knew how to get in first to speak at the Forum on Monday night. The forum was supposedly part of the Fairer Future consultations but appeared very stage-managed to ensure lots of YIMBY-types filled most of the first 30 speakers. By 9pm, when I (and my dodgy spine) had given up any chance of speaking, there were still 50 speakers to go!!

My own number-crunching of the Fairer Future "consultations" shows (based on census data 2021) that 1.7% of residents responded to the plan and only 0.63% of Ashfield's residents responded (we have 70% of residents in flats/apartments, most of whom are renters).

Of the 80 people registered to speak on Monday night I heard from someone on Council there were 34 pro and 44 against, yet the news release at the IWC website today implies there is an overwhelming support by "young people".

So much for democratic processes and the Inner West!!

Members can check the full recording at the Better Future Coalition's website:

[Better Future Coalition. An Inner West community group. Save Marrickville. Save Dulwich Hill.](#) "



Photo from ABC News website: *Sydney's inner west residents pack into forum on high-rise apartment plan*

Future events

On Sunday:

The history and drama of Callan Park

28 September 2025

2pm – 4pm

Meet at The Writers Centre

A tour led by Hall Greenland

Callan Park is one of the largest heritage cultural landscapes in the metropolitan area, increasingly threatened by development plans. We are privileged to have **Hall Greenland**, Friends of Callan Park President, taking our group through significant parts of the site, starting at the c1839 Garry Owen House, the original estate mansion (later renamed Callan Park House - which gave its name to the asylum).

We will circle the original asylum - *Kirkbride*, walk past the Convalescent Cottages (part of James Barnet's original plan), on to Callan Point, then past the 1931 Sydney Harbour Bridge War Memorial designed by **Douglas Grant**. We next visit *Broughton Hall*, the adjacent psychiatric clinic with its glorious horticulture specimens and depression era stonework.

The tour will discuss the site's rich and storied history from Indigenous presence at the site to the most recent changes. The changes are the demolition of veterans' foreshore wards to generate foreshore parkland, and the most recent proposal for the demolition of buildings in the middle of the landscape.

The Friends of Callan Park have published three books on Callan Park, which will be available at the bargain price of \$10 each. The tour cost is \$25.00 per person, payable directly to The Friends of Callan Park.

Register here: <https://ashfieldhistory.org.au/>

Visit to the Parramatta Female Factory

25 October 2025

10am

Meet at Bicentenary Memorial Wall in Greenup Drive

Concurrent with this year's 198th annual Riot Day organised by the **Parramatta Female Factory Friends**.

Riot Day is one of the rare occasions when access to interiors of some of the buildings is possible, so we have arranged to have a special guided tour.

This tour brings to life the extraordinary stories of the women and children who shaped our nation's early history - in a place that echoes with resilience, reform, and change.

Public Transport to the site is straightforward. From Parramatta Rail Station it is a 5 minute walk to Parramatta Square Light Rail stop, with a tram every 10 minutes to Ngara stop, where a short walk sees you in the heart of the precinct. Parking on site is not available, and much of the surrounding street parking is limited to 4 hours

There will be a range of activities and speakers throughout the day. The Riot Days have proven very popular, so a dedicated tour is a favourable gain. We expect various catering options will be available on this day, otherwise Havenstone Café or Parramatta Leagues are nearby for those who wish to fully experience the activities on offer.

The Friend's charge for these tours is normally \$20, but we may negotiate a discount. More details in due course, as arrangements are fine-tuned.

Register here:

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

Ashfield & District Antiques Road Show A show and tell afternoon

16 November 2025

2pm - 4pm

Summer Hill Community Centre.

It's time to hunt through your attics, garages, even under the bed for those forgotten treasures. We are all waiting for you to show them, and tell their stories;

- What do you know about it?
- How did it come to be in your possession?
- Is it something you would like to know more about?



There will be room to display your treasures – you can bring as many as you can carry. It may even be just a memory you would like to share, and of course there will be a sumptuous afternoon tea.

Be part of the fun – what will be the oldest or most unusual item?



Can you stump us with a true mystery item ?

Participants bringing an item to show and tell will be admitted free, otherwise the usual \$5 member/\$10 non-member will apply.

Register through our website to pre-inform our caterers.



Christmas Party

7 December 2025

From 1pm

A member has generously offered to host our Christmas gathering at their home in Haberfield.

This will take the form of a Barbeque – bring your own food to be sacrificed to the flames, and a salad and/or sweet contribution, and something to assuage your thirst.

Register through our website.

The address will be provided by email to all registrants a few days before the event.

There will not be an entry charge, as catering will all be cooperative.



Past events

Under the Big Top: Circus in Australia

Held on 27 July 2025 at
Summer Hill Community Centre

In the 1850s or perhaps as early as 1849, John Jones started a circus. Perhaps the name John Jones doesn't mean much to you, but to me it means everything in light of the most excellent talk presented to the Ashfield & District History Society by **Dr Mark St Leon** on Sunday 27 July 2025. This is because John Jones later became known as Matthew St Leon and the St Leon family evolved to become one of the great circus families in Australia.



Dr Mark St Leon is a descendent of **Matthew St Leon**. I suspect prompted by his family tradition steeped in the Australian Circus, St Leon, has become a scholar on the history of circus and we were treated to a history of the “modern” circus and most particularly the Australian traveling circuses. We also learnt about some Australian circus families and performers that made it big overseas, particularly in the United States.



The “modern” circus has its roots in England, in the 1760s, when **Philip Astley**, a former cavalryman and a seven-years’ war veteran, and his wife began giving bareback horse-riding exhibitions. These exhibitions developed to include other acts, and were done in a ring, or if you like a circuit. It was this that gave rise to the name “circus”, not the circuses of Roman times.



As the “circuses” evolved, they travelled to and were set up in other places around the world. Launceston, Van Diemen’s land is of historical significance to the development of the circus in Australia. In 1847, **Robert Avis Radford** commenced an open yard circus behind Launceston Inn. Launceston at the time, was a great place for breeding and training horses, and Radford was a jockey and horse trainer.

Under the Big Top

John Jones, a London-born convict and acrobat, was recruited as one of Radford's performers, and Jones (later Matthew St Leon) became known for his skills as a dancer, acrobat and an equestrian.

Whilst the circus of Philip Astley had a home, the distances in Australia gave rise to the travelling circus. For example, early on Radford was to take his circus to Hobart-Town, and his circus toured other places as well. St Leon when forming his own circus travelled to the mainland, and they travelled with their tents. Tents were also used by circuses in the USA from around the 1820s.

The Australian touring circuses of the 1800s included not only the St Leon circus, but also (the colonial formed) Bird and Taylor's Great American Circus, the Wirth Bros Circus, Henry Burton's Circus Royal, and even the still running Ashton Circus.

Some Australian circuses also travelled overseas, and some circuses and performers were so successful, that they made their life outside of Australia.

One such performer was **May Wirth** (1894 – 1978), whose career included touring with **Barnum & Bailey**, and was famous in the USA as being the World's Greatest Lady Bareback Rider. Another Australian famous in the USA was **Con Colleano** (1899 – 1973). Colleano was known in the USA for his acrobatic skill on the wire. Colleano was born in NSW and had some indigenous ancestry.



The decline of the Australian travelling circus began with the rise of Vaudeville commencing in the 1890s, along with the commencement of: cinema in 1915; radio in 1923; TV in 1956; and the internet in the 1990s.

Despite the above, the 1970s saw the development of the "new circus", with a focus on acrobatics, and so the circus continues.

Dr Mark St Leon is the current Vice President of the Royal Australian Historical Society. Those wanting to know more may wish to visit Dr Mark St Leon's website www.pennygaff.com.au or read his book *Circus: The Australian Story* 2nd Edition 2012, published by Melbourne Books.



by **Linda De Rosa**

Images: **Heather Warton**

*See Linda's review of Mark St Leon's book **Circus: The Australian Story** on page 9 below.*

To the rescue!

Seventy years of the SES

Held on 24 August 2025 at Summer Hill Community Centre

A small but appreciative audience enjoyed a very informative and interesting presentation by **Pilar Lorenzo** and **Peter Kaye AMESM** to mark the 70th anniversary of the State Emergency Service in NSW.

Our President, **Alex Lofts**, respectfully acknowledged the traditional owners of the land. Then he introduced Peter Kaye whom he had known as an outstanding volunteer and community leader. They regularly attended citizenship ceremonies together. Pilar, a former Volunteer of the Year, was introduced as a younger volunteer, albeit with some 20 years of service. Pilar had worked closely with **Ann O'Connell** at *Thirning Villa* to piece together the early history of the organisation.



Pilar presented slides showing, among other things, the early Controllers and premises of the Ashfield service (later amalgamated with Leichhardt). The genesis of the NSW SES organisation was the Maitland and district floods in February 1955. This disaster, in which 14 lives were lost, and massive property damage sustained, showed that a coordinated approach was needed to disaster management. The first Director, **Richard H Hicks**, appointed in April 1955, was part-time. At the same time, with fears of the Cold War, the NSW Civil Defence Unit had been established under **Ivan Dougherty**.

The two organisations were merged in September 1955 with Ivan Dougherty as Controller. Initially the mindset was that of civil defence with pamphlets on nuclear attacks and radiation.

The first local Controller for the Ashfield unit was **Alderman Charles Alfred Bullivant**; the initial meeting room was upstairs at 1 Tintern Road Ashfield. Other important foundational members were **Louis Samuel Fitch** (Deputy), Alderman **Neil Bridgefoot OAM**, and **Alexander Bailey** (Deputy).

The unit moved several times, having rooms at 57 Smith St (a coachbuilding workshop) and 37 Central Avenue Ashfield. Currently the unit has space behind the Haberfield Library.

Peter Kaye joined the SES in 1976 and became a Deputy. In those days, volunteers had to buy their own uniforms and could be trained to use a Geiger-counter. Peter served as Controller from 1983 to 2023, and during that time was awarded Citizen of the Year by Ashfield Council. He described the evolution of the organisation into a more professional operation, still relying on volunteers who had to be recruited and trained. The rescue vehicles and equipment were originally modest, but these days have been standardised – in other words the overall standard has improved markedly since the State Government took over funding of the organisation.

Nevertheless, Peter paid tribute to **Mayor Lew Herman** who gave strong Council support to the organisation earlier on.

Sharon Buckley OAM was appointed Commander (no longer 'Controller') of the unit in 2023.

Some more points that Peter made were:

- During the Covid-19 pandemic, local SES volunteers provided services at vaccination centres so that nurses could be freed up
- Most of the team's work is outside of Ashfield/Leichhardt
- SES supports the Fire Services after bushfires, clearing logs etc
- With climate change, more rain events and floods are expected

To the rescue!

- A greater proportion of the 130 trained local volunteers is now self-employed or single parents or shift workers, making it harder to find people who can be available when emergencies strike
- The biggest source of work locally was blocked gutters and downpipes, followed by leaking skylights, and fallen tree branches.



Peter said that he loved his connection with local residents and enjoyed the demanding leadership role he had. He gave a couple of lucky (and attentive) audience members a scoop designed for cleaning gutters, and most audience members scored a pair of bright orange sturdy gloves as a memento of an excellent presentation!

Alex Lofts and Peter Schulz thanked the two presenters and congratulated them on a thoroughly researched and interesting presentation.

by Catherine Crittenden

Image at the event: Murray Cleaver; other: Heather Warton

Heritage Report

There appears to be rising opposition to Council's 'Our Fairer Future' plans, particularly in proposed upzoned/increased height areas of Marrickville and Dulwich Hill. A public meeting held at the Addison Road Community Centre had some 400 attendees and the number of speakers addressed Council in open forum at the 19 August Council meeting. I understand public comment and submissions from around Ashfield town centre is much lower, however.

Council has decided to hold an EGM on 30 September specifically to deal with the final draft of 'Our Fairer Future' being the plan to be recommended by the staff after considering all submissions.

This final draft was uploaded to Council's website on 16 September and a public forum for comment was held on 22 September. It was packed to overflowing, with 80 registered speakers.

Issues of 'heritage' and 'existing character' are not getting traction with most councillors, based on the comments and debate I have witnessed thus far.

Council at the last minute entered into a s34 agreement with the owner/applicant for the re-development of the dry-cleaning site at **150 Smith Street Summer Hill**. This was announced at the start of the LEC hearing on 21 July 2025. There are improvements to the design and a lowering of the height of what will be now 20 co-living studio rooms but ADHS suggested changes at ground footpath level (including deleting the driveway across the footpath) were not taken up. This is a very disappointing result.

See the Judgement here:

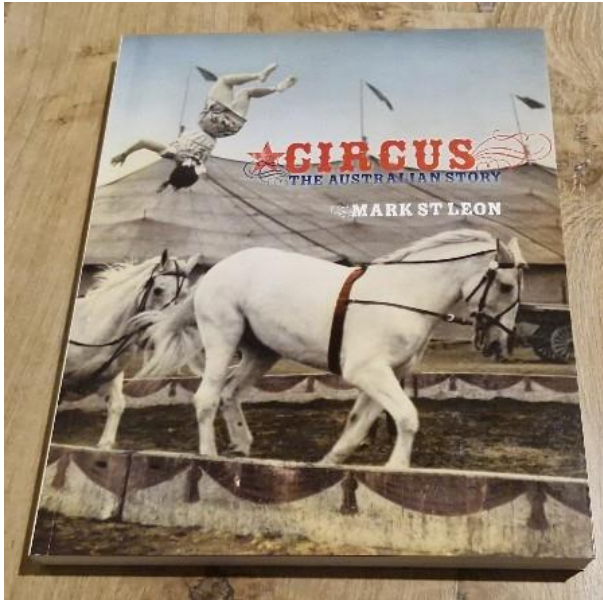
Maurice Dry Cleaners Pty Ltd v Inner West Council [2025] NSWLEC 1579

<https://www.caselaw.nsw.gov.au/decision/198a09b4397b73694e7e1419>

by David Rollinson

Book review

Circus: The Australian Story by Mark St Leon



2nd Edition 2012, Melbourne Books

Inspired by his unusual last name and an interest in his family circus history, Mark St Leon spent many years delving into the development of circus arts over a period of 175 years. The result is a beautifully presented book, which is wonderful to browse for the pictures and memorabilia shown, but it is also more than that.

The book starts with a brief history. It notes that as early as the eight century BC circus arts were a feature of Greek civilisation. The conquests of Alexander the Great made it possible for actors to travel and entertain. St Leon notes that during Roman times, circuses held in amphitheatres like the Colosseum became more blood thirsty, and that the rise of Christianity led to the demise of this form of entertainment. St Leon quickly covers some of the history in between and leads us to the commencement of the modern circus.

The second, third and fourth chapters look more closely at the circus in Australia. This includes information of Robert Avis Radford's circuses and others. It also covers the gold rush periods and travelling to non-urban centres.

Chapter 5 is entitled "Foreign Exchange". It covers visiting circuses from other countries, including circuses from America, and the visit from the monster circus of the Italian born, Giuseppi Chiarini. St Leon also writes of Australian circus artists traveling to America, including the "wizard of the wire", Con Colleano.

Chapter 6 is entitled the "Wirth's Circus". The Wirth family were originally musicians from Bavaria. They arrived in Australia in the 1850s, during the gold rush period. Eventually the family would develop into a circus family.

An interesting fact is that the Wirth family abandoned their circus wagons in the 1880s and became the first permanently rail-based circus. Of course, the chapter provides information on May Wirth (who was adopted by the Wirth family) and who was described in the USA as "the World's Greatest Lady Bareback Rider".

The final two chapters focus more on the twentieth century. This includes: the difficulties of the early 1920s, when some family circuses simply closed down; and the move for some to motorised transport. The final chapter, entitled "Oz Circus", looks at the development of the contemporary Australian circus movement from the early 1970s.

If you are interested in history, and circuses, then this book is likely to be of interest to you. And even if you are not, I suspect you'll like flicking through the various photos, and other memorabilia which is generously included in the book.

by Linda De Rosa

Recent acquisitions

A musical souvenir program

We greatly appreciate ADHS member, **Helmut Kals'** donation of a printed 'Souvenir Programme' for the musical *White Horse Inn*, performed just over 60 years ago in Ashfield Town Hall by the Petersham-Ashfield Musical Society over three nights in July 1965.



Programs for local productions are of great value as they tell the story of social activity, theatrical performance, dance, music and of course, the Chorus, the backbone of all musical shows.



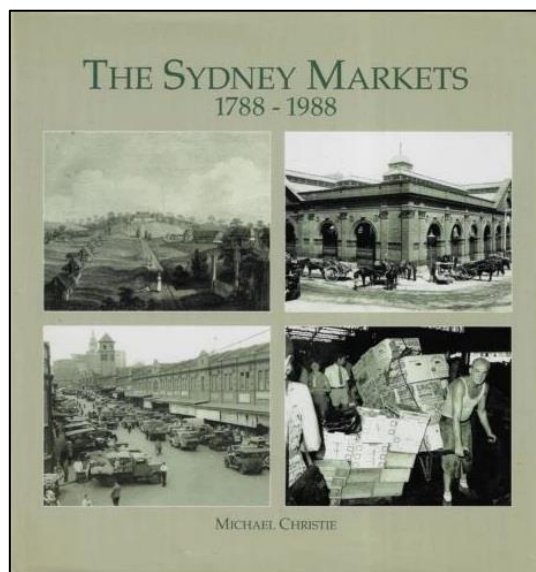
The program gives a profile of the seven main 'Stars' and of the 'Supporting Cast' and includes a double page listing of all involved in what must have been an impressive production. Thank you, Helmut!

Donation of books

Barry Ryan visited our Research Rooms in August. Barry's wife Jeanette was an ADHS member who worked as a long-standing and popular volunteer at our rooms many years ago. Sadly, Jeanette passed away in 2016 and now Barry is finally tackling the task of finding homes for various belongings.

The ADHS is pleased to acknowledge the donation of a good number of our early journals and books including two out-of-stock items, such as *A Triangle of Land* and Journal No. 10.

Barry also donated copies of *A History of the Cinemas of Ashfield* and a hard bound copy of *The Sydney Markets, 1788-1988* by Michael Christie. These books are much appreciated. Thank you, Barry!



by Ann O'Connell

What's in a Name?

Benjamin Spendelove

'Brit', 'Brickie', Builder, Bowler

While researching the history of the Fernbank subdivision development - the area of Alma and Shepherd Streets Ashfield, I came across the name of '**Benjamin Spendlove**'.

This is such an unusual surname and one I had never encountered before. It intrigued me. Who was this person and where did this surname come from. This is what I have discovered.



My Heritage provides that this interesting name means 'free with his affections or generous with his love'. It is of Anglo-Saxon origin and comes from pre C7th 'spendun' meaning to spend, employ lavishly or squander, plus 'lufu' love.

The Coat of Arms depicts a black lion on a gold shield - a lion denotes strength, courage, and black is for constancy and gold signifies generosity. The first recorded spelling is in 1219.



I was able to establish that Benjamin James Spendelove was born on 27 December 1859 to Benjamin, an agricultural labourer, and Ann Spendelove, in the small historic village of Rushall, part of the borough of Walsall, Staffordshire in the English West Midlands (English Census of 1851). The 1871 Census indicates that his 15 years old brother Thomas, was a bricklayer's labourer and by the 1881 Census, Benjamin was listed as a bricklayer and his father, a builder's labourer.

The 1881 Census also indicates that Benjamin 23 years, is now married to **Emma Heath** 25 years and her occupation is a boot closer. A boot closer is a shoemaker who sews different sections of a boot's upper together in traditional shoemaking.

Emma was born at Hilton, Staffordshire and baptised on 28 December 1856. The 1871 Census, listed Emma, 23 years, as a dress maker, living at 1 Tussell's Row, Castle Gresley, Derbyshire, with her father William, a master tailor, her mother Harriet (nee Stretton), and brother Thomas, a coal miner. Ten years on, the Census states that Benjamin and Emma are married with their abode at 1 Raven Rowe Basford, however the Registry record of the marriage is two years later, on 5th April 1883 at Basford, Nottinghamshire.

It also lists Thomas as her father when he was actually her brother. So here are a number of discrepancies - Is it the records or do I have the wrong persons?

What's in a Name? Benjamin Spendelove

Not long after, the young couple left from Plymouth, England as Assisted Migrants, arriving in Rockhampton Queensland aboard the ship *Hampshire* on 10 November 1883. Benjamin's younger sisters, Phoebe 18 years, and Elizabeth 16 years, came with them. The *Hampshire* a steamer, had been chartered to bring assisted migrants from Plymouth to Queensland ports via Suez. Assisted migration to Queensland at the time was open to skilled persons who were required to work in Queensland for at least 12 months.

A brick layer and a dressmaker would have been in demand but did the Spendelove's comply with the 12month work commitment? Maybe, as a 'B. Spendlove' was listed as living in Brisbane in 1884.

Benjamin then made a move south as he is listed as living in Manly in the January – March period of 1885. There is no further information about Emma. Is she with him or is she deceased or somewhere else? Nevertheless, a new chapter begins for Benjamin when he marries **Amy Mary Benham** on the 16 May 1885 at St Paul's Anglican Church Sydney. It is noted on the Marriage Certificate that he is now living in Surry Hills, describes himself as a bachelor (Is this true?) and a brick layer. Amy is living at Double Bay.

Amy arrived in Sydney on 6 July 1884 aboard the vessel *Abergeldie*. She too was an assisted migrant and also a dressmaker. Amy was born in Mapledurwell, Hampshire in 1859 to Charles and Sarah Benham (nee Johnson) according to her Marriage Certificate but no father was identified in her baptism record nor is he listed with them in the 1861 Census. Sarah died 19 August 1866 when Amy was 5 years old. An orphan?

Prior to emigrating to Australia, Amy was boarding with the Ware family in North Aylesford Kent and working as a dressmaker (1881 Census).

The newly married Spendeloves set up home in George Street Macdonaldtown where Benjamin was able to work as a bricklayer. Close by were several brick pits - Bakewell Bros, Coulson Street Macdonaldtown, William Dalton Brickfields at Alexandria and Rochford Street Macdonaldtown (now Erskineville), Goodlet and Smith at Waterloo and the St Peters works.

On 17 May 1886 their first child Ernest, was born at Waterloo. Benjamin and Amy were living at Rowley Street Alexandria. Benjamin's parents, Benjamin (died 1901) and Ann Spendelove (1909), also arrived in Australia that year and settled near Southport Queensland.

This must have induced Benjamin to move back to Queensland as his next two children were born up north – Marjorie at Southport 1 July 1888, and Ralph at Toowong in Brisbane 4 August 1890. Benjamin was working as bricklayer in Toowong in 1891. The photo below shows the young family in Brisbane before Ralph is born - Amy nursing Marjorie, Ernest and Benjamin.



What's in a Name? Benjamin Spendelove

With three children now, the Spendeloves moved back to Sydney, taking up residence in Bruce Street Ashfield from 1892 - 1894. They rented a small terrace, part of Jersey Terrace - 5 terraces constructed by Henry Pickering and owned by the Bank of NSW in 1892.

During that time two more children were born - Doris 21 June 1892 who was baptised at St Andrews Summer Hill, and Elsie May 17 April 1894. Benjamin expanded his work sphere and began operating as a builder in the Ashfield area.

From 1895 to 1901 there are different addresses almost yearly as documented in the Sands Postal Directories and it is uncertain whether these involved contract builds or 'spec homes' that Benjamin was erecting. Land was also being purchased in his and his wife's names, some in Arthur and Carlisle Streets.

In 1895, he is listed at: the only house on the northern side of Arthur Street between Hugh and Holden Streets; 1896 35 Carlisle Street; 1897 back in Arthur Street at 20; 1898 *Fiona* 49 Carlisle Street; 1899 *Maple Dene* Alma Street; and 1900 at 72 Elizabeth Street West. Amy would have been fed up by then if indeed she had had to move the family of 6 children each year. The last child, Jessie Marian, was born 11 March 1896.

Stability for the family was to come when Benjamin purchased *Fernbank* 7 Alma Street Ashfield, in 1901. Described as gothic in style, it was a substantial 9 room two storey brick home with a shingle roof, wrapped with a verandah on the north and eastern facades.

Formerly the home of **Dr John Aitken and wife Jane** (nee Shepherd), the property was put up for sale when the youngest Aitken child, Mary, moved out to live with her sister.

Benjamin's business prospered with evidence of landholdings continually being purchased and sold up to at least 1925, including land on the northern side of the railway line, and some at Petersham, Croydon and Burwood. He was listed as a new telephone subscriber at Parramatta Road Croydon (20 February 1907 - this may have been his building depot).

His bricklaying skills are in evidence in the cottage at 3 A'Beckett Street (see photo below) but he was also involved in large building projects.



In 1907 he completed the Holy Trinity Catholic Church at Granville.

Church at Granville.—Just completed; 80ft long and 30ft wide. Sanctuary, 14ft x 30ft; sacristy, 12ft x 14ft; porch, 12ft x 10ft. Built of brick, faced with O.K. bricks. The dressings and mouldings are of cement, and the roof is of Bangor slates. The ceilings and ornamentals are treated with oregon and kauri and varnished. A gallery to accommodate about 60 people is at the end of the nave. The contractor was Mr. Spendelove, of Ashfield, and the cost about £1000.



He tendered for work at the Gladesville Hospital for the Insane in 1908.

What's in a Name? Benjamin Spendelove

Benjamin's last major business venture was the establishment of the Bankstown Brick and Tile Works Pty Ltd, with his two sons, Ernest and Ralph, also Directors of the Company. The company was registered for public float in 21 December 1918.

There are interesting snippets from the SMH where Benjamin sought various 'tradies' for his work:

- a stonemason 1901
- plasterers for a cottage at Sydney and Young Streets Concord 20 Sept 1907;
- a joiner for cedar work in Arthur Street;
- painters for a shop and dwelling opposite the Town Hall
- a roof tiler for a job in Milton Street
- a fencer for construction of a new fence in Alma Street 1898 and
- 'a capable engineer' for the Bankstown Brick and Tile works.

In March 1903, the Police Gazette ran a notice for a missing person, William Johnson, a bricklayer's labourer, employed by Benjamin at Old Canterbury Road Petersham.

As part of his building trade Benjamin developed good cabinet making skills too as is demonstrated in the elegant cedar drumroll secretaire (see below) which he made by hand.



With the Spendelove business doing well, Amy sought a respectable young girl as 'mothers help' for the Alma Street home. Amy had sold a new Beale sewing machine in June 1900. Was that because she no longer wanted to sew or that the new machine did not suit her?

The photo below shows her very elegantly dressed which it is assumed is one of her creations given her dressmaking skills.



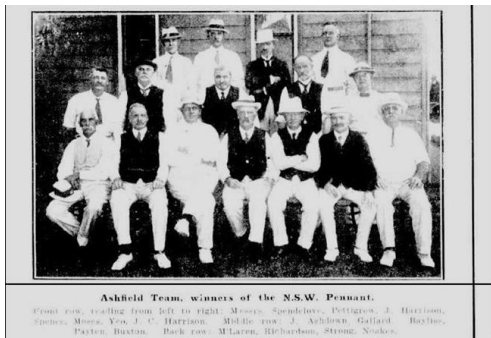
Benjamin embarked on upgrading his mode of transport- first selling his pony with harness and sulky, November 1914 and then advertising in the Herald on 3 Dec 1914 for an up to date 5-seater car and a Jap motor cycle with the latest improvements. Land was offered as part payment.

On the domestic scene the family had poultry and were selling poultry settings, pedigree laying hens and roosters (4 Dec 1917); and possessed dogs as a pair of Australian terriers was lost on the train from Ashfield one night 31 July 1915.

What's in a Name? Benjamin Spendelove

Building and bricklaying did not consume all of Benjamin's life – he was very involved in lawn bowls first at Ashfield Bowling Club and from 1913 the South Ashfield Bowling Club at Pratten Park.

From at least 1907 through to his death in 1933, his name regularly appears in the Bowls results, for singles, pairs and fours at local District, regional, Interstate and International level (New Zealand tour).



Ashfield Team, winners of the N.S.W. Pennant.
Front row, reading from left to right: Messrs. Spendelove, Pettigrew, J. Harrison, Simpson, Moore, Yow, J. C. Harrison. Middle row: J. Ashdown, Gallard, Bayles, Patten, Buxton. Back row: McLaren, Richardson, Strain, Nokes.

Benjamin was a key instigator in setting up the South Ashfield Bowling Club and always took an active part. The Pratten Park Club would have suited him as he lived just up the road. On 9th May 1913 he and 7 others signed a Memo of Association to form the Club and then he was elected the Club's first Treasurer. Benjamin was also the contractor who established the greens getting them finished ahead of schedule. He must have been eager to play there.

Amy too took up bowls and was a keen player at Pratten Park and they are both pictured in the group below.



PRATTEN PARK BOWLING CLUB
October 6, 1917

Meanwhile Amy and Benjamin were successfully raising a family of six who were growing up and participating in local and world events.

Ernest must have been a good singer as he is reported as being a soloist at the Leichardt Central Hall for the Men's Brotherhood (1907) and successfully competed in the Hurstville Eisteddfod as a baritone and bass vocalist in 1906, and 1907; he played Aussie Rules (1910). Initially he worked with his father on building projects as at 17 July 1905 'Spendelove and son' were calling for tenders to plaster a 6 roomed cottage. Ernest went on to establish a building supply yard opposite Bankstown Railway Station (at least by 1914), selling lime, cement ironmongery and timber, the stock which was put up for auction in November 1918 in preparation for the new enterprise -Bankstown Brick and Tile Company.

Ralph attended Petersham Superior Public School winning a prize in the Public Service class (March 1904). He commenced work as a Manufacturing Stationer's Clerk, Government Printing Office and went on to be an accountant. On 23 June 1915 he enlisted for WW1, served and was wounded at Gallipoli. He returned home but on 25 Jan 1921, died at Ashfield from war injuries (his leg was amputated just below the knee). His funeral train went from *Fernbank*, Alma Street to Rookwood Cemetery. He received a Military Medal with a Bar for his bravery. The Governor presented Ralph's medals posthumously to Benjamin at the unveiling of the War Memorial in Ashfield Park.

Jessie, attended the Metropolitan Business College, Holt House, York Street Sydney in 1912. She was recognised for making exceptional progress in typing. On 1 July 1922 she married Leonard Judd at home, *Fernbank* Ashfield. The news report of the wedding said that 'Mr Leonard Judd, is now manager of the farm section at Hawkesbury Agriculture College, and doing wonderful work at Hawkesbury'. Jessie died December 1990.

What's in a Name? Benjamin Spendelove

Doris married **Leslie Sydney Horder** in New Zealand on 24 October 1924 and died at Mittagong in 1988. Little is known of Marjorie and Elsie. Elsie attended Fort Street Model school and was a prize winner in 1909. They never married, stayed at home with their parents, their occupations being 'home duties'. Both died at Moss Vale - Marjorie, 27 June 1975, and Elsie, 10 December 1979.

Benjamin caught a chill and died unexpectedly from pneumonia on 4 September 1933 in the Ashfield Masonic Hospital aged 73. He had still been very active playing competitive bowls until this short illness. Ashfield Bowling Club members attended his funeral at Rookwood Cemetery where he is buried with his wife Amy and son Ralph.

Benjamin was a resident of Ashfield for over 50 years and contributed significantly to the community through his building enterprises and his long-standing involvement with the Ashfield Bowling Clubs, all while successfully raising his family of six. After his death, his widow and children moved out of the district so the Spendelove name completely disappeared from this area. Nevertheless, his legacy can be seen in buildings he constructed. Maybe you are living in one of his projects.

Well done Benjamin the 'brit', 'brickie', builder, bowler, husband, father ... The question is: did he live up to the origins of the surname 'Spendelove' and his family motto?

By Lois Gray

Images from Lois Gray, Tony Walsh, ADHS and Wikipedia.

ADHS Journal 2026 Expressions of interest for articles

The 2026 Society Journal will be on the theme of Liverpool Road Ashfield.

Our journals are enriched by a variety of authors' voices, and we invite members and others to contribute.

While writing about historical factual accounts, an article can be presented in many ways and approaches and can include elements of expression, drama, detective mystery solving and empathy and also encompass detailed descriptions or statistical information. An article can be written taking a variety of stances: biographical, social history, demographic, town planning, architectural, commercial, industrial, etc.

- Articles should be on the theme of Liverpool Road (stretching from Parramatta Road to Milton Street, Ashfield)
- Length - can be one page made up based on a photo and caption or multiple pages
- Must be factual and have references to original sources
- Should not reflect personal, political, racial, sexual, offensive, etc points of view
- Must be your own work (No plagiarism)
- Copyright of images must be checked
- Soft copy is needed in MsWord or similar

The range of topics for Liverpool Road-related articles is huge and can include local personalities and leaders, builders, trades or professional people, community groups, early subdivisions and settlement, events, shops, small businesses, churches, clubs, schools, sport, theatres, banks, offices, houses, hotels, garages, roadworks, transport, road traffic, fires, accidents and tragedies, fun, fairs and celebrations.

EOI for ADHS Journal 2026

Authors should visit our Research Rooms initially to discuss their proposed article to ensure the topic has not been chosen by another author or been 'written up' in a previous journal. They should also visit to locate information, images and maps from our collections.

Support will be offered throughout the research and writing process if required. All articles will need to be up to a good standard and will be edited by our team.

Why not give it a go!

by **Ann O'Connell**

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 Saturday** of each month from 11am until 4pm.

Membership matters

- \$40 for standard household membership - no postage
- \$30 concessional membership (DVA, Centrelink, fulltime student) - no postage
- \$50 for standard household membership - with postage
- \$40 Concessional membership (DVA, Centrelink, fulltime student) - with postage.

Household membership entitles all members of your household to participate in Society events as members.

We try to hand deliver to local members, but this is not always possible. As you would be well aware, \$10 for the postage of newsletters and journals is a bargain!

➤ **EFT payments:**

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- **Cash payments** can be made at our Rooms on the second and last Saturday of the month.

To join or renew please complete the online form and submit it to:

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

Contact the Society

- Postal address:

PO Box 20 ASHFIELD NSW 1800

- Email: admin@ashfieldhistory.org.au

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

Newsletter

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Thank you to:

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for their contributions to this newsletter.

Heather Warton

25 September 2025