



Nurungi

Remembered

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CONCORD HERITAGE SOCIETY

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MEETINGS

General Meetings

2nd Wednesday of month
at 7:30 pm in the
Concord Citizens' Centre
9 Wellbank Street, Concord
Phone: 8765-9155

Executive Meetings

4th Wednesday of month
at 7:45 pm in the
Concord Citizens' Centre

Walker Estates Committee

1st Wednesday of month
Concord Citizens' Centre
Graham Packett, 9743-3007

Other Committees

As arranged
Watch the newsletter

Museum

Fred Stansfield, 9743-1866

Archives/Local History

Kate Skillman, 9706-7479

Heritage

Bob Jones, 8765-9347

Oral/Family History

Lola Sharp, 8753-0659

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CONCORD HERITAGE MUSEUM

5 Wellbank Street

Open 2:00 - 4:00 pm
on 1st and 3rd
Wednesdays & Saturdays

No.110

May 2005

The Mortlake Ferry - Historical Notes

Happy 77th Birthday - 16th May

The Mortlake Ferry is a vehicular cable ferry that plies the Parramatta River at a crossing between Hilly Street in Mortlake and Pellisier Road in Putney. It is the last remaining vehicular ferry (or punt) operating on the Parramatta River, and in Sydney more generally. Other existing vehicular ferry services close to the Sydney region include five on the Hawkesbury River at Wisemans Ferry, Sackville, Lower Portland, Webbs Creek and Berowra Waters.

Ferries, both passenger and vehicular, were an essential link in the transport infrastructure of Sydney throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as the city is built around the harbour and the network of river systems that flow into it. Vehicular ferries were particularly vital at tidal crossings, such as the point between Mortlake and Putney, where the cost of the construction of a bridge of sufficient design merit to make the crossing was prohibitive, in terms of finance and the availability of materials and manpower to build it.

A number of vehicular ferries operated on Sydney Harbour, the Georges River to the south and Parramatta River to the west in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Vehicular ferries were particularly important for linking North Sydney and the south side of the harbour in this time. In c1842 the Sydney Ferry Company began the first vehicular ferry between these two points, which operated until 1932 at which time the Sydney Harbour Bridge was opened to traffic. On the Parramatta River, a vehicular ferry service was first established in c1832 between Bedlam and Abbotsford Points, which was replaced by the first Gladesville Bridge in 1881. In most instances, bridges have since replaced earlier vehicular ferries operating on Sydney Harbour, and the Parramatta and Georges Rivers (OHM Consultants, 1998, pp 8-11). The Mortlake Ferry is a highly significant remnant of this early and prevalent form of transport as it is the only remaining vehicular ferry in use on Sydney Harbour and its tributaries.

The Mortlake Ferry, also known as the Putney Punt, began operations in 1928 (OHM Consultants, 1998, p 11). The Hon Robert Thomas Ball officially opened the Mortlake

Putney ferry service on 16 May 1928. Ball was the Secretary for Public Works in George Fuller's coalition government (1922-25), and was also a minister in the Bavin Government at the time the ferry service was instituted by the Department of Main Roads (DMR).

The ferry service was commenced to enable employees at the nearby Australian Gas Light Company (AGL) who lived in suburbs on the northern side of the river to reach their workplace. Pressure came from the 'Putney side' for the institution of the service, and was primarily led by the Putney Progress Association. Otherwise, gasworks employees on the northern banks of the Parramatta River '...were confronted by a round trip via the Meadowbank-Rhodes punt or rowing themselves across or again using the passenger ferry but this would not always have been at convenient times for the worker.' (Information supplied by Concord Heritage Society Inc, letter from G M Cashman to D Brown, Town Clerk, Concord Council, 24 February 1982). This ferry would also have been a benefit for residents on the southern side of the river to access Ryde and other suburbs to the north, and as such would have been a sup-



Bulletin Board

8th June: Jane Bennett, Painter of Architecture in Sydney

13th July: Graeme Payne - Lane Cove Historical Society - "Australian Commercial Plane Crashes"

10th August: Annual General Meeting and Election of Officers.

14th September: Andrew Monaghan, The Costume House, Gladesville - "Early Australian Fashions in Museum Collections"

12th October: Pam Liell, speaking on her recently released book, "Dressed in their Best: 100 Years of Family Photos"

9th November: John Walmeant - African Safari Photographs

plement to the nearby Ryde Bridge. Both Mortlake and Putney were named for towns on the Thames River in England. The AGL established gasworks at Mortlake in 1883 (moving from Darling Harbour). The suburb was subdivided for sale the following year, and would have provided housing for workers employed at the gasworks. Evidently a ferry service of some description was servicing the suburb during in the 1880s (and possibly earlier), as a subdivision plan for Mortlake prepared in 1884 shows a 'steamer wharf at the end of Tennyson Road (then named Burwood Road), a little to the south of the present ferry wharf (Pollen, 1996, pp 179-180).

Construction began on a bridge between Ryde and Rhodes/Concord in 1933, which was officially opened in 1935. However, workers at AGL continued to use the Mortlake Putney ferry service. The Mortlake Ferry service is still in operation, although the new bridge threatened the viability of the service, and despite intermittent attempts by the DMR (and later the RTA) to remove it. That the service remains is a testament to the strength of the local community, who have campaigned to keep it operational since this time (OHM Consultants, 1998, pp 11-12).

By 1948, the Mortlake Ferry accommodated an average of 811 cars each day. More recently the numbers of cars travelling on the ferry dropped to an average of 310 vehicles per day in 1986 and 250 per day in 1990 (OHM Consultants 1998, p 12). The ferry currently plying between Mortlake and Putney (Ferry No 28) was built in 1960 and is 'a welded steel hull vessel with a 15 car capacity; this ferry has been operating on this run since at least 1976 (OHM Consultants, 1998, p 11; RTA File 35P.755 Part 5 Ferry Vessel DMR No 5, 1971-1987). The ferry was originally intended to carry 12 vehicles but was widened with wing decks on either side to make the main deck wider (so that it now carries 15 vehicles).

Similarly to most vehicular ferries currently operating in NSW, the Mortlake Ferry powered by a diesel engine and is guided by two sets of cables lying on the bottom of the river. One of these cables pulls the ferry, while the other cable guides the ferry across the river (OHM Consultants, 1998, p 7).

The Department of Main Roads

(DMR), and latterly the RTA (since 1989) operated Mortlake Ferry from 1928 to 1992. Although the RTA continues to maintain and repair the ferry, it has contracted out the ferry operations to a private operator since 1992. The ferry cables are replaced every 12-15 months, and the ferry is slipped every three years at the Mortlake Slipways. The slipway is located to the south of the Mortlake approach ramp and is used for the maintenance of RTA-owned ferries operating in the Sydney region (including the Mortlake Ferry and the five vehicular ferries servicing the Hawkesbury River).

The contract to operate the ferry is tendered and awarded every three years. Shad Wall held the contract from 1992 until at least 1998. The current contractor is Maccas Ferries, who have had the contract for seven years. In 1998, it was reported that the staff required for operating the Mortlake Ferry included a ferry driver, a gatekeeper and a deckhand (OHM Consultants, 1998, pp 11-12).

At the time of inspection in August 2004, the ferry was crewed by two staff (ferrymaster and deckhand).

The suburbs of Mortlake and Putney are now largely populated by white-collar workers. As such, the ferry has become a commuter service for local residents working in the city, as noted on a site inspection in August 2004. This changing demographic is reflected by the restricted operating times for the ferry, which is in service Mondays to Fridays 6.20am-9.25am and 2.20pm-5.25pm. The large apartment construction program under way was cause for optimism that patronage would increase.

Description:

The ferry is a welded steel hull ferry rated for 15-car capacity. It is a rope - cable - guided ferry having a steel guide rope on the eastern side and drive rope on the west. Propulsion along the rope is by a 4 cylinder Perkins diesel driving a drive wheel system. The ferry has ramps at each end consisting of a primary ramp surfaced in steel grating, and a secondary flap, which has steel checker plate. The level and angle of the ramps are hydraulically controllable from the control cabin.

Deck facilities include the following:

- * Control cabin with engine and ramp controls, safety equipment etc.;
- * Road deck marked for three lanes of traffic. There are hand operated swing gates at each end of the deck;
- * Pedestrian passenger waiting room opposite the control cabin. Routes on and off the ferry for pedestrians are marked on the deck. Pedestrians on Mortlake side use right hand side of

approach ramp to alight the ferry. The waiting room has containers with life vests;

- * Davit supported dinghy;
- * Anchors for emergency deployment.

In operation the ferrymaster uses the engine and brake to align the ferry as it approaches the ramp, and adjust the ramps to suit the traffic load being carried. On grounding, the flaps slide up the ramp till the inertia of the ferry is lost. The deckhand hooks a chain from the ferry to a safety chain on the ramp, opens the swing gates and uses a remote control to raise a boom on the ferry approaches. Vehicles then exit the ferry to be replaced by vehicles travelling in the opposite direction. The docking procedure is reversed for departure, and the ferrymaster sends a warning by radio of intention to move, thus warning craft such as the Rivercats, which ply this waterway.

The operation of the ferry is undertaken on contract to the RTA by Macca Ferries Pty Ltd. On the day of inspection, the two personnel on board reported experience on most of the RTA's ferries in NSW.

The ferry approaches form an essential part of the ferry infrastructure. On the south side of Parramatta River the road approach is in concrete of considerable age. Likewise the ramp is concreted, with insert steel rails. Between the ramp and concrete road there is a bitumen section of recent reconstruction. Facilities on the shore include a waiting room, a staff shed, modem boom gate and old handraised half gates, which are no longer in use. There are also a pair of chain wire gates which are closed during ferry outages, which occur daily between 9.30 and 2.20, and at night from 5.25 pm to 6.20 am. The ferry cables are fixed to terminal posts, one of which is a timber pile and the other a steel pile. The boom gates and wheels and posts are 'original'.

(Sue Rosen & Associates, Heritage Assessment And History, Epping. Reprinted with permission.)

Group Visits to Yaralla

These are becoming more popular and we desperately need volunteers to help with the Devonshire Teas. If you can spare a couple of hours, now and then, on week days we'd love to hear from you.

A former resident of Concord West, who joined our last Yaralla tour thought we might enjoy this newspaper article about one of her younger brothers . . .

Hospital patient runs into sea, saved by youth.

A 16-year-old youth yesterday afternoon swam naked to the rescue of a patient of the Repatriation General Hospital, Concord, who tried to swim across a shark-infested bay in his pyjamas.

The patient had run from a Yaralla ward with his dressing gown over his pyjamas. He was also wearing shoes.

He half ran, half stumbled into the sea, then began floundering his way across to the other side of Yaralla Bay.

His dressing gown and shoes pulled him down and he was soon in serious difficulties.

The youth who rescued him - Trevor Collins, apprentice carpenter of Currawang Street, Concord West, was on the opposite side of Yaralla Bay to the hospital, leading a troop of Sea Scouts.

He said last night:

"We saw something splashing about in the middle of the bay.

"I ripped off my clothes and swam out about 75 yards to the man.

"He was about 25 or 30, and was wearing pyjamas, dressing gown and shoes and socks.

"He was exhausted, so I turned him over on his back and took him in.

"I wasn't thinking about sharks in the bay - I was thinking about getting back", he said.

"When I got the chap ashore, he wanted to know how to get to North Sydney. He said he wanted to go home because the hospital wasn't treating him right.

"The scoutmaster, Reg Tidball, rang the hospital and they sent an army ambulance waggon round with three attendants to pick up the man."

Collins has held a Royal Life Saving bronze medallion for life saving for two years.

The Repatriation General Hospital last night refused to give any information about the man.

(Sunday Telegraph, 3rd October, 1948)

Heritage on the Parramatta River, Concord

Stone retaining walls, Hen & Chicken Bay

Former swimming baths at Hen & Chicken Bay, Bayview Park

Former Cabarita Wharf, Cabarita Park

Sanders Marina, Cabarita Park

Federation House boatshed (only), 87 Llewellyn Street, Rhodes

Stone Wharf, 91 Llewellyn Street, Uhrs Point, Rhodes

Ryde Bridge, Church Street Ryde to Concord Road, Rhodes

Ryde Railway Bridge, Northern Railway Line, bridge between Rhodes and Meadowbank

Log Ponds and Wharves to timber yards, Bennelong Point, Homebush Bay.

Rookwood Necropolis - Open Day 2005

This will be on Sunday, 18th September, between 9:00 am and 4:00 pm.

We have advised The Friends of Rookwood that we will be able to supply some volunteers to assist on this occasion for a half day, leaving time for the volunteers to take part in the other activities.

The theme for the year is "150th Anniversary of the Official Opening of NSW Railways".

This year there will be wonderful surprises for the visitors, including a steam train which will be running from the Mortuary Station at Redfern and will be arriving at Lidcombe Station, for display. Vintage buses will transport visitors to the cemetery.

They will have a 19th Century funeral bus carriage on display and also the NSW Railway Band will be entertaining.

At 11:00 am there will be the street parade, with many hearses including a horse drawn hearse and people in costumes.

There will be white elephant stalls, plant stalls, craft stalls and the usual BBQ lunch and delicious Devonshire teas and other events taking place throughout the cemetery.

Make a note of the date in your diary now and even if you can't spare a few hours to help, go along and enjoy an interesting and enjoyable outing.



We have quite a few events coming up in the next few months and volunteers are needed. If you can help please phone the secretary as soon as possible so that we can plan.

Mon. 11th July - Group to Museum, 10:00 am - 2 volunteers

Wed. 20th July - Group to Museum, 11:30 am - 2 volunteers

Wed. 20th July - Group to Yaralla, 9:30 am - 1 or 2 guides, ? Devonshire Teas

Wed. 3rd August - Group to Yaralla, 9:30 am - 1 or 2 guides, ? Devonshire Teas

Tuesday, 9th August - Group to Yaralla, 2:50 pm - 2 or 3 guides - Devonshire Teas

Sunday, 21st August - *Our own OPEN DAY AT RIVENDELL - ALL HANDS ON DECK*

Sunday, 18th September - Friends of Rookwood have asked for assistance with their open day - can you spare half a day?

Wednesday, 12th October - Group to Yaralla, 10:30 am - 2 or 3 guides needed, ? Devonshire Teas.

Sunday, 23rd October - *our OPEN DAY AT YARALLA - ALL HANDS ON DECK.*

Please put these dates in your diary NOW and if you know you will be free and able to assist please call the secretary as soon as possible. These days take some organising and it is nice to know in advance what help will be available.

Annual General Meeting - 10/8/05

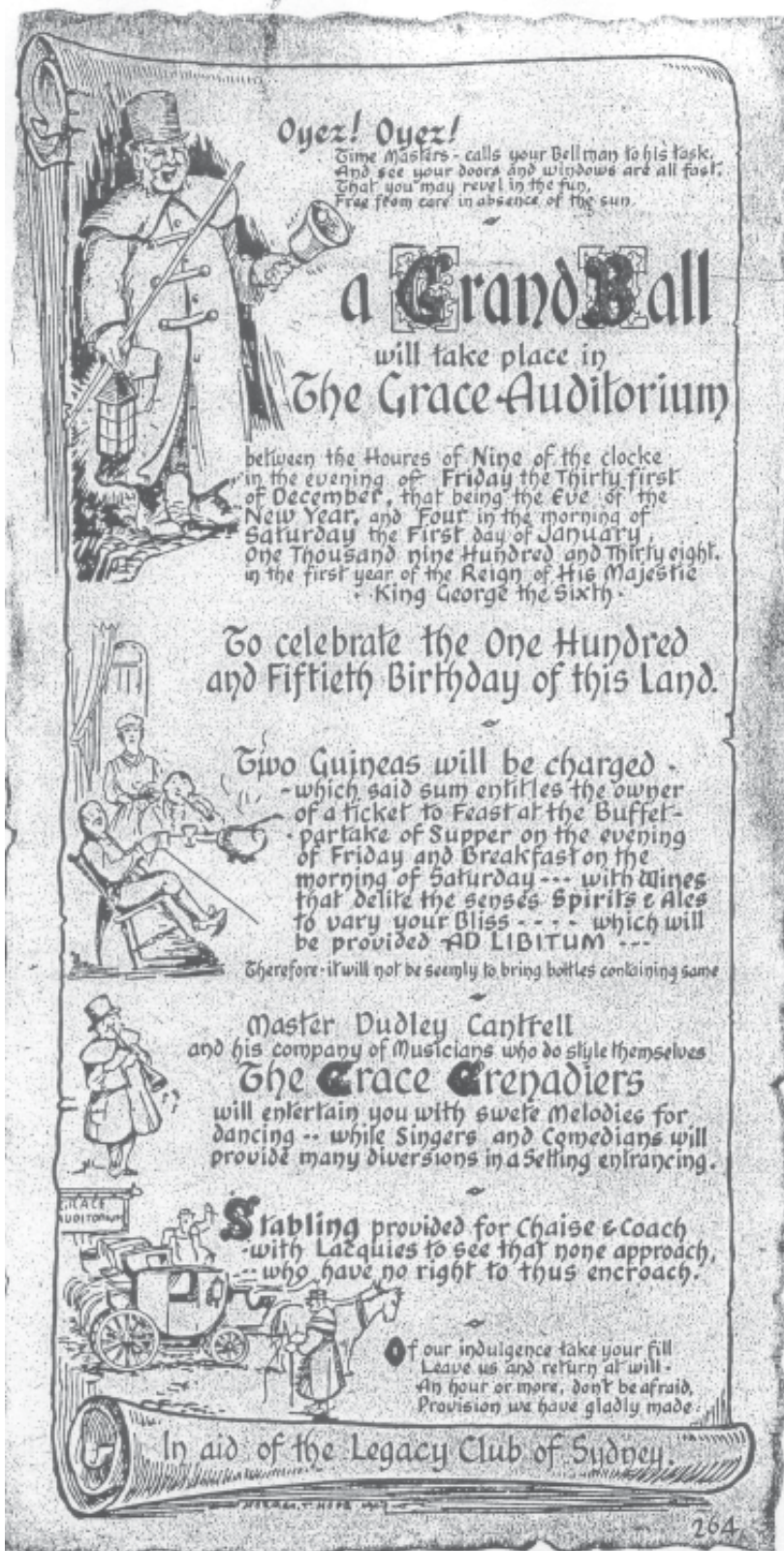
This is the time to elect your officers and committee members for the ensuing year.

All positions will be declared vacant and will be up for nominations. Let's make it a proper election with lots of names being put forward.

There will be several vacancies and we urge you to consider putting your name forward for any of the positions. New blood is always welcome as you bring fresh thoughts and ideas.

If you feel you would like to be a part of the planning process please don't hesitate to put your own name forward - others may not know of your willingness to become part of the executive. If you're shy, just whisper in someone's ear and they will gladly nominate you.

Come, visit our museum and see what we have . . .



The Concord Senior Citizens Club is holding their Annual Charity Luncheon and Auction in support of the Oncology Department at Westmead Children's Hospital on Sunday, 19th June, 2005 at 12 noon and invites any of our members interested to join them.

Cost is \$15.00 each, BYO drinks.

The guests of honour will be Dr. Michael Stevens, AM, FRACP, and Mayor Angelo Tsirekas and family.

Some of the items to be auctioned are:

- * A basket donated by Telstra which includes a DVD player, a cordless phone and 2 bottles of Andrew Garrett wine.
- * A swimming cap from the Athens Olympics 2004 presented in a glass showcase and signed by the Australian Swimming Team.
- * An original framed watercolour painting by club member Bill Bittman.
- * Two tickets for the Bridge Climb, valued at \$360.

To secure your tickets for this worthwhile event let Jan Bedingfield, Secretary, know as soon as possible. Telephone 9743-5793. Last day for payment will be Wednesday, 8th June.

From the **Secretary's Desk**

Welcome Back: It was good to see Fred back at our last meeting, together with brother Frank. We've missed you.

Auditor Needed: Do you know anyone who would be willing to audit our books at the end of this financial year? Our current auditor has been doing the job for several years and would now like a break.

A note for tour guides: To all tour guides and intending tour guides . . . we have updated our Tour Guide Books. Some of our guides have received these. If you haven't, please contact the secretary to get yours.

Membership: It's time again for renewal of membership. Have you paid yet?

Photographs: We still need some help to do a rough sort of our photographs so they can be identified and indexed for reference.

Photocopying, Filing and Typing: Can you spare an hour or two, here and there, to help with this. It's mounting up.

For your Diary

Wed. 1st June - Walker Estates Meeting
Wed. 8th June - General Meeting
Wed. 22nd June - Executive Meeting