



# “Nurungi”

Remembered

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CONCORD HERITAGE SOCIETY

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#### MEETINGS

##### General Meetings

2nd Wednesday of month  
(except January)  
at 7:30 pm in the  
City of Canada Bay  
Museum  
1 Bent Street, Concord  
9743-3034

##### Executive Meetings

4th Wednesday of month  
at 7:30 pm in the  
Museum  
(all members welcome)

##### Walker Estates Committee

Meets at Yaralla on the  
3rd Saturday of month  
at 2:00 pm  
**Chairperson**  
Graham Ferguson, 9300-9657  
**Tours Organiser**  
Sandra Elliott, 9797-1040  
[ttouille@optusnet.com.au](mailto:ttouille@optusnet.com.au)

##### Museum Committee

Meets on 2nd Wednesday of  
month at 9:30 am at museum  
**Chairperson**  
Lorraine Holmes, 9743-2682

##### Oral History Committee

Betty Fletcher, 9713-1384

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## CITY OF CANADA BAY MUSEUM

1 Bent Street, Concord

Open Wed & Sat  
10am to 4pm

No.174

December 2010

## Gasworks Tragedy at Mortlake

Three men asphyxiated. Thrilling heroism of rescuers.

Yesterday morning three men lost their lives at the Australian Gas Light Company's Works at Mortlake. Two of them – fearless, brave men – in attempting to rescue their mate, met with a sudden end, but their heroism will live long in the public memory.

The story of the tragedy is simple enough – one man rushing to a comrade's help – yet the circumstances call forth admiration beyond expression.

No man's courage was more severely tested than that of the third victim who, well aware that one of his comrades had already been asphyxiated by the fumes of a still in an attempt to save a fellow-workman's life, flung hesitation and fear aside, only to meet a similar fate.

The tragedy occurred within the space of ten minutes, and the bodies had been recovered before even all those on the works knew about it.

### Fatal Fumes

It appears that about 11 o'clock Michael Carrig, a boilermaker, was working inside a tar-still effecting repairs. The still, which is of a cylindrical shape, resembling the ordinary water tank, is about 8 feet high and 5 feet in diameter. Carrig had been working on the job about two hours when he was overcome by a sudden rush of fumes.

His mate, Robert Allan, heard his cries and, without any hesitation climbed to the top of the tank and scrambled down inside. Before doing so he raised an alarm; but time was precious, and he did not wait for others to arrive. By the time the other workmen arrived at the fatal spot Allan was groping his way in the still in search of his comrade. It was not long, however, before the deadly fumes once again reaped their harvest and Allan collapsed.

### A Brave Attempt

A stillman named James Crombie was among those who were attracted to the spot. He promptly emulated Allan's example and jumped into the tank when the latter failed to appear. But his sacrifice also proved to be in vain.

Notwithstanding the utter danger of the task, there were others ready and willing to volunteer their services for rescue work.

Tied around the waist with a piece of rope, Fred Martyn, an engineer's fitter, was let down into the tank, and he too was overcome; but, fortunately, he was dragged out and after resuscitation methods had been applied, he revived.

Still another workman essayed the task. Frederick Zahra, a first-aid officer and storeman on the works, was roped around the waist and, carrying a loose piece in his hand to fix to the bodies of the stricken men, he descended into the death-trap. Zahra made three descents, and although suffering severely from the gaseous fumes, he was successful in bringing to the surface on each occasion one of the bodies of the dead men.

In the meantime Doctors Beattie and Brooks were brought to the Company's works and resorted to every known means of resuscitation, but their efforts were of no avail. The bodies were subsequently conveyed to the Western Suburbs Cottage Hospital, and thence to their respective homes.

The still is ordinarily used in the process of extracting certain properties from tar. Yesterday it was not being used

### Mysterious Cause

The fact of the presence of poisonous fumes, supposedly sulphuretted hydrogen, is a mystery and is now being closely investigated by the Company's officials. So far as is known, the still only contained a quantity of tar, but how the fumes escaped into it is inexplicable.

### Widows and Orphans

Three widows and ten children have been left to mourn the loss of their breadwinners.



Bulletin Board

Wed. 8th December: Christmas Party at  
Museum - from 6:30 pm

January: There is no general meeting in  
January.

Michael Carrig lived with his wife and seven children at Granville; Robert Allan resided with his wife and child at Hunters Hill; whilst James Crombie was a resident of Mortlake, and leaves a wife and two children.

## Medals for Life-Saving

Mr. Frederick Zahra enjoyed the distinction of being the first recipient in Australia of the Silver Medal, St John of Jerusalem, awarded to him for his heroism in saving life when one of his fellow-workers was overcome by fumes in the Mortlake gas Works.

Mr. Fredrick Zahra was also awarded the Medal of St John Ambulance Association, The Royal Shipwreck Relief Humane Society of NSW and the Royal Humane Society of Australia.

The Australian Gas Light Company gave him a cheque for £50.

(Ed. This information is taken from newspaper cuttings of the day - 13<sup>th</sup> August, 1919.)

## An Ode to Bravery

*Whereby brave men lost their lives  
in their endeavour to save the life  
of a fellow comrade.*

You've heard of brave men gone,  
And brave men here today;  
Men who risked their precious lives  
And now have passed away.  
But the tragedy of Mortlake  
Puts all deeds in the shade,  
When Robert Allan and Crombie  
Gave life for their comrades.

Although Martyn knew the fate  
Of those who went before,  
He volunteered to bring to earth  
The mate whose life was o'er.  
They tied a rope around his waist,  
That dauntless hero brave;  
But willing hands did haul him up,  
His own good life to save.

Zahra then said, "I'll go down,  
They might be still alive;

I'll save them if its possible,  
For they may yet survive."  
He was the last man who volunteered,  
His fellow men to save;  
But he was almost overcome  
That dauntless hero brave.

Now each of those have left behind  
A weeping, loving wife;  
Let's help them and their children  
Through this uncertain life.  
And may their offspring never be  
Forced to become a slave  
May a monument of marble  
Be erected o'er their grave.

May God be good to those who've  
passed,  
Great heroes brave and bold;  
O may their names be written down  
In letters of pure gold.  
Until the sun will never cease to shine,  
That will be on the last day;  
The memory of lion-hearted men  
Will never pass away.

P.F. Collins



from our Archives

## A Prophecy Come True . . .

*Where Sydney her lucid bosom  
swells,  
There the proud arch, colossus like  
Bstride yon glittering streams . . .  
There shall tall spires,  
And dome cap'd towers ascend  
And piers and quays  
Their many structures blend.*

This poem was written by the poet Erasmus Darwin, who came out on the First Fleet with Captain Phillip.

## Congratulations

. . . to Lorraine Holmes, who is  
the proud grandmother of a  
baby boy,  
Edwin James.



Mum, dad,  
baby and  
grandma all  
doing well

A little boy went to the library to check out a book titled "Comprehensive Guide for Mothers.

"Is this for your mother?" asked the librarian.

"No," said the boy.

"So why are you checking it out?"

"Because I started collecting mothers last week."

# Christmas Around The World

■ One of the most enduring symbols of the Christmas Season originated in Italy. St Francis of Assisi commissioned a man to create a manger scene and a tradition was born. In Rome, canons are fired on Christmas Eve to mark the beginning of the holiday season and a 24 hour fast comes to an end on Christmas Day with an elaborate feast. Although small gifts are exchanged on this day, the main gift-giving day is on January 6, the last day of the Epiphany.

■ Visitors flock to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve to witness a dramatic annual procession. Galloping horsemen and police on Arabian horses head the parade – followed by a lone horseman carrying a cross and sitting astride a coal black steed. Churchmen and government officials follow and the solemn procession enters the Church and places an ancient effigy of the Holy Child inside.

■ Romanian children take to the streets over the Christmas season travelling from house to house singing carols and reciting poetry. The leader of any particular group carries a large wooden star covered in shiny paper and decorated with bells and coloured ribbon. A picture of the holy family is pasted in the centre of the star and the entire creation is held aloft with the help of a broomstick or stout pole.

■ Christmas trees aren't commonly used in Greece but in almost every home the main symbol of the season is a shallow bowl containing a little water. Suspended above the water is a cross that is wrapped in basil leaves. The mother of the home keeps goblins at bay by dipping the cross in the bowl and sprinkling water into each room of the house. This ritual continues through the twelve day of Christmas ending in January

■ The Scots celebrate Christmas in a rather sombre fashion and reserve their merriment for New Year's Eve. It's bad luck to allow the fire to go out on Christmas Eve as the chimney cools down enough to allow mischievous elves into the house via the hearth. On Christmas day the fire is transferred out-doors as people gather 'round a bonfire to dance to the sound of bagpipes before settling down to a hearty dinner.

■ Christmas in Armenia is enjoyed a tad earlier than most of the rest of the world. Six days earlier in fact because they believe that Christ's birthday should be celebrated on the day of his baptism. No worries for Armenians about shedding unwanted pounds after the festive season – they prepare for their Christmas celebrations with a fast. They eat no animal food for a week and no food at all on the last day before Christmas.

■ The kids of the rest of the world universally consider Polish children downright lucky. They receive presents once on St Nicholas Day and again on Christmas day when they enjoy a feast consisting of twelve courses, one for each of the Apostles. The table is always set with an extra place in case a stranger or the Holy Spirit should appear. The Star of Bethlehem is the most popular image of the Polish Christmas and the Star man and his helpers, the Star boys, deliver the presents on Christmas Day.

■ Mexican preparations for Christmas begin weeks before with elaborately decorated market stalls appearing in the plazas of every town and city. Some people travel great distances from remote areas to attend processions re-enacting Mary and Joseph's nine-day journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Christmas Day is filled with food, drink and celebrations and children take turns to break open the piñata.

■ A 4pm on Christmas Eve in Norway all work comes to a halt as people take to their bathrooms to wash and put on new clothes to greet the holiday season. An ancient Norse figure called Julesvinn delivers presents to the children and on Christmas day families congregate to eat the Christmas pig. After Christmas day, the children play a form of trick or treat – where they dress up and go door to door asking for goodies.

## Calendars for Sale

Sydney Wildlife Rescue Calendar



If you're looking for a special present for someone, or just for yourself, come and see the calendar published by Sydney Wildlife Rescue.

It contains twelve beautiful photographs of different animals and birds and plenty of space for each day to fill in all your appointments.

They are only \$10 each and all money goes to assist in Wildlife Rescue.

## Celebrating Canada Bay Volunteers

Mayor Angelo Tsirekas invites all community volunteers to attend a

### Christmas Morning Tea

to thank them for their hard work and dedication throughout 2010.

**Tuesday, 30th November, 2010  
at 10:00 am**

**Concord Community Centre  
1A Gipps Street, Concord**

RSVP Heather Crichton, 9911-6508  
or

heather.crichton@canadabay.nsw.gov.au  
by Monday, 22nd November

## Posties Party

If you didn't come to this you missed a wonderful night - thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended. Thanks to all who came and also brought visitors.

Thanks also to Terry & Beryl's daughters and the lovely Marlene who were our models for the evening.

Special thanks to Beryl Robinson, who organised the event, supplied presents for our hostess and our lovely models, as well as supplying some of the supper.

Thanks also to all the others who contributed towards the delicious spread. It was very much enjoyed, with no left overs.

With entry and commission on sales we raised approximately \$300.00.

*The measure of a man's real character is what he would do if he knew he would never be found out. - Thomas B Macaulay*

*Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you're right. - Henry Ford*

*Diamonds are nothing more than chunks of coal that stuck to their jobs. - Christopher Morley*

*Don't forget our*

## *Christmas Party*



**Wednesday, 8th December - 6:30 for 7:00 pm  
at the Museum**

*Family and friends are invited*

Members are asked to please bring finger food for the refreshments  
(We now have a new microwave/convection oven for warming)

BYO liquid refreshments

*Please let the secretary know by 1st December who will be  
attending and what type of food you will be bringing.*

### **BOOK LAUNCH**

#### **Pictorial History - CITY OF CANADA BAY Drummoyne to Concord**

Catherine Warne Kingsclear Books  
invites you to the launch of

**A Pictorial History - City of Canada Bay**

by

**Gregory Blaxell**

with special guest

**Broadcaster Angela Catterns**

on

**Friday, 10th December, 2010 at 6 pm**

at the

**Kokoda Cafe, Rhodes Park, Concord**

RSVP Friday, 3rd December, 2010

Email: [blaxellg@ozemail.com.au](mailto:blaxellg@ozemail.com.au) or phone 9874-2266

Parking in Rhodes Park or adjoining Kiloola Street

# *Merry Christmas*

**from all of us  
to  
all of you**



## **From the Secretary's Desk**



**Welcome** to new member Corinne Gaston. We look forward to getting to know you soon.

**Membership Renewals:** There are still a few outstanding. You were recently sent a letter to remind you. If we do not hear from you this will be your last Nurungi. We thank you for your help in the past and hope you still keep in touch with us.

**Executive Vacancies:** There are still a couple of vacancies on the committee. Trish Skehan is finding it difficult to handle publicity and guest speakers now she lives so far away so we desperately need someone to take on this job.

We also need someone to come and help us to organise our archives and catalogue the collection.

If you feel you can help with any of this work we would be most grateful.

**Vale Dianna Mitchell.** We were saddened to hear the Dianna passed away on 28th September at the age of 91. Dianna is the sister of Colonel Savage and until a few years ago was a very active and supporting member of our society. Our sympathy is extended to her family.

**Information Sought:** Does anyone know of a Private Alan Lenz of the 2/10 Field Ambulance. He was thought to be a resident of Mortlake.

**Errors in last Nurungi:** The History Week project for next September, mentioned twice in the last Nurungi, is "Eat History" - not "East History". This gives it a whole new meaning. Put your thinking caps on and give us some suggestion of what we can do for it.

**Faces in the Street:** This display has finally come down but if you missed seeing it we still have all the stories here in a folder for anyone who'd like to read them. Also, we would like to go on collecting stories so if you know of someone who would like to contribute, or if you'd like to contribute your own story, we'd still like to hear from you.

**Garage Sale:** It was a great success and we raised \$804.35 towards our Museum. Our thanks to everyone who supported our recent Garage Sale - by setting up, helping on the days, clearing up after or donating to the cause.

### **For Your Diary**

Wed. 24th November - Executive Meeting

Wed. 8th December - Xmas Party

*This concludes our meetings for 2010*