

KURRAJONG ~ COMLEROY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Covering all of the Hawkesbury West of the River, from North Richmond to Bilpin, Grose Vale to Colo, including Wilberforce, Ebenezer, Glossodia, Tennyson, Freemans Reach and Bowen Mountain.

DIAMOND HILL - 40 Years On by Deborah Hallam

Tucked away in Kurrajong Hills is a small reserve known The application was advertised and 227 submissions as Diamond Hill. The derivation of the name is the stuff of legends as is the later history of the site to many long strength of local feeling led to the formation of the time residents of the Kurrajong area.

The original land grant here was to a William Bell bounded on the south by Thomas Asplin.Blue Gum creek flows through the northern part of the reserve. The pretty rounded hill of the reserve is the remnant of an ancient volcano, a plug of breccia and basalt and it is here it is said Bill Bell claimed to have found a diamond.

Wealth from a different source was sought by others eyeing off our Diamond Hill. Basalt! Road Base! The Sydney Market! So began the "Battle for Diamond Hill" when June, 1976 Mosaic Tile and Pottery Pty Ltd lodged a Development Application for a quarry on the site.

Hill as in 1968 Farley and Lewis had an application refused by Colo Shire Council and the State Planning Authority. Likewise the application by Mosaic was refused both by Council and the Local Government Appeals Tribunal, the senior authority at the time. Interestingly three other companies had also considered studied the proposal and carefully prepared. By contrast the site and rejected it as unviable.

Not to be deterred in November 1977 Kurrajong Aggregates, major shareholder of Mosaic Tile and Pottery, lodged a Development Application to quarry Diamond Hill for basalt. This time the application was to become a showcase for the new Land and

Environment Court Act. For the first time affected residents would have input to the planning decisions.

were received objecting to the development. The Kurrajong Hills Committee to oppose the quarry. The main battle was joined when a procession of horse riders, horse drawn vehicles and marching residents descended on Parliament house in December, 1978 to deliver a petition to the Premier, Mr Neville Wran. The war cry "DON'T MINE KURRAJONG" began to resound.

The formal case began with a round table discussion at Grose Vale involving representatives of the applicants and a large number of local residents and friends. In all 190 people attended at least one of the round table conferences.

The formal Court hearings were held during December in This however had not been the first attempt to mine the Sydney and attended by many residents. It rapidly became evident that the Diamond Hill committee were better prepared with their technical arguments than the developer. The committee made use of many volunteer and paid experts and residents who had extensively the developer relied on unproven assumptions as to the size and quality of the deposit. In addition, very little consideration had been given to factors such as the suitability of the access roads, the effect of noise, traffic and dust on residents and appropriate restoration of the site. Diamond Hill story continued on page 3

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GENERAL MEETING - Monday 27th May 2019		



The dark volcanic mound of Diamond Hill can be seen in the background of this photo, taken from Mountain View Close in 1978 by Lenore Walker. Image: 144212

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President's Corner from David Griffiths

society activities. The weather was nothing short of from out of the area participate this time, which is great fabulous on both days.

Saturday saw the inaugural Richmond Heritage Day. K-CHS had a display in the Bank Bazaar building with seven other historical groups. Most of the buildings in West Market Street and the old Post Office were open Thanks to the many members who assisted on both for inspection and the event was well attended. We found most of the visitors were particularly engaged June and August. See details later in this edition. in the history and what we had to show them. There is already talk of it becoming a regular event.

hand crafted pin-board stand and matching board, which he has donated to the society.

KURRAJONG – COMLEROY HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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On Sunday we conducted our 2019 Pansy Line Tour Well just recovering from a very busy weekend of with 100 people booked. We had a lot more people to see. One passenger runs a Facebook page with a rail history theme which he said has over 6000 people following it. He intends to do a spread on the tour, so who knows, we could be inundated with interest?

days. We are pleased to announce two other tours for

Don't forget our May General Meeting to be held at 2pm Monday 27th May, at The Hangar in Kingsford Smith Our thanks to Arthur Cooper for providing us with a Village, North Richmond. Our Annual Mid-Winter Dinner will be held at Loxley on Bellbird Hill this year, on Monday 22nd July 2019. Members & friends welcome.



Image courtesy: Liz Keenan

WELCOME to NEW MEMBERS

The Society would like to welcome new member

Shawna Henderson

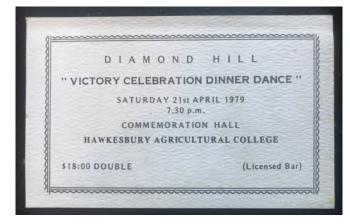
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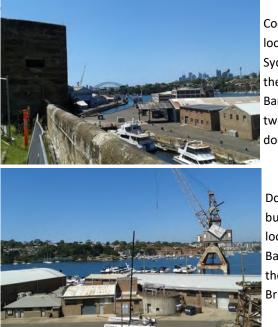
Jennifer & David Griffiths and Pat O'Toole represented K-CHS at the Back to St Bartholomew's Day, at Prospect - 6th April 2019

Diamond Hill by Deborah Hallam (cont. from cover page)

In rejecting the application the Court ruled in such a way as to prevent further attempts to mine Diamond Hill.



A K-CHS Group VISIT COCKATOO ISLAND Monday 4th March 2019



Cockatoo Island looking East to Sydney from the soldiers Barracks, over two of the docks.



European habitation on Cockatoo Island dates back to the early settlement of Sydney, but the island's first visitors were the Eora people, the Indigenous people of Sydney's coastal region. Known as Wa-rea-mah, the island would have been a great base for them to fish from, using their bark canoes made from the red gum forests that once covered the island hill. During early settlement the red gum trees were known to have been frequented by sulphurcrested cockatoos. Although there is no evidence, the island was thought to have been a sacred birthing place for aboriginal women.

In 1839 the Governor of the colony of New South Wales, Sir George Gipps, chose Cockatoo Island as the site of a new penal establishment to alleviate overcrowding on Norfolk Island. Initially, prisoners were employed constructing barracks, a guard house and official residences.

The total land area of 72 ha was subject to large lot subdivision with the actual guarry site to be retained as reserve under the control of Colo Shire, now Hawkesbury City Council.

Residents celebrated the victory with a Dinner and Ball at Hawkesbury Agricultural College, now Western Sydney University.

For many the best outcome of the "Battle for Diamond Hill" was the development of a sense of community in an area that was undergoing rapid change and should you venture to the Diamond Hill Reserve and pick up a piece of the famed basalt you will notice it glistens in the sunlight, an attribute that some claim is the real reason for the name Diamond Hill.

Rock-cut silos for storing the colony's grain supply were also created by the convicts. By 1842, approx.140 tonnes of grain were stored in the islands 17 rock-cut silos. Later, quarrying on the island provided stone for construction projects around Sydney, including the seawall at Circular Quay.

The bushranger Captain Thunderbolt is purported to have escaped in 1863, his wife having swum across with tools, facilitating his escape to the New England region of NSW.

During the years 1850-1870, the Fitzroy Dry Dock and a workshop were built by prisoners to service the Royal Navy and other ships. In 1870 prisoners were relocated to Darlinghurst Gaol and the island used as a Reformatory and Industrial School for Girls. The ship, Vernon, was anchored nearby to train wayward and orphaned boys.

Between the years 1880 and 1900, shipbuilding and repair activities expanded steadily and the Sutherland Dock was completed, with the island reverting back to a gaol from 1888 to 1908 due to overcrowding elsewhere.

During the years 1900 to 1930, Cockatoo Island became the Commonwealth Naval Dockyard and in 1913 Australia built its first steel warship on the island. From 1930 to 1945 the island is now the major shipbuilding and dockyard facility for the South West Pacific during WWII, following the fall of Singapore.

From 1945 to 1965 additional buildings were constructed for shipbuilding and repair. The refit of T-Class submarines occurs and the Navy destroyers, HMAS Voyager and HMAS Vampire, were built. From 1965 to 1992 the island's work included service and refit of Oberon Class submarines and the construction of HMAS Success. The dockyard closed in 1992 and the machinery was sold off, and about 40 buildings and several wharves demolished.

There is still much to see of historic interest on the island, as the images taken during our K-CHS visit show. (More Images page 6)

Janice Green's Memories of "The Islands": 1941-1954

General Meeting Presentation by Jennifer Griffiths - March 2019

In September, 2018 I happened to meet Janice Green and her husband Rev. Barry Green in our street. They had come to revisit the location of the house and property owned by Janice's Grandfather, George Sydney Rayner, where she had lived from 1941 to 1954. Janice subsequently gave me a wealth of information about her life at the property known as *The Islands*. The following is a brief summary.

The Islands was originally 2,560 acres in Kurrajong North (Kurrajong Hills) belonging to William Hampton Dutton (1805-1849) from about 1841. Dutton, who arrived in Sydney in 1826, was a well-connected expert in sheep husbandry and the development of fine wool. He acquired a number of properties with his main business ventures near Yass, Port Phillip and Mount Barker in SA. He died almost penniless in Melbourne.

I haven't traced the subsequent ownership of this property but it remained intact until one hundred years later when, in 1941, it was purchased by George Sydney Rayner.

George's father, William Charles Rayner (1849-1896), a fitter and turner, arrived from England in 1878 and worked at a sawmill near Kempsey where his son George was born in 1881.

William became involved with the installation of steam boilers for operating various bits of equipment, particularly in sawmills, and the family moved around NSW. In 1896 Charles built a sawmill in Wyndham, west of Merimbula on the south coast, and was tragically killed when a boiler exploded. George was injured but continued the sawmilling business.

In 1903 George married a Wyndham girl, Ethel Robinson. They had eleven children.

After working at various mills in the area, George and Ethel moved to Granville in about 1939 where he opened a sawmill and then in 1941, at the age of 60, he purchased *The Islands* and established his mill.

This was a family affair. Also living on the property and working the mill were his brother Charles Rayner and wife Maude (the cousin of George's wife Ethel) and his cousin Alfred Rayner who was married to Ethel's sister, Adelaide.

George's third child, Elizabeth married Edward Cootes in 1929. They also came to the property and lived in the *Big House* with their three children, Ethel, Janice and Albert. George's youngest child Rodney Rayner also lived with them.

There were three houses on the property: the *Big House* at the top on what is now 46 Mountain View Close and two smaller houses down the slope to the west. The mill was further down on Little Islands Creek.

Their neighbours were Blanche and Minnie Pittman, who lived on their grandfather, John Pitman's, property.

Janice's memories are of humble homes full of love and hospitality. Charles and Alf were great gardeners and fresh vegetables were plentiful. They had a small orange orchard, as well as chickens and a small herd of cows. The family was self-sufficient.

Ethel was a great entertainer. Relatives and friends from Sydney were frequent visitors, enjoying Ethel's cooking, bushwalks and farm activities. Many games of tennis were also played on the tennis court next to the *Big House*.

The family attended St. Stephen's Church of England, Kurrajong but when there was a 5th Sunday in the month, the Rev Len Daniels would hold a service at 3.30pm in the living room of the *Big House* for the family and the locals of Hermitage Road. Anyone visiting was also obliged to attend.

Continued page 5



411 Bells Line of Road, Kurmond, NSW, 2757

The sawmill, beside Little Islands Creek, was powered by steam and fuelled by timber off-cuts. The logs for milling were brought down from the mountainside by bullocks on rough treacherous roads to the 40-acre paddock on *Middle Island*. Young men, such as Jack and Jim Buckett, Teddy Ness and some from the Davis family, learned or honed sawmilling skills at Rayner's Mill. Trucks took the timber to Parramatta or Sydney.

Two major events were the 1943 flood and the 1944 bushfire.

Janice's younger brother, Albert, was born during the 1943 flood. Elizabeth was able to get to the private hospital at Richmond as water lapped the bridge. Her husband and sister were the last ones to get back across before the bridge was closed. It was several days before the family could reunite after the baby's birth. (Later, after the 1955-56 flood, Dr Bain instigated the building of a Maternity Hospital in Kurrajong. Opened in 1958, it is now the Kurrajong Nursing Home.)

Janice vividly recalls the devastating 1944 bushfire. The Rayners houses were saved by the efforts of the family but the mill was destroyed. The Pittman's old slab house was also destroyed. Blanche sustained severe burns when she tried to retrieve some gold coins. Rodney Rayner managed to get her to Windsor Hospital where she died.

After the fire George restarted the mill. He purchased the Pittman's property from Minnie Pittman, which gave the family easier access to the *Big House* from the end of Hermitage Road.

Janice attended Kurrajong North school. She rode a pony to school, along the rough Hermitage Road and then up Bells Line of Road. Dorrie and Frank Doyle lived opposite the school and allowed "Billy" to graze in a paddock during the day.

Janice went on to the Richmond Rural District School and was in the first Leaving Certificate class of 1952. Before that students had to go to Parramatta High to complete 4^{th} and 5^{th} Years.



George Rayner outside the Kurrajong North General Store and Post Office, on the corner of Hermitage and Bells Line of Roads, with grandson Albert Cootes and college friends of his granddaughter, Janice Cootes. c. 1950. Image: 181807

George closed the mill in 1950. Janice's parents Elizabeth and Edward Cootes went to Kurrajong

Heights where Edward worked at the Buckett Brothers and Ness sawmill until 1970. Other members of the family moved to mills at Nimmitabel and Adaminaby. George and Ethel stayed at *The Islands* until purchasing a dairy farm at Wilberforce in 1955. In 1960 they moved to Merimbula where they celebrated their 60th Wedding anniversary. George died in 1968 and Ethel in 1976. They are both buried in Pambula Cemetery.

I thank Janice for sharing her memories and providing me with an insight into the lives of those who lived on the block of land that I now live on. *Jenny Griffiths*



George Rayner's grandchildren, Janice and Albert Cootes with a young third cousin, Maxine Rayner, stand outside the *Big House* at Rayner's Sawmill. C. 1946

Image: 181805 K-CHS Image Archives www.kurrajonghistory.org.au





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Ethel Foster (1870 – 1955)

The Royal Australian Historical Society would not be where it is today without the remarkable contributions of one of its founding female members, Josephine Ethel Foster. Born in Paddington in 1870, Ethel – as she preferred to be known – dedicated her life to the preservation, promotion, and appreciation of Australian history. Ethel shared this keen interest with her husband, Theodore Arthur George Foster, whom she married in 1896. Together in 1901 they helped establish the then Australian Historical Society, now the RAHS.

The turn of the century was a time when many of Sydney's older landmarks were being replaced, urging historically minded Australians like Ethel and her husband to capture the images and memories of early Sydney before they vanished completely.

Even before founding the Society, the Fosters were active participants in the preservation of Sydney's historic landmarks. From 1900 they devoted their weekends to photographing, sketching, and recording the inscriptions of over 700 monuments in the Sandhills Cemetery before their removal for the construction of Sydney's Central Railway Station.

Today these photographs are collected in five volumes in the Mitchell Library and are an invaluable resource to historians researching the subject. Ethel also photographed a number of iconic Sydney buildings before their demolition, donating these glass lantern slides to the RAHS collection, as windows into the city's past.

As an active member of the Historical Society, Ethel was elected its first female Councillor on 21 February 1912. She served in this role on three separate occasions, from 1912–16, 1919–21, and 1923–39, moving into the Vice-President position from 1940-1943.

As the first woman awarded the Society Fellowship in 1924, Ethel later founded the RAHS Women's Auxiliary in 1927, aiming to involve "every lady member of the Society" as well as to raise funds for the purchase of a building. She was president of the Auxiliary for the rest of her life, and oversaw the completion of its main goal with the purchase of a three-storey wool store near Circular Quay in 1940, which was refurbished and opened as History House in 1941. The lounge room in the building was named the Foster Room in her honour. During her lifetime, Ethel saw the Society's membership grow from less than 20 members at its establishment, to over 1000 by 1955. In her 55 years as a member, she claimed to never have missed an AGM.

Ethel left the RAHS a large, generous, and invaluable bequest: a significant financial donation and most importantly, her collection of over 250 books, 30 volumes of press clippings, and 381 glass slides for the RAHS Library. Today, the Fosters are commemorated by the annual Foster Prize awarded to the top Australian history student in the NSW Higher School Certificate.

Ethel Foster was remembered in her obituary as an intelligent, generous, and hard-working woman who accomplished much for historical preservation and women's involvement in the first half of the twentieth century. Note: extract, with the original article written by Elizabeth Heffernan, RAHS Volunteer. *To celebrate Women's History Month, the Royal Australian Historical Society highlighted Australian women that have contributed to our history in various and meaningful ways. You can browse the women featured on the RAHS website <u>www.rahs.org.au</u> new webpage, <u>Women's History Month</u>. For full article and references, please visit the website.*



K-CHS Group inside the walls of the original soldiers guard house and Barracks on Cockatoo

Exploring one of two tunnel systems excavated through the islands sandstone



Visiting the prison cells. Convict built in the early 1800s, hewn from the islands sandstone

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THE ARCHIVES

Yarramundi Bridge - crossing the Nepean-Hawkesbury from Agnes Banks to Yarramundi at a popular picnic spot. Prone to flooding the old timber bridge was replaced with a slightly higher level concrete bridge in 2004. Sand mining had been undertaken at this site in earlier years. **Image 064241** from K-CHS Image Archives where this and many other images of The Kurrajong region, can be viewed at:

www.kurrajonghistory.org.au

YARRAMUNDI BRIDGE – AGNES BANKS

"The Hawkesbury is a peculiar river as far as names are concerned. If you trace its main stream, you find that just south of Richmond it becomes the Nepean...continuing on until Warragamba Dam when it becomes the Warragamba River; this rises in the Wollondilly.

The reason for the change from Hawkesbury to Nepean lies in the piecemeal way it was discovered. Governor Phillip first discovered and named it when, on 12th June 1789, he was rowed about thirty kilometres upstream. Returning on the 28th June, 1789, he followed the river to a short way beyond a junction flowing from the west, which he named after the Lieutenant Governor, Francis Grose. He then climbed a hill nearby and nostalgically called it *Richmond Hill*.

On the 26th June Captain Watkin Tench and another party also set off from Rose Hill (Parramatta), towards the west, travelling overland. The next day they came on a river "nearly as broad as the Thames at Putney". When Tench reported this news to Governor Phillip, the latter called the river the Nepean, after his friend Evan Nepean.

It was not until May 1791 that Tench and a party discovered that the two rivers were one and the same. The wooden bridge below at Agnes Banks is where this mystical union takes place. (*Pencil Sketch below by Cedric Emanuel*)



From here to Broken Bay is about 160 kilometres, a spectacular waterway where great gorges alternate with rich river flats.

The first settlers soon realised that the Hawkesbury/Nepean system was prone to disastrous floods. Their first serious flood was in 1803, and wiped out most of the food resources of the colony. As a result, in 1810 Governor Macquarie established a number of townships, such as Windsor and Richmond, on high ground. The first settlement on the banks of the river by what is now Windsor was established in 1794, when Lieutenant Governor Grose allowed twenty-two settlers to farm there. (Now known as Pitt Town Bottoms).

Some of the most notable early architecture of NSW is at Richmond and Windsor and in the old houses of the district. There is a beautiful reserve between Windsor and South Creek". (Now known as Governor Phillip Reserve).

The pencil sketch of Yarramundi Bridge is from *Waterways* of *Sydney* by Cedric Emanuel – The accompanying text is by Geoffrey Dutton.

Cedric Emanuel is well known for his pencil sketch documentation of much of old Sydney and the coastal regions of NSW. Between 1971 & 1983 he was editor of more than 40 publications on Australiana.



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Dates for Your DIARY

K-CHS GENERAL MEETING Monday 27th May 2019 2pm-4pm



Venue: The Hangar Kingsford Smith Village via Grose Vale Road North Richmond

> Guest Speaker: Keith Painter of Mountain Mist Books

"Padley of the Pedestal" The story of James Padley

Keith has recently completed writing the biography of a man who was the driving force behind the Lithgow Progress Association and the chief instigator of the tourism development at Hassans Walls in the early 1900s. His life story features Castlemaine (Victoria), Windsor, Lithgow and Parkes in New South Wales.

Keith will highlight James Padley's 10 years in the Hawkesbury and his connection with Kurrajong Heights during his talk. He will also have other interesting Mountain Mist publications available, following the meeting, including: *The 1920 Mt Victoria Chert Bubble, The Hassans Wall Story* and *Padley of the Pedestal,* books for sale by cash, EFTPOS, Credit Card or PayPal.

All welcome - Afternoon Tea provided

Note: speed limit in the village is 10km/h

Diary in Tuesday 13 August 2019 for a visit to

Bella Vista Farm Estate & The Hills District Museum

Full details and booking arrangements will be in the July/August Millstone Newsletter and on the K-CHS website



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KURRAJONG VILLAGE

For BOOKINGS phone 02 4573 0988



Tour of BELMONT HOUSE Sunday 23rd June 2019 St John of God Hospital North Richmond

There are two tour ticket types available, **\$20 for the tour** only at 2pm, or **\$35 which includes lunch from 12:30pm** then the tour at 2pm. Bookings essential via K-CHS website: www.kurrajonghistory.org.au You can pay by EFTPOS, Credit Card, PayPal or send cheque to: K-CHS Treasurer PO Box 175 KURMOND NSW 2757

Enquiries contact: Suzanne Smith Ph: 4567 7410 or Email: viewfromheights@bigpond.com

K-CHS ANNUAL MID-WINTER DINNER Monday 22nd July 2019 - 6pm

Venue: LOXLEY on Bellbird Hill Guest Speaker: Dr Peter Spearritt - a History of Warragamba Dam

Bookings Essential via K-CHS Website: www.kurrajonghistory.org.au

Cost: \$50.00 Members \$55.00 Non Members You can pay by EFTPOS, Credit Card, PayPal or post cheque to K-CHS Treasurer PO Box 175 KURMOND NSW 2757

Members & Friends Welcome

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