

MARRICKVILLE HERITAGE SOCIETY INC.

CAMPERDOWN DULWICH HILL ENMORE
NEWTOWN PETERSHAM STANMORE

LEWISHAM MARRICKVILLE ST PETERS
SYDENHAM & TEMPE



Our next meeting – 'in person' at last!

In March 2020 we cancelled all 'in person' events and remained committed to 'safety first' through COVID lockdowns. So we are relieved and happy to invite you to our first gathering as we cautiously emerge and look forward to the future.

Lewisham Walking Tour with Mark Matheson Saturday 26 March 10.00 for 10.30 am start

Meet: Taverners Hill Light Rail stop overhead bridge (south side) at Parramatta Road where it crosses Hawthorne Canal

Cost: \$5. Pay on the day

Book: Elda 0417 343 855 elda.ribeiro@hotmail.com

This walk takes about 2 hours, and concludes at a point halfway between the Taverners Hill Light Rail stop and Lewisham Railway Station. Be sure to wear comfortable shoes, bring your hat and water – and an umbrella!

Mark Matheson is the author of *Victorian Villas of Marrickville/Newtown* (Marrickville Council Library Services, 1996). Despite the praise that publication received, and its ongoing appeal, Mark tells us that 'it pretty much relied on secondhand information', and he has since spent the better part of a decade scouring municipal records and other primary documents to find out who made the decisions that shaped the local area. Mark leads many local walking tours showing how the topography of a place can so often dictate that decision-making.

In the late 1800s, Lewisham and surrounding suburbs were desirable areas, but circumstance and political expediency rendered them less so during much of the ensuing century. This loop walk visits the most historically-interesting locations and houses in Lewisham. There is newly uncovered information about the people here including the successful convicts, the carcass butchers, two women pioneers and eight parliamentarians; and the failed Benedictine seminary, the 1870s 'garden suburb' and the 1948 'green belt'.



The Boulevard in Lewisham was the first in Sydney
(illustration: *The Australian Town and Country Journal*, May 1884)

Our last meeting: Saturday 26 February 2022

How the Heritage Act and the Burra Charter couldn't save the Sydenham Coptic Church

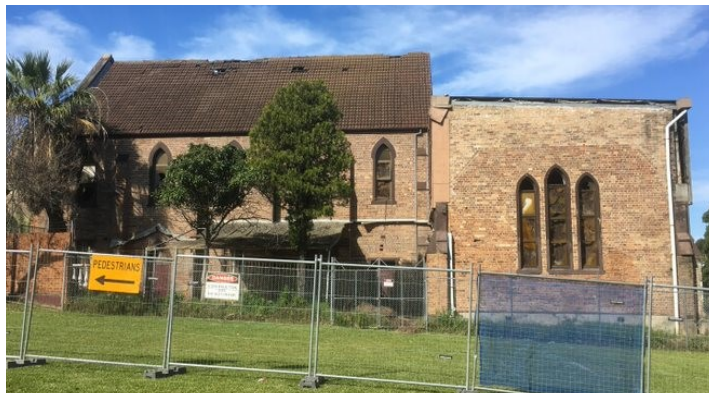
It was again Zoom with a View when **Scott MacArthur** presented his illustrated talk from his family home on Ngunnawal country (in Canberra). Scott introduced his talk by noting that members and website visitors were asking us how they could challenge DAs and developers with convincing rebuttals of sometimes dubious heritage assessments. The Society realises that while our members and the community are passionate about our heritage, they don't necessarily understand the nuts and bolts of the heritage system: this talk is the start of a project to make our community advocacy more accessible and effective.

While the scope and complexity of the statutory aspects relating to heritage in Australia, NSW and the Inner West cannot be adequately summarised in a few paragraphs, identifying and listing items of heritage significance are the first steps towards protecting and managing those places and objects that we as a community want to keep. Listing our special places on statutory heritage registers provides a legal framework for managing the approval of major changes so that heritage significance is retained and not diminished. In NSW, our local and state heritage is protected by the *Heritage Act 1977*, the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* and the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*. This suite of laws identifies, lists and protects local and state significant buildings, archaeology, environments and Aboriginal cultural values.

Underpinning this statutory system is the UNESCO supported Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter. Australia ICOMOS, the local affiliate of the International Council of Monuments and Sites, was established in 1976. ICOMOS is primarily concerned with the philosophy, terminology, methodology and techniques of cultural heritage conservation. As a response to rising community support for protection of local cultural heritage, Australia ICOMOS in 1979 adopted the Burra Charter to provide guidance for the conservation and management of places of Australian cultural significance (cultural heritage places). The Charter sets a standard of practice for those who provide advice, make decisions about, or undertake works to places of cultural significance, including owners, managers and custodians. The Burra Charter advocates a cautious approach to change: *do as much as necessary to care for the place and to make it useable, but otherwise change it as little as possible so that its cultural significance is retained* (creating the handy mnemonic **Do As Much As Necessary But As Little As Possible – DAMAN BALAP**). The Charter defines conservation terminologies and conservation best

practice that support and permeate heritage legislation and professional practice throughout Australia.

With all of this complicated legislation and good intentions, how could the Coptic Church in Sydenham not be saved? Members will be aware of the Society's concerted efforts over several years to save this church building from destruction at the hands of its owners Marrickville and later Inner West Council. The building was demolished in May 2017.



Sydenham's Coptic Church, 2017— demolition imminent

The foundation stone for the **Tempe Park Methodist Church** (in Railway Road, Sydenham) was laid in 1884 and by the 1920s this was a thriving church community serving Tempe and Sydenham. However, by the 1960s, the congregation had diminished, and in 1969 the church was purchased by the Coptic Church and reconsecrated as **St Mary and St Mina's Coptic Orthodox Church**. This was the first Coptic Church in Australia.

The Coptic Church thrived on the site for many years, with extensive extensions and alterations to the building in the 1980s. However, with the expansion of Sydney Airport in 1995, the building lay directly under the flight path of the new third runway, and the site was compulsorily acquired by the Australian government. At the same time, almost 200 Sydenham houses and shops were acquired and demolished, replacing a community with a 'green' (a park called Sydenham Green). The Coptic Church congregation moved to Bexley. In 2001 the government transferred ownership to the then Marrickville Council with the view to it being preserved and adaptively reused as a community or civic facility. After years of negotiations with church and community groups to find a new owner, operator or deep-pocketed benefactor, in 2011 Marrickville Council resolved to demolish the building. Years of futile community agitation, legal injunctions and heritage challenges to save the church followed.



Reminders of the church – March 2022 (photo: Scott MacArthur)

A final Interim Heritage Order was placed on the property in 2016, and an independent heritage assessment was commissioned by the NSW Heritage Division. Heritage consultant **Sue Rosen** prepared a **Heritage Significance Assessment** that concluded that the former Church achieved state significance for **two** heritage criteria: 'The former St Mary and St Mina Coptic Orthodox Church at Sydenham is of state significance due to its **social** significance (Criterion C) within the Coptic Orthodox community and their strong attachment to it as their first 'home' in Australia. It is also of state **historic** significance under Criterion A due to its capacity to demonstrate the course and pattern of development in Sydenham and as 'the first Copts' Parish in Australia and the first Coptic Church purchased outside Egypt'.

The independent Heritage Council of NSW, comprising experienced heritage professionals appointed by the government, considered the assessment and recommendation for State Heritage listing, and rejected it, on the grounds that the Church was only of **local social significance**, and that *the poor condition of the property and its adverse environment creates difficulties with the long term conservation of the current building*. The Church was demolished eight months later.

As a summary of the failures of the heritage system, **David Burdon** from the **National Trust (NSW)** wrote just prior to the demolition of the Church:

- This building was subject to two Interim Heritage Orders. The Heritage Council's rejection of State Heritage Register Listing was despite an independent report commissioned by the Heritage Division that argued the place met two criteria at State Level – Social and Historic.
- The local council was given the property at no cost, it was locally heritage listed, no money was spent on its maintenance and the Council's Administrator now argues it should be demolished because it is unsafe.
- A proposal has been put by the Coptic Orthodox Community to commit \$2.1 million towards making the church safe and commencing its restoration as a museum for the Copts and a Youth Centre. The National Trust also offered to run a tax-deductible restoration appeal. This has been rejected by the administrator of Inner West Council, an amalgamated, unelected body.
- In the words of (local federal MP) Anthony Albanese, 'If a church built in the 1880s, the first church purchased by the Coptic Orthodox Community outside of the Nile Valley is not heritage then what is?'
- This episode ticks all the wrong boxes –
 - 1) The two tier system of heritage listing, State and Local, where locally listed items don't have the full protection against demolition of State-listed items
 - 2) A council wanting to demolish its own heritage listed building which it has neglected and then argues economic hardship and that the building is unsafe
 - 3) The failure of the Heritage Council to deal properly with 'social significance', despite this

being the community's most highly regarded value for heritage

- 4) The demolition of a building highly valued by the Coptic Orthodox Community at a time when this community is under threat worldwide and its churches being destroyed
- 5) The admission by the Heritage Division that they are now powerless to stop the demolition.

Richard Blair & Scott MacArthur

Footnote: Scott's summary of the heritage system in NSW and the Burra Charter will accompany the email issue of this newsletter. For those without email, a copy of Scott's documents (c. 10 pages) can be mailed on request or collected at a future meeting.

Cataloguing project comes to an end

It's done. For more than five years volunteers from Marrickville Heritage Society have been assisting Community History Librarian, **Aleem Aleemullah**, to complete the cataloguing of the Marrickville Local History Collection. And after a flurry of extra hours during February 2022 the undertaking has been accomplished.

Initiated in 2016, the project involved **Richard Blair**, **Diane McCarthy**, **Monica Oppen** and **Benjamin Summers** in the early years and, for most of the time, **Mary Oakenfull**, **Vilma Bell**, **Megan Hicks** and **Paula Gard**. Usually working one afternoon a week the group mined their combined local knowledge as they described, photographed and documented over 1000 objects dating from the 1800s to 2022 – and that's not counting the historical photographs they catalogued as well.

This successful collaboration between the Society and Inner West Council was acknowledged when Council's Amy Large Volunteer Awards were presented in 2021. Even allowing for Covid interruptions, the project took much longer than any of the volunteers expected but, although it has been taxing, it has also been the basis of new knowledge gained and new friendships formed.

During that last busy month the final 193 items added to the database included a number of gifts – some of them strange, some of them beautiful – presented to the Mayor when Marrickville was forming Sister City relationships with other cities around the world, mostly during the 1980s. There were also many varnished and painted honour boards, notice boards and name boards from organisations and locations around the former Municipality of Marrickville. A collection of rolled-up maps included one from 1881 that was 2½ metres long and very difficult to photograph. Hand drafted on paper and linen, it showed the proposed route of the tramline from Newtown Station to Illawarra Road, Marrickville.

At an informal lunch to celebrate the end of the project, volunteers wished Aleem well with his

next task – the cataloguing of the much smaller local history collection at Ashfield Library.



A name board from the Marrickville Boys' Club incorporates the former emblem of the Municipality of Marrickville but with a creative interpretation of Captain Cook's likeness.
(photo: Megan Hicks)

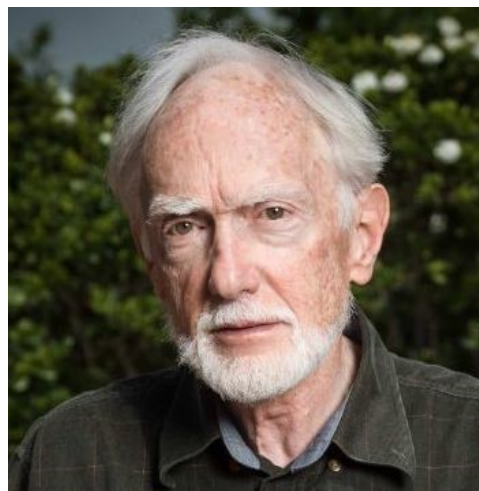
Megan Hicks

Vale Nigel Butterley AM

Much has been written about **Nigel Henry Cockburn Butterley** following his death on 19 February 2022. He is acclaimed as one of a triumvirate of composers, with Peter Sculthorpe and Richard Meale (see obituary MHS newsletter February 2010), who helped to shape a contemporary identity for Australian music.

Nigel Butterley and **Tom Kennedy** lived in Stanmore and joined the Society in 1986 and for a few years Nigel was one of **Richard Blair's** team of newsletter 'runners'. He addressed a meeting of the Society in 1989, posing the question 'whether we should have distinctive Australian music, as we have distinctive Australian literature (eg Henry Lawson) and Australian painting, or should we continue to follow European musical traditions'. **Geoff Ostling's** report of that meeting is in the September 1989 newsletter on our website.

Nigel Butterley, among his many accomplishments, produced 'dozens of works for everything from children's recorder groups to large scale symphonic structures' (Vincent Plush, *Limelight Magazine*, 21 February 2022). We offer our condolences to Tom and all who feel Nigel's loss.



Nigel Butterley (photo: Josh Raymond, *Limelight Magazine*)

Lorraine Beach

Well, what a welcome to the new year. Here's hoping you remained dry(ish). We have just posted a story about the Marrickville floods. But which ones? We have had a few in the last 160 years. We look at why Marrickville floods, and particularly the one that really had an impact. No, it wasn't the one in 2012.

We started the year with a quick introduction to the protracted birth of the Marrickville Town Hall on Marrickville Road. The town hall is celebrating its centenary this year and we hope to publish a few more stories about its interesting life.

Rod Aanensen

Our April meeting

Will be a talk – venue and details to be confirmed.



Summer Trivia Answer

The easy part of this answer is 'the where'. This cast iron box is in Garners Avenue near the corner of Marrickville Road, Marrickville, opposite the Royal Exchange Hotel. Only one correct response was received – from our treasurer **Diane McCarthy**, who grew up in Marrickville. Well done, Diane and thanks to **Ian Phillips** who submitted these photos and the question.

Ian's assumption was that it was associated with the tram network, given trams ran along Marrickville Road until 1957. So he approached the Sydney Tramway Museum, who initially advised they had several such boxes around the museum. In response he was told 'they would have contained the equipment they used to detect return current faults'. A further enquiry by Ian revealed 'the locker is an electrical utility box and *not* tram-related'.

So, its use remains a mystery. Perhaps it's telephonically-related or bus-related. A clue may lie in the round insignia or trademark embossed on each door (photo above). Let Richard or Ian (0420 321 967) know if you have any pointers on this. And are there any other such metal boxes in the Inner West and, if so, where?

Richard Blair

We need storage space

Can anyone assist with a small storage area? MHS archives are stored in boxes in the roof of committee member Iain Carolin's house and we need to move them. Requirements: secure, dry and cheap! If you can assist, please contact anyone in the box to the right or the Society's email immediately below.

Autumn Trivia Question

Where, in our area, was this and when did it cease to be with us as depicted? Contact Richard 0413 335 897 or MHS email (in black band below).



A request from our 'trivia master'

Richard invites suggestions for trivia questions – send to marrickvilleheritagesociety@outlook.com His guidelines: 'It ought to be *not* too obvious (like, please, not a photo of the Winged Victory) nor too obscure. It doesn't have to be a pictorial question'.

Local men in the Boer War

We've been contacted by **Robin Droogleever** who has completed a regimental history of the 1st Regiment of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, including 58 men from our area (Marrickville, Stanmore, Dulwich Hill, St Peters and Petersham) who went to the Boer War. His book has 150 pages of biographies of most, if not all, of the men, and 185 pages of photographs. Costs and details are available from the author Robin Droogleever at jerwfd@optusnet.com.au or phone 0455 346 777.

Feedback on Ferncourt

News of **Rebecca Jones's** upcoming book prompted this from member **Ros Torrent**: 'Whenever I come across Ferncourt School I always have a silent chortle, remembering one day in the 1970s-80s, I was there in the capacity of a casual teacher. After lunch the students gathered for a lineup in the playground. The teacher in charge was waiting for silence when I heard her announce: "Would the woods of Dunsinane kindly get a move on!" (Shakespeare's *Macbeth*). Well, that caught my attention. Upon looking around I spotted a trail of students at the back of the area, each dragging a sizable tree branch, thus causing a significant rustle.'

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