

MARRICKVILLE HERITAGE SOCIETY INC.



CAMPERDOWN DULWICH HILL ENMORE
NEWTOWN PETERSHAM STANMORE

LEWISHAM MARRICKVILLE
ST PETERS SYDENHAM & TEMPE

Our March Meeting

Thursday 27 March

Garden Island guided tour

Meet: 9.45 am at the security gate at the end of Cowper Wharf Road, Woolloomooloo

Cost: NHTA fee is \$30 per person (pay on day)

Booking essential: Richard 0413 335 897 or email marrickvilleheritagesociety@outlook.com

Numbers limited to 30

Please advise if you need to cancel

Getting there: 311 bus from Central (stand C, Eddy Ave); ferry from Circular Quay; 10-15 minutes walk from Kings Cross station; Domain parking station.

In 1788 the Captain of HMS *Sirius* ordered his men to plant onions and corn on an island to feed his crew. The men planted the garden and carved their initials and the year into nearby rocks. Today Garden Island is 5 times the original size and has been joined to the mainland by a dry dock, the second biggest engineering feat in Australia.

It was attacked by Japanese mini submarines in 1942 and has historic buildings dating to the late 1800s, historic trees and probably the earliest tennis courts in Australia. It is a working naval base and is full of interesting relics.



Garden Island (Source: Dictionary of Sydney)

The group will be shown a 15-minute video of early Garden Island prior to the walking tour with a guide from the Naval Historical Society of Australia (NHTA). Tour to end around 12:30 pm.

This is a rare opportunity to see this important historical and military site. Indeed, it may be the only chance for a tour this year.

Our Last Meeting: Saturday 22 February An Uncommon Hangman: The life and deaths of Robert 'Nosey Bob' Howard – talk by Rachel Franks

MHS members enjoyed being back in The Pavilion at Marrickville Library for the first meeting for 2025. They enjoyed a fascinating presentation by historian **Dr Rachel Franks** about the life of Robert 'Nosey Bob' Howard, the longest serving hangman in the history of New South Wales. Dr Franks published her authoritative biography of Howard in 2022, *An Uncommon Hangman: The Life and Deaths of Robert 'Nosey Bob' Howard* (New South Publishing).

Capital punishment was a part of the criminal justice system in NSW from the arrival of the First Fleet – the first hanging in the colony occurred just one month after settlement on 27 February 1788 – until 1955 when capital punishment was abolished for murder, and for all other crimes in 1985. In the early years of the colony hangings were carried out by convicts, until the position of hangman was established by the colonial government.

Robert Rice Howard was born in Marham, Norfolk, in 1832 and married Jane Townsend in 1858. In 1866 the family emigrated initially to Brisbane, but by about 1868 the Howards had settled in Sydney. Howard worked as a cabdriver and it seems was known for his courtesy and discretion. It was even said that he was the preferred cabdriver for Government House, as he could be relied upon for his circumspection in driving distinguished guests of the vice-regal residence.

He then worked as a labourer. His nickname 'Nosey Bob' was conferred on him, not because he was a busybody who was too concerned about other people's lives, but because he had lost his nose. There was much speculation about how this had occurred, but Dr Franks believes the most plausible explanation is that he had contracted syphilis.

He entered government service in 1876 as assistant executioner, becoming senior executioner in 1877.

Howard carried out his last hanging in 1903, before retiring the following year. His retirement was only brief, as he died at Bondi in 1906.

He was a familiar figure in Sydney, occasionally appearing in the newspapers: in the first issue of *The Bulletin* on 31 January 1880, a four-page article was published about him. Despite this notoriety his occupation meant that he was often not considered to be part of what may be called 'polite society'.

His position as hangman at Darlinghurst Gaol was a full-time occupation and Howard went to work each day. When not conducting hangings he was engaged in maintenance of the gaol's grounds, looking after the animals, in addition to working with the convicts, such as teaching them how to grow vegetables and so on. At one point in his career his annual salary was £156. During his working life he conducted 62 executions, of which about 50% occurred at Darlinghurst Gaol and the remainder in regional NSW.

Howard was obviously concerned about the welfare of his children, and he bought three blocks of land at Bondi and other property at Windsor. Howard lived at Bondi and one of the most fascinating images of the presentation was a photo of his cottage.

Dr Franks's account of the realities of the criminal justice system and of capital punishment was compelling and evocative.

But for members of the MHS the other major part of her presentation was revelatory. Dr Franks outlined in considerable detail the challenges of the research project and the difficulties faced in locating sources, both in the official archives and elsewhere. The official sources for Howard's life were scarce. For example, there was no Personal File for Howard in the NSW archives and very few other documents. This absence may, in part, reflect his somewhat ambiguous status as a hangman, but may also be the result of irregular record keeping and inadequate preservation of official documents prior to the passage of the NSW Archives Act in 1960.

The strategy that Dr Franks adopted to reconstruct Howard's life was through the official files of those he executed; hence the word 'deaths' in the book's title. These files, for example, included the file for Louisa Collins who was found guilty of murder by arsenic poison.

Official records from other jurisdictions, such as Victoria and Queensland, provided valuable documentation about the technical processes of hanging, where such documents were not preserved in the NSW official records.

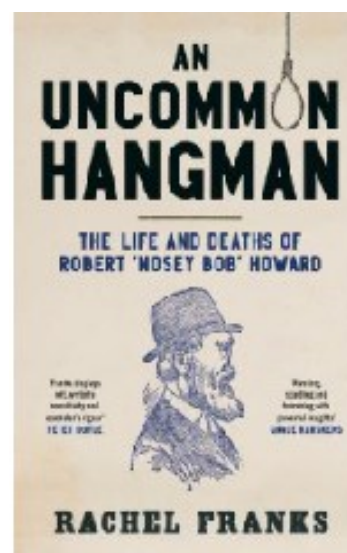


Dr Rachel Franks and MHS president Scott MacArthur
(Photo: Richard Blair)

As mentioned earlier, given Howard's notoriety he occasionally appeared in the press, such as in the first issue published (31 January 1880) of *The Bulletin* in 1880. To locate these articles the National Library's online research portal Trove was essential and invaluable in allowing access to important newspaper resources. Indeed, it is common for Australian historians, when discussing their research, to speak of pre-Trove and post-Trove eras.

The presentation ended with a lively and informative question and answer session. We thank Dr Franks for her illuminating presentation in bringing to life this fascinating figure from our past.

Greig Tillotson



Our April Meeting
Saturday 26 April 10.15 for 10.30 am
The Ladies' Velocipede Races of 1869: an
early challenge to male supremacy in colonial
Australia – a talk by Marc Rerceretnam
The Pavilion, Marrickville Library
Cnr Marrickville & Livingstone Roads



THE LADIES' VELOCIPEDE RACE
THE WINNER

(And we had made up our minds, like many others, to see a loveable and sylph-like creature bounding gracefully along with the swiftness of an arrow on the elegant and fawn-like bi-cycle. Judge of our feelings, when -- but, no; we cannot go on ---.)

Source: *Melbourne Punch*, 2 September 1869, p 8)

Current research suggests that cycling began growing in popularity in Australia with sections of the female population from around 1890. However, this study uncovers a series of formal women-only cycle racing competitions that took place between July and November 1869.

In the 1860s, it was highly unusual for women to partake in a large public, competitive sporting event. These women challenged an oppressive patriarchy by taking part in such unorthodox events. For wealthy, upper-class women, it was a defiant show of their own status, female identities and individualism.

This talk will also examine the hostility from pro-establishment voices to activity deviating from acceptable patriarchal norms. One woman racer, Maybanke Anderson (1845-1927), was one of the founders of the prominent Womanhood Suffrage League of New South Wales, two and a half decades later in 1891.

Marc Rerceretnam is a Sydney-based historian and research consultant. He has a PhD (Economic History) from Sydney University.

He specialises in a wide array of areas and has published extensively on the following topics: Singaporean community interaction with British colonial governments, the role of religion within colonial society, intermarriage in 19th century Singapore, the history of Christianity and religious conversion in Singapore and, lastly, the history of Australian sport.

He will publish a book on the 200-year history of cycling in Sydney titled *Sydney's Cycling Communities: Pioneers and Unsung Heroes of its Cycling Past 1830s-2020s* in May/June 2025.

Marc received a 2019 Research Fellowship, issued by the National Library Board, Singapore. He was also a recipient of a History Grant from the Inner West Council in 2018 and again in 2024.

Pix exhibition at the State Library

Pix magazine, Australia's first pictorial news weekly, ran between 1938 and 1972 and has been described as 'the magazine that changed everything'.

With its eye-catching lipstick-red logo, *Pix* delivered a new style of journalism, using photographs to tell daring stories of modern life. Always intended to shock, entertain and inform, *Pix* stayed popular with its readers for over 30 years.

An exhibition about *Pix* is currently at the State Library of New South Wales and will be on display until 30 August 2026.

It's free and is recommended.



A cover of *Pix*
 (24 February 1940)

Vale: Graeme Hamilton Napier (1947–2025)

Graeme Napier died on 1 February 2025 after a long battle with cancer. Graeme had been an auditor by profession and was the Society's Honorary Auditor for about 15 years until 2022. Diane McCarthy, in her capacity as MHS treasurer for a number of years, remembers Graeme as competent and reliable in his auditing of the Society's books, a gentle man full of wisdom and with a delightful sense of humour.

He joined the Society in 1998 and served as a committee member for four years between 2002 and 2006. This included one year as a vice president (2004-05). He regularly attended meetings and went on several coach trips with the Society. Graeme's wife Susan became a member in 2007.

Graeme was the Society's returning officer at several annual general meetings. His sterling service was rewarded in June 2023 when he was made a Life Member of Marrickville Heritage Society.



Graeme Napier with Alison and Susan
(Courtesy Napier family)

Born in Lithgow, Graeme grew up in Yule Street, Dulwich Hill, attending Dulwich Hill Primary School and Fort Street Boys' High. He belonged to 2nd Dulwich Hill Cubs and Scouts. After he married, Graeme and Susan lived in Dulwich Hill for six years and 16 years at Picnic Point before returning to their roots in the inner city: firstly in Petersham, then Dulwich Hill, then Ashfield.

Graeme was a devoted family man. He was very much a quiet achiever, who avoided the limelight, but showed a friendly, good humoured and positive demeanour, even in adverse circumstances.

I knew Graeme for most of his life and always enjoyed his company. He had a strong interest in

the history of the area and strongly supported the Society's goals to preserve and protect our heritage as much as possible.

Our condolences go to Susan, James and Alison.

Richard Blair

Vale: Dr Barbara Le Maistre (1937-2025)

Dr Barbara Le Maistre (formerly Little) was an influential figure in the establishment of the Marrickville Heritage Society being its first President (1984–86). She played an important role in the naming and the shaping of the society. At the meeting which led to the creation of the Society, on 28 April 1984, chaired by Marrickville Town Planner Peter Arnett, Barbara raised the question: 'Can this Society be called a Heritage Society rather than a Historical Society and that Society cover the whole of the area (meeting minutes)'? Motions along these lines were then passed.

The name of the society linked it to ongoing heritage developments, the NSW *Heritage Act* of 1977 and the Marrickville Heritage Study, a joint initiative of the NSW Department of Planning and the Environment and Marrickville Council. Collection of material for this study commenced in June 1984 and was completed in December 1985. The Society became, as Barbara suggested, a municipal-wide organisation furthering the actions of local resident groups in Petersham, St Peters/Tempe and Stanmore. Barbara was an effective and professional leader of the new society. Meetings of the executive were held in her home in Cavendish Street, Stanmore.

Barbara died unexpectedly on 17 February, four days after turning 88 leaving one son, Julian. It was her wish that no funeral be held. Julian suggested that a memorial service was likely to be held in a few months.

Barbara was born in Melbourne on 13 February 1937. She moved with her family from Sydney's Paddington to Stanmore in 1979, spending more than half her life in that suburb. She and her then husband Geoffrey became active members of the Stanmore Society.

Barbara had broad interests. She earned a PhD at the University of Sydney in 1979 on the topic of 'Retail Trade and Distribution in Sydney 1880–1914'. She published an article on Alfred William Anderson, a prominent butcher and entrepreneur, in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.



Barbara Le Maistre
(From her Facebook page)

An involvement in the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service with the Aboriginal Land Council resulted in two books: *Using directories in local historical research* (1987), and *Nimula, Tingha, Bullawangen: Aboriginal people and their land* (1996).

Barbara also published three articles in *Heritage*, the journal of our Society, and edited *Heritage 5* (1989). She was part of a group that restored dilapidated sections of Rookwood Cemetery. Barbara taught economic history at the University of New South Wales. As well as being President for two years, Barbara was a Vice President in 1987-88.

Although she moved aside from the Society in the early 1990s, she kept contact with some of its important figures including Eve Sharpe (the initial senior vice-president and later patron) until she died in 1999. Barbara also had a long and enduring friendship with Chrys Meader, the first secretary of our Society. She was very supportive of Chrys in her final months and spoke at her funeral.

Dr Barbara Le Maistre was awarded a Special Achievement Award from Marrickville Council in April 2010 for her promotion of heritage and her role in the early years of the Marrickville Heritage Society. She played an important role in the creation of a viable society that continues to flourish 41 years later.

Richard Cashman

Ben Hudson is looking for any information on his great-great grandmother, **Lena Kelly (Blackley)**, who opened, built and started Reliance Book-binding in Marrickville during World War II. She was the first woman to get a business loan from the Commonwealth. I believe the factory was at 13 Sloane Street.

Email is <benjaminhudson@outlook.com.au>.

Before Fanny there was Sarah

Fanny Durack's story is an inspiring one as MHS members would be well aware. However, doing some research on Trove – on a completely unrelated topic – I came across the remarkable story of **Sarah Tighe**.

Sarah's story took place in 1881 at Gannon's Paddock, Fred Gannon's property in Tempe where the house he built, *Hurlingham*, still stands. The paddock was the scene of pigeon shooting, the original Bonnie Doon Golf course and hurling matches in later years.

Sarah was a 16-year-old servant girl who worked at Gannon's home. About 4 o'clock on a Monday afternoon in September 1881 she was standing on a hill overlooking the paddock when she noticed something struggling in the water. It was a little boy named Sergeant who had been playing in the paddock with another boy named Armstrong.

Sarah jumped over the fence, ran down to the waterhole, and plunged in without removing any of her clothing and succeeded in rescuing Sergeant. The waterhole was described as about 30 feet long, 12 feet wide with a depth of 5 feet in the middle.

The boy was sinking when she rescued him and was described as insensible for some time afterwards. She ran to Gannon's residence with the child in her arms and restoratives were successfully applied.

Sadly, the other little boy had also fallen into the water. Sarah was not aware of this as he had sunk to the bottom. His body was recovered some two hours later.

Sarah attributed her success to having learned to swim at Randwick. Her quickness and bravery saved the boy Sergeant. The writer concluded '... she certainly deserves great praise for her brave action.'

The story was reported in *The Armidale Express and New England General Advertiser* (9 September 1881 p 3).

In the NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages index there is an entry for Archer Armstrong who died in 1881.

The only notation is 'Died Cooks River' in place of the mother's name. No father's name is provided. While it seems likely that this is the child who drowned, we would need to have more details such as his age and cause of death.

Mary Barthelemy

The Three Sisters

Webmaster **Rod Aanensen** reports:

On International Women's Day, we take a look at the lives and extraordinary work of three sisters.

Annie, Kate and Belle Golding dedicated their lives to the belief that women should be able to participate fully in our society. Many of the things that they advocated for have come to pass, and others have not.

These three sisters lived over half their long lives in our area (Annandale) along with a short time in Warren Road, Marrickville.

The Society has made an application that the Golding sisters be honoured with a blue plaque and look forward to a successful nomination.

See: <marrickvilleheritage.org.au> for more details



Clockwise from top left:
*Annie, Kate
and Belle Golding*
(Source Wikipedia)

Build to Rent

Rent to Live Co., a property developer, has lodged an application with the New South Wales Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure to redevelop the old Marrickville Timberyards into a 2,400 square metre site with retail and commercial spaces, gardens, communal spaces and 1,188 rental apartments.



*An artist's impression of the proposed
Marrickville Timberyards development*
(Source: Instagram/neoscapeprojects)

If the Department approves the application, the development in Victoria Road, a short walk from Sydenham Station, will become the largest of its kind in Sydney.

This news has occasioned some debate in MHS circles but it appears development of the area has been in the planning stages for some time. A large multi-storey apartment block has already been built on the opposite side of the street next to Wicks Park.

The build-to-rent model means the developer owns and leases the units on an ongoing basis. The proposal has been lodged via the State Significant Development Application process – designed to fast-track developments when these types of units make up more than 60 per cent of the total project.

Mary Barthelemy

Facebook page

The MHS Facebook site has attracted several new postings.

Recent ones range from black and white and coloured photos of buildings, scenery and people from the Marrickville LGA district to St George Historical Society and Lydham Hall.

There is plenty to engage your interest.

Check it out at:

<www.facebook.com/groups/347191112093219>

Rod Aanensen



Danias Timberyard (Photo: courtesy of Google, 2022)

Summer Trivia Answer

The photo of this mansion appears on page 163 of Meader, Cashman and Carolan, *Marrickville: People and Places* (Hale & Iremonger, 1994). Details relating to the house are on pp 164-5.

Originally called **Woerden**, it was built in the early 1870s by **William H Paling** (1825-1895) who named it after his birthplace in the Netherlands.

Paling founded a prominent musical business house in Sydney which became a household name – musical instruments and sheet music were obtainable from Nicholson's or Paling's until well into the 20th century. He was a composer and among his compositions was his 'Sydney Railway Waltz' to commemorate the opening of the Sydney-Parramatta railway line in 1855.

Paling became an alderman with Petersham Municipal Council in 1876 and served until 1889. He was Mayor of Petersham in 1881-82. He donated a clock to the first Petersham Town Hall tower in 1886; this clock was incorporated in the new town hall in 1938 and was fitted to work electrically as a master clock. (Cashman & Meader, *Marrickville: from rural outpost to inner city*, Hale & Iremonger, 1990, p 189).



WH Paling (Image published in *The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser* 10 March 1888, p 522)

Other prominent people occupied the house on the corner of Cambridge and Merchant Streets, Stanmore (Francis Crago, flour miller owner, and the Rofe family: Alfred Rofe was an alderman and Mayor of Petersham, 1894-97), but in the 1950s it was bought by the chocolate-making Darrel Lea

family who renamed it Montague Gardens after a family member. It was later converted into a boarding house, but in 1978 the house and land were purchased by the state government and the following year it was – surprise, surprise – demolished.

The land was converted to a small park called Montague Gardens. The *Woerden* gates were stolen and not retrieved, so the current pillars facing Cambridge Street are not the original ones.



Long time local resident **Elda Ribeiro** recalls: 'exactly where the house sat within the park; also that it was a pinky/salmon sort of colour. I used to cut through the gardens on my way to and from school. It totally fascinated me as a kid and may well be the reason for my fascination with historic houses in general (apart from simply growing up in Stanmore). Montague Gardens has changed a lot since it was first established. The original garden beds are still there, but the stone benches that were left from the house are long gone as is the original waterfall fountain feature in the centre.'

Megan Hicks remembers 'Montague Gardens and the totally misguided park that replaced it, presumably designed by a "tyro" on Marrickville Council. The disproportionately grand fountain in the centre inevitably became a swimming pool for local kids and had to be fenced off for safety reasons. Eventually, the water was turned off and it became a giant rubbish receptacle instead.'

This question was inspired by **Ben Summers**, whose YouTube channel has been promoted in this newsletter.

Thanks for input from Stanmore locals Elda Ribeiro and Megan Hicks. No one came up with the correct answer, though some worthy educated guesses were made.

Richard Blair



Where in the broader Marrickville area is this and what is it?

Photo taken in the 1980s.

Email Richard c/- the Society at the foot of this page (or ring him on 0413 335 897).

Joining Marrickville Heritage Society

If you are enjoying this newsletter, benefit from and care about the character and heritage of our local area, but are not a member, why not consider joining? Take part in as much or as little as you wish; receive the newsletter directly and a *Heritage* journal whenever one is produced.

Readers are welcome to attend events (see event details). Contact us via the methods described in the newsletter. For a talk, you need just turn up at the event at the time and location set out.

To join, just download a membership form from our website, pay by direct debit or cash at a meeting.



Hover your phone camera over the QR code and tap on the information on the screen to be taken to the webpage for the application form.

To access the website use the QR code below.



Calendar of MHS Events

Thursday 27 March

Guided tour of Garden Island by the Naval Historical Society of Australia
Details on front page

Saturday 26 April

Marc Rerceretnam - The Ladies' Velocipede Races of 1869: an early challenge to male supremacy in colonial Australia
Details on page 3

Saturday 24 May

Sydney Park brickworks tour with Ron Ringer
Details in May-June newsletter

Saturday 28 June

Annual General Meeting

Saturday 26 July

To be decided

Saturday 23 August

The changeable symbols of Australia with Richard White

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