

Published by Granville Historical Society Inc.



The Granville Guardian

Patron Laurie Ferguson M.P. B.Ec.(Syd) M.A.(Syd)

Volume 22 Issue 1

February 2015

The next general meeting of the Granville Historical Society will be held at 2.00 pm on Saturday 28th February 2015
At our Research Centre
62 Railway Parade Granville

Guest Speaker

Mrs Beverley Mc Clymont OAM
“Billy Hart – The Flying Dentist”

TO CONTACT US

Write to

P.O. Box 320
Granville NSW 2142
Phone:

9682 1290 (Wed. only)
9631 0216
(Barry & June Bullivant)

Email:

granvillehistorical@bigpond.com

Website

www.granvillehistorical.org.au

Heritage Watch NSW Website

www.heritagewatchnsw.org.au

Friends of Mays Hill Cemetery

www.mayshillcemetery.org

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/GranvilleHistoricalSocietyIncNswAustralia?ref=hl>

PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Granville Historical Society

“A Place where heritage & culture are valued & celebrated.”

Welcome back and Happy New Year. The Granville Society – and particularly researcher Colin Humphreys – have been working on the 100th Anniversary of Anzac for quite some years; and we are looking at the launch of the publication at the Granville RSL Sub-branch, in 2015. The publication was researched and written by Colin Humphreys. Arthur Naylor has been busy scanning the photographs and giving them an upgraded caption and serial number for the last few years, Arthur also created the Excel spreadsheet, sorted them into suburbs, and burnt them to disk.

Most of you would be aware that not all the history is in one place, so to accomplish the task at hand we formed networks, and we are now linked to both the sub-branches in our area. However they do not have much on WW1 soldiers, although most of the sub-branches were formed by the ones who came back home from WW1.

We formed a working relationship with the Parramatta Heritage Centre, although their research for their project is based around the WW1 soldiers who have their photos in the Parramatta & District Soldiers Book.

We applied for an Anzac Grant and received a grant of \$11,500, at the time it did not appear that anybody was researching the Royal Gate or Prince Alfred Square (Parramatta). Fortunately for us, our member Enid Turbit (who is also a member of the Parramatta Society) came forward and offered to do the research for the Square.

We have also applied for a grant to cover the cost of researching Merrylands & Guildford; if this is successful HLHR (Holroyd Local History Research) will have the money to accomplish their project. We also received an Art grant to have a young artist paint both memorials. These will

be presented at the Gate in April and also the Square on 11 November 2015.

Our Anzac project will be a short ceremony in front of the Royal Gate 3.30pm 24th April 2015, which will work in with the planned Parramatta Council project which is a procession from the Gate to the Square.

We are assisting with the Granville RSL Sub-branch by helping design the order of service for the Dawn Service, and planters for the wreath laying service.

The Square on the 11th November 2015 will be the Parramatta RSL Sub-Branch Remembrance Day Ceremony, where we intend to give the RSL planters and the Painting to President of Parramatta Historical Society to attend the service and donate the painting.

Recently we have been assisting the Granville Sub-branch with their Memorial Cabinet.

We are also assisting Jerome Pearce who has joined the society, our youngest member; we first worked with Jerome with the ICE production, Pearls of Granville. He has technical skills with digital images, skills with displays, and IT skills; he brings knowledge to our society that we have not ventured into.

We are also working closely with Delaney College in Granville on their Anzac project.

Anzac Day falls on our meeting day in April, after consultation with members and their commitments a decision was made to cancel the meeting on 25th April.

Barry G Bullivant OAM

President

<p>WILLIAM ROBISON AND HIGHFIELD HALL</p>
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William Robison was part of the Scottish Diaspora, one of the many Scots who collectively made a major contribution to the culture and development of Australia. Scots have migrated all around the world, and have been in Australia since the time of the First Fleet. At a local level, Cliff McNeil's book *The Industry of the Scots in the Parramatta District*, published in 2003, records their achievements, and *The Granville Guardian* has profiled people such as Andrew Sutherland Low, Robert McAdam, and John Howieson, in recent years.

William Robison was an early coppersmith and engineer in Sydney and a pioneer pearler. He was born in Edinburgh on 9 April 1926 and left his native Scotland for America, as a young man seeking a fortune on the Californian goldfields. "He walked across the U.S. on foot to San Francisco before the days of the railway", according to Thomas Fowlie in his *History of Granville*. He next turned up on the Victorian gold diggings, and apparently was successful as a gold miner in both California and Australia. But his principal occupation was in the engineering field as a coppersmith. He spent several years in Victoria after the Gold Rush before coming to New South

Wales: a letter published in *The Age* newspaper Melbourne on 8 September 1862, signed William Robison, 113 Flinders Street West, indicated he was still in Melbourne at that time, but he moved to Sydney a few years later. He was in business in Sussex Street City, near Erskine Street, from about 1868, offering to supply a variety of copper and brassware, including copper boilers and stills, and pumping equipment. When heavy industry started to move to Granville, he picked up local clients, including Hudson Brothers and Brunton's flour mill. Years later – in 1892 – his daughter Agnes married an employee of Brunton's, William Anderson, from Smeaton in Victoria. The wedding took place at the Robison family's Granville home, *Highfield Hall*. The father of the bride gave the young couple a good start in their marriage with a cheque for one thousand pounds as a wedding gift.¹



William Robison built Highfield Hall on land that was originally part of a grant of 500 acres made to botanist Charles Frazer, the first superintendent of the Botanic Gardens. Frazer died at Parramatta in 1831, and subsequently the land was acquired by John Lackey and subdivided. In January 1881, the Auburn Vale Estate of 500 acres, comprising mainly land from the Frazer grant, was subdivided into 152 lots and offered for sale.²

Part of the subdivision was an area known as Cherry Tree Hill, where one of the early woodcutters of Granville, Pat Finnigan, lived in the 1840s. Fowlie says William Robison purchased Cherry Tree Hill in 1882 and changed the name to High Field. However there is evidence that Robison's acquisition of 58 acres of land that became known as the Highfield Hall Estate didn't take place for a further two years. A land sale advertisement, published on 15 November 1884, announced the auction of 58 acres of the Auburn Vale Estate on 23 November 1884.

Ten months later, Robison advertised for bricklayers and plasterers to work on the erection of an eight-room cottage on a 17-acre block of land in the estate. This would become *Highfield Hall*, the home of the Robison family for the next 11 years. A smaller cottage of seven rooms, *Normanhurst*, was built on an adjacent block of 41 acres, and this became the home of Robison's step-daughter, Margaret Mary Norman, who married Hugh Davis Norman on 5 March 1884. The couple's address from 1899, according to the Sand's Directory, was Milton Street Ashfield but it seems they were

¹ Scotland, Births and Baptisms Index, *Familysearch*, <https://familysearch.org>; T Fowlie, *The History of Granville 1919*, Granville Historical Society 2001, p. pp. 25-26, 83; *The Age*, 8 September 1862, p.6; *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)*, 4 January 1868, p. 5; *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 2 July 1892, p. 5

² Frazer, Charles (1788–1831), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/frazer-charles-2068/text2579>, accessed online 23 February 2015; *SMH*, 19 January 1881, p. 10

residing at *Normanhurst* when her fifth child, John Edgar, was born on 8 October 1891. Robison's 58 acre property was within the boundaries of Ferndell Street, Boundary Street (later re-named Rawson Road) and Campbell's Hill Road.³

In 1882 Robison decided to expand from engineering into the pearl industry. With a master mariner, Captain William Kirkpatrick, as a partner, he sent a schooner and four luggers (small boats) to a pearl diving area in Torres Strait, between Queensland and New Guinea. But pearl resources there were badly depleted and the venture was unsuccessful. In May 1886, he brought his son-in-law, Hugh Norman, into the firm of Robison and Norman, and sent him to the north of Western Australia, in charge of the 94-tonne schooner *Mist*, to start diving for pearl in the Broome district. Diving operations in King's Sound began in a small way in 1887 with a schooner and four luggers, but were expanded to 14 luggers by 1900. The fleet grew to 28 boats and two schooners in the next decade. Norman opened a general store in Broome that year, was elected chairman of the Pearlers' Association and was mayor in 1909-10. His brothers George and Tom were also pearlers, as was his son Ted.⁴



When William Robison died at *Highfield Hall*, aged 67, on 28 February 1894, Hugh Norman took sole charge of Robison and Norman's pearling and business empire in Broome. Robison's 21-year-old son, John Boyd Robison, had control of the company's Sydney assets. Boyd Robison retired from the company in 1911 and formed the limited company of Robison and Norman Limited, shipowners and pearlers. He was chairman of directors of this company when he died at 57 in 1928. Hugh Norman died in Perth in 1942.⁵

Part of Auburn Vale Estate. Highfield Hall land is pink, Normanhurst acreage is shown as blue-grey

After Margaret Robison's death in 1896, *Highfield Hall* was occupied by tenants until the family decided in 1905 to sell the whole estate comprising two cottages and 58 acres of land. For-sale

advertisements described *Highfield Hall* as a charming large brick cottage residence, with a slate roof, noble hall, eight commodious rooms (later advertisements stated 10, and then 12 rooms), a wide verandah on all sides, as well as two servants' rooms, kitchen and laundry, on 17 acres. With its "delightful climate" and elevated position, it would - according to the agents - be the ideal home for a retired or leisured gentleman. With the second cottage, *Normanhurst*, buyers were offered the choice of taking the

³ Fowlie, pp. 25-26; *SMH*, 15 November 1884, p. 21, 12 September 1885, p. 4, 19 March 1884, p. 1, 17 October 1891, p. 1

⁴ J.P.S. Bach, *The Pearling Industry of Australia*, Australian Government report 1955, http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:248877/Pearling_industry_Australia_1.pdf; accessed 20 February 2015;

⁵ *SMH* 3 March 1928, Western Australian Online Deaths Index, registration no. 1038

house on six, eight, or 41 acres. It was a brick construction with slate roof, verandahs all around, and bathroom, pantry, kitchen and laundry. Richardson and Wrench failed to clinch a sale when the property went up for auction. It was offered for sale again two years later, this time by the managing trustee of William Robison's estate, Boyd Robison. But despite his promise to accept 'a very low price', there was no sale once again, and the family would be compelled to engage a real estate agent to find tenants.⁶

There's more to tell in the story of the Highfield Hall Estate. To be continued!

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⁶ SMH 9 December 1905, p. 25, 7 December 1907, p.22