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The next general meeting of the Granville Historical Society will be held at 2.00 pm on Saturday 25 September 2010 at our Research Centre 62 Railway Parade Granville Executive Meeting 1.00 pm

**Guest Speaker:
Dr Terry Kass**

Our Centre is open every Wednesday from 10 am to 4 pm and on the fourth Saturday of the month for personal research. Visitors and members of family history societies are welcome. A fee applies for non-members

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Hello members. First and foremost, to our members who are unwell, we are thinking of you. Maureen is out of hospital and a little sorry; she has a good fighting spirit so that will carry her through. Susan has been the welfare officer and finding out how everyone is, thank you Susan. Daphne is still about the same and June Parkins is making visits to doctors and a couple of trips to hospital. We wish them well and hope they keep fighting.

The Civic Event that Parramatta Council gave to launch the Talking Book was fantastic. The event was well attended and it was a good public relations exercise. The people who handle the grants at Council were extremely pleased with the result of the grant; the book was distributed to 75 people in the local government area who are registered with Vision Australia. We have ordered a MP3 version which will be distributed to the local libraries and schools. Our inspiration came from Betty Holland who after many years of community work has macular degeneration and cannot read. Betty was taken aback when she was given a copy at the launch. Also the Parramatta Branch Libraries were donated copies, as well as the Royal Australian Historical Society. This project is the only local history in Australia that has been made available for the vision impaired and people with dyslexia. The Royal has emailed us and asked if they can use our idea to write about in their magazine *History* as an example for other societies to use the digital format.

June and I gave a talk on Down Memory Lane to the Prospect Probus Club. This is a vibrant club with over 80 members attending on the day, and they have a waiting list. Our website is down at the moment; the program we were using is no longer supported by Microsoft, being made obsolete, so it is off the air, June has purchased a new program and is working on a new site. This will take approximately a couple of weeks.

Our speaker this week is Terry Kass, one of our very talented members who will talk to us about War Service Homes from the First World War until the 50's.

Members who are photographing for our display in February are running around the creeks and bringing back some beautiful shots. We have also been spending the resources part of the grant for this display and have purchased six Magic Lantern Slides as part of the artefacts for the Aboriginal display as well as some samples of Darug art, also some good examples of Aboriginal poker work, such things as music sticks, clap sticks and post cards. This will allow us to have tremendous samples to display at the Parramatta Heritage Centre in March. We have also been purchasing some WW1 images from the Salute Their Service grant which we got last year. These have come in at \$20 cheaper than buying them from the War Memorial, and they are original images.

Barry G Bullivant OAM - President

**THIS MONTH'S GUEST
SPEAKER**

Our guest speaker, Doctor Terry Kass is a consultant historian, specialising in heritage and conservation work. He has carried out heritage studies for several municipal councils, and completed a report on Granville as part of his Parramatta study. He has published several local histories, including *Parramatta: a past revealed*, written in collaboration with Carol Liston and John McClymont, and *The Streets of Granville*.

His fields of expertise include urban history, housing, building and real estate history, and the history of land settlement.

**JOHN RAYNER –
EARLY RESIDENT**

If you or a member of your family were born in Granville between 1886 and 1937, chances are it was John Rayner who recorded the birth details. As the local Registrar of Births Deaths and Marriages, he registered 25,000 births, five thousand marriages and 26,000 deaths over a 50 year period. He was also the secretary of many community organisations. But he had a serious flaw – when times were tough, he didn't pay his debts.¹

John Rayner was born in Kent, England, and came to Australia at the age of 17. He lived in the inner city for a while until after he married Annie Richardson at Parramatta in 1875. She was the daughter of Ralph Richardson, Parramatta's town surveyor. In the same year, when the first allotments in the subdivided Drainwell Estate were auctioned, Rayner and his brother-in-law, Harry Richardson, who 10 years later would become Granville's second mayor, purchased two adjoining parcels at the corner of Railway Street (The Avenue) and Daniel Street, on which they built a two-storey terrace. Both

¹ *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate*, 22 April 1937, p. 2

mortgaged their land to finance the construction, but when they were unable to meet their repayments several years later, the mortgagee repossessed the terrace and sold it.²

Rayner teamed up with John Nobbs, the Father of Granville, and acted as committee secretary for Nobbs's 'various schemes to advance the place'. In 1877, he was a staunch supporter of plans for a new Anglican church, and would serve as a warden of the Church of St Mark for many years. In 1878, he was among the early settlers agitating for a public school, and once the school was established, was a member of the Parents and Citizens Committee for 30 years. He was a prominent member of the School of Arts for many years, including terms as president and secretary, and in 1882, he was secretary of the committee seeking a public park for Granville. In the early part of the 20th century, he was secretary of a committee supporting a campaign for the manufacture of locomotive engines at Clyde Engineering. He was active in fund-raising in World War I, and in 1923 was secretary of the Granville Relief Society that helped the poor.³

Both John Nobbs and John Rayner believed that as Granville (then known as Parramatta Junction) grew they could profit from that growth. Nobbs was a conveyancer, Rayner a land speculator. As the 1880s land boom gained momentum, Rayner opened a city office, and advertised land for sale in Merrylands, Auburn and Granville, including 'blocks with a deep-water frontage' in the Hudsonville Estate. At the age of 27, Rayner must have felt he was on the pathway to riches when he and four partners each made £850 profit from a one-day auction of land in the New Glasgow Estate near Clyde in September 1882. The syndicate had received a disappointing response to an earlier sale on the estate, so Rayner decided on bold action to make the land more attractive to buyers. He had the site cleared 'and looking like a park'. He organised a special train to bring potential buyers from Sydney, arranged for the Parramatta Band to play selections as the visitors walked through the bush to the blocks that were for sale, and provided refreshments for them. The auction was a great success, with every lot sold for a total of £5,500.⁴

John Rayner continued his speculative land dealings over the next five years. He was appointed manager of the Granville Permanent Building and Investment Company when it was formed in September 1883. Foundation directors were members of the so-called Granville elite, John Nobbs, Harry Richardson, Laurence Olsen, William Baker and Good Street grocer Lucien Grimwood. Rayner and Grimwood had become partners in a firm of auctioneers and land, estate and general commission agents, but the partnership was dissolved in March 1885. Rayner continued as manager of the building society for four years, but according to Thomas Fowlie 'gained some notoriety' when the company eventually collapsed. When Granville became a new local government area in 1885, John Rayner was a member of the Progress Party that won office in the inaugural election. He later said he would have been one of the successful candidates but for the fact that 'by some omission' he had not been on the roll of electors.⁵

² *ibid*; J. Rayner, 'Recollections' in *Granville Jubilee*, Granville Jubilee Celebrations Committee, 1935; T. Kass, *Streets of Granville*, Granville Historical Society, 1995, p. 34

³ T. Fowlie, *A History of Granville 1919*, Granville Historical Society, 2001, pp. 116-117; *Granville Jubilee*; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 November 1882, p. 2, 27 January 1906, p. 10, 5 February 1923, p. 6

⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 October 1882, p. 4; *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate*, 23 November 1921, p. 1

⁵ *Cumberland Mercury*, 15 September 1883, p. 2; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 April 1885, p. 4; Fowlie, p. 97; *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate*, 23 November 1921, p. 1

Rayner expanded his business interests in the late 1880s, opening a furniture store and drapery business on the southern side of Railway Parade, near the Colonnade. On 30 October 1888 an advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* announced that he wanted to relinquish his drapery business, and invited offers to buy the stock-in-trade. In truth, it was a sale forced on Rayner by the merchant Robert Reid because of an outstanding debt. Furthermore he had been required to assign to Robert Reid some of his properties. It was the beginning of the end for the land speculator. His wife Annie took over the furniture business, and in 1893 purchased the land and shop with money provided by Rayner's brother Edward. The business was later moved to South Street, and later again to Mary Street. In a subsequent bankruptcy hearing, John Rayner said he had not been in business after 1889, and ceased land speculation in 1891. He also said he had not held a bank account after 1891 and his sole income came from his employment as Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages.⁶

Rayner had total liabilities of £2,466 and no assets, when he was made bankrupt on 25 June 1897 over a debt of £139 to Sydney solicitor W.C. Shipway who, he said, had acted for him in the early 1890s to recover monies due in connection with land and property. The actions were unsuccessful because of the bad economic climate, and the fact that most of the people concerned were small buyers who couldn't pay their debts. He also blamed his bankruptcy on the collapse of the land boom. Rayner provided the Bankruptcy Registrar with a list of almost 100 properties, mortgaged for £6,000, which he had lost for failing to pay interest, or which had been sold by the mortgagee. A mortgagee had also sold a shop property, mortgaged for £4,000, in which he'd had a one-third interest with John Nobbs and Harry Richardson.⁷

John Rayner's creditors included his brother Edward, a resident of London, who was owed £1,300, and his brother-in-law Harry Richardson, owed £670. Both forgave the debts. Edward Rayner also gave John's wife Annie £500 to purchase the shop in Railway Avenue in 1893. Perhaps he also helped to allow John to visit England in 1896. For reasons unknown, John Rayner did not apply for a certificate of release from his bankruptcy for 20 years, but it was finally granted after a hearing in June 1921.⁸

John Rayner continued to carry out his role as registrar past his 80th birthday. He died at his home in Hutchinson Street on 16 April 1937, aged 82. His wife Annie had died on 21 May 1934 at the age of 83, and their only daughter, Minnie Louise, had passed away on 16 February 1921, aged 44. The couple was survived by their son, Oswald Ralph Rayner, who died in October 1943.⁹

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⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 October 1888, p. 10; State Records NSW: Supreme Court, Registrar in Bankruptcy; CGS 13655, Bankruptcy Files 188-1928; 10/23156 No. 11919; J. Rayner, Statement by Rayner, 28 July 1897

⁷ *ibid*, Affidavit by Rayner, 2 May 1921, Statement of Affairs, 14 July 1897

⁸ *ibid*, List of unsecured creditors, 2 July 1897; Discharge Certificate, 1 June 1921

⁹ Rookwood Cemetery Monumental Inscriptions, Old Church of England section.