



The Nepean

Journal of The Nepean Historical Society

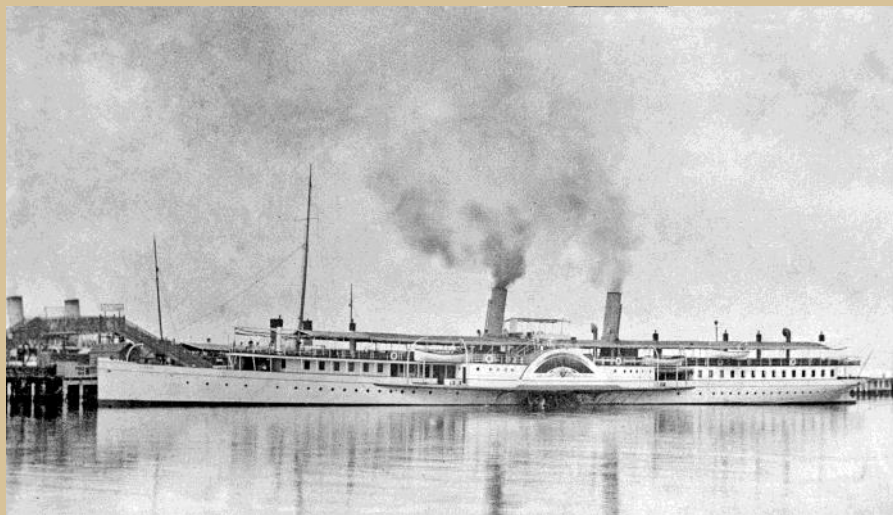
Volume 16 No 1

Mar 2021

Ph: (03) 5984 0255

Email: admin@nhs.asn.au

The Paddle Steamer Hygeia 1890 - 1932



PRESIDENTS REPORT

“The morning had dawned clear and cold, with a crispness that hinted at the end of summer.”

- George R.R. Martin

I am not altogether sure that Summer this year, ever actually began.

I would like to thank all those that have renewed or joined as new NHS members or Friends of the Sorrento Museum in these difficult last twelve months. I acknowledge that it has been a bit of a 'leap of faith', but we fully intend to justify your support into the future.

Despite the on again, off again nature of Covid restrictions we have managed to continue a level of remote control activity sufficient to keep us busy.

For the time being, The Museum is open only 'by appointment', so if you want to visit or show someone around please contact us and we will endeavour to make the appropriate arrangements.

The 'Stalls Team' have been operating at maximum effort with great results.

With appropriate Covid restriction we managed to hold our 'deferred' AGM in both physical and zoom format. A good group came to The Museum and a few more braved the technical hurdles of zoom. Regrettably, a few 'zoomers' didn't quite manage the challenge.

Your new Committee are listed on the back page. I welcome Tash back onboard and 'newcomer' Judy Walsh, who brings her great experience with the National Trust and Collins Settlement to our Committee.

I'd like to thank Janet South, who retired from Committee after over two decades, for her hugely valuable input and wise counsel. She will, of course be continuing with her roles as Archivist and Senior Researcher.

Our research team continue to operate, with many requests coming via the website.

We do have a couple of events planned, including an exciting book launch at The Museum on the 27th of March (see details later)

Take care and let's hope the early Autumn brings some good weather.

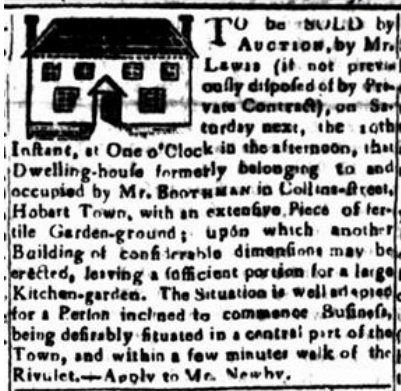
Clive

STORIES FROM 1803

John Broadhurst Boothman – Convict to Clerk

A recent visitor to The Museum introduced us to their ancestor - John Broadhurst Boothman (1779-1829). A convict and public servant, he had humble origins in Lancashire, England. He worked as a servant to Thomas and Joseph Ridgeway, bleachers of Horwich, near Bolton. On 20 January 1802, at the age of 22, he was charged in the Lancashire Quarter Sessions at Manchester with embezzling £20 from his employers, pleaded guilty and was sentenced to transportation for seven years. He came to Australia with the Collins expedition in 1803 and served as a subordinate of the night watch at the original Port Phillip settlement. Moving with Collins to the Derwent in 1804, he continued to perform minor administrative duties, notably as commissariat clerk, until his emancipation in 1809.

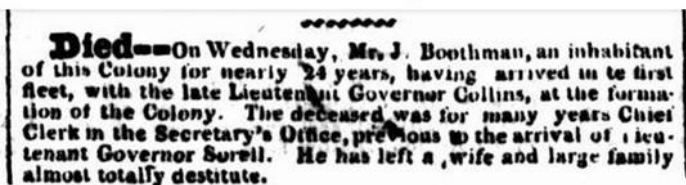
The Hobart Town Gazette and Southern Reporter (Tas.: 1816-1821) / Sat 12 Sep 1818 / Page 1



- Sale of Hobart house prior to Port Dalrymple move - from [Trove](#)

Thereafter, apart from a short break in the summer of 1817-18, he served the government of Van Diemen's Land for more than a decade, first as store-keeper at Hobart Town, then as clerk in the office of the governor's secretary and for six months in 1816-17 as acting secretary, then as one of the superintendents of convicts at Hobart, and finally in 1818 as principal superintendent at Port Dalrymple. In this capacity he moved first to Launceston, then in November to George Town. Here, in 1819 he had charge of the building of Government House and was also made chief district constable. Boothman was unable to avoid altogether that process of charge and counter-charge so common among early officialdom: thus, as friend and sometime assistant to Leonard Fosbrook he was implicated to some extent in

Colonial Times (Hobart, Tas.: 1826-1857) / Fri 13 Nov 1829 / Page 3



the latter's trial in Sydney in 1814 for fraud and peculation. Boothman later held two small land grants in the north of the island, but

when he died at Hobart on 11 November 1829, he left his family wholly destitute. . . ADB

The Girls by Robin Levett

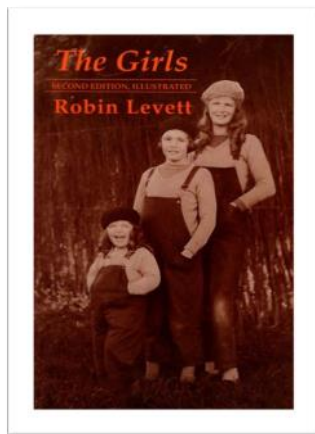
Camels in Sorrento?

A casual comment by someone at the museum recently drew me to this book.

Robin Levett's stories of the Walker family and her two much older sisters is lively, perceptive and often very funny. They arrive in Australia from India in 1925 (Levett in utero) and come to live in The Haven on the cliff between Sorrento & Portsea for five years. Father Major Geoffrey Walker, had served in the Political service of the Raj.

Sorrento in the 1920/30's was 'self-sufficient, gossipy and insular'. Lovett fondly describes Stringer's Store with its tiny cable cars and the goods 'all in a muddle that only old Mr Stringer understood.

She records 'the relative shabbiness' of their beach 'rich with curiosities at low tide'. And "*The Jack*" their grubby 12 foot dingy 'infinitely sea worthy and perfect for fishing'; giant rays, whales, sharks and even a scary encounter with a very big octopus evoke this special place.



(Continued on page 5)

... Cont

Life was happy and full of adventures with no school but a governess called Mike instead. Even Levett's mother and aunt would surf the back beach on solid wood surfboards.

Lovingly drawn Sorrento locals abound—young Cedric Bright besotted with fishing who 'had developed scruff into a lifestyle', neighbour Mr Davenport and his handyman Reilly, toothless Mr Johnson the professional fisherman who took them fishing for giant schnapper in the South Channel.

Major Walker had a rule that his children would have animals instead of toys so there are many tales of those who shared their lives even after they left Sorrento—including Jessie an 8 foot python in their South Yarra house who was playful as a puppy and very affectionate.

AND the CAMELS?

Abdul Mohammed and his camels and horses had been a fixture on the Sorrento beach for many years every summer holidays. Levett's father could speak to Abdul in fluent Urdu (remember the Major had lived in India). One year Major Walker invited the now very elderly Afghan to stay with the family over the winter. With his camels of course—'huge liquid eyes, shadowed by Odalisque lashes and they touched our arms with lips of shorn velvet to show their gratitude' (ignore the vile breath comments).

The girls would ride through Sorrento village to the back beach 'idiot proud in our camel given glory': later cantering down the beach with Abdul Mohammed 'singing in soprano Urdu and all of us, the camels too, drunk with joy'.

After the family leaves Sorrento there are many more terrific tales to tell. WWII brings tragedy—but no spoilers here.

I loved this book. Robin Levett led an amazingly full life. She wrote seven books.

The Girls

by Robin Levett

Joy Kitch, February 2021

Nepean Historical Society acknowledges and pays respect to the Boon Wurrung/Bunurong people, the traditional custodians of these lands and waters

DISPLAYS AND COLLECTION REPORT

Sorrento Museum was very thrilled when local model maker Gerry Gilliland offered to donate to us his beautifully accurate model of the Port Phillip Paddle Steamer "Hygeia". Gerry trained as a tool maker, awarded apprentice of the year in 1967, and spent his career as an industrial model maker, later in research and development with major Australian companies.



This special model has taken Gerry four years to create, using plans based on the original drawings from the Glasgow Museum. The model's materials have been carefully selected to be totally accurate. It is truly a work of art. Gerry had to make every seat, hand rail, chimney to scale - the detail is exquisite. She is elegantly slender in her original pink and grey blue.

When PS Hygeia was built in Glasgow in 1890 she was considered the largest and fastest bay steamer afloat. She was capable of carrying up to 2,000 passengers and crew. Her finish was of the highest quality as is Gerry's beautiful 1.9 metre model of her.

Hygeia was a coal driven paddle steamer - 300 feet (91.44m) long, 32 feet (9.75m) beam and 11 feet, 4 inches (3.45m) deep. She had seats in the centre and along the sides of the promenade deck, comfortable saloons on the main deck and room dining rooms below.

She commenced passenger ferry services around Port Phillip Bay in December 1890. She was selected to carry Lord Hopetoun and the Countess to the grand opening of a new channel linking Port Phillip and Corio Bays.

(Continued on page 7)



Saturday
6th March 2021
9am—2pm

... Cont

With the arrival of motor vehicles and the Great Depression, passenger numbers plummeted. After 41 years carrying approximately 3 million passengers, she was removed from service in 1931.

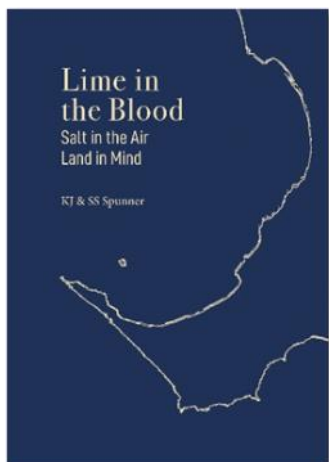
But, she did not go easily. Running aground near Rosebud she remained fast for 10 months until repaired and then towed and sunk in June 1932, in the 'ships graveyard' 6.5 kilometres outside Port Phillip Heads.

We hope that you will soon be able to see and celebrate Gerry Gillilands beautiful model at the Sorrento Museum.

Joy Kitch

Collection Coordinator at Sorrento Museum

UPCOMING EVENTS AND DATES



INVITATION TO A BOOK LAUNCH

LIME in the BLOOD

Salt in the Air, Land in Mind

by K.J. & S.S. Spinner
at The Sorrento Museum

Saturday 27th March 2:00pm

827 Melbourne Road, Sorrento

With Songs once sung by Fanny Spinner, now by Alexandra Mathew, Mezzo Soprano

Refreshments will be taken in the Pioneer Gardens

RSVP Essential for nos. for Covid compliance: admin@nhs.asn.au by 20th March

VALE THE FOLLOWING VALUED MEMBERS

Jim BARRAS—Jim's wife Elsie (deceased) was spoken about in the previous 'The Nepean'

Michael BEGG

Dorothy CHISOLM

Tony JOHNSON

Nepean Historical Society send our condolences to Family and Friends.

VALE FRED SULLIVAN

Frederick Brian Sullivan was born in Sorrento in 1931. His family connections to this area go back to 1939 when Dennis Sullivan (1787-1860) took up land at Point Nepean until 1852.

Fred became Sorrento's barber and worked as such for over 50 years. He married Dorothy Redman in 1955. Fred was a very active member of the local community—playing golf until late in life.



Brian McGrath's reflections on Fred.

During my time as Sorrento Cemetery Sexton, I had many conversations with Fred about old identities. He had a remarkable ability to recall names, where they came from, where they lived. He was a tremendous reference source. I saw him several times each week, visiting his wife Dot's and later Greg's (his son) grave.

I played bowls in his team at Sorrento Bowls Club and he was always a great competitive player.

He will be sorely missed by so many people, a true Sorrento identity.

VALE PAULINE POWELL

Pauline Powell OAM. 4/01/1933 to 8/01/2021

Pauline gave enormous service to her Rye community as the local pharmacist from 1958 to 1994. As a founder of the Rye Historical Society her contributions to preserving local history were immense.

She initiated and saw to the completion of so many projects.

**SORRENTO FESTIVAL 2021**

Friday 5/3/2021—Monday 8/3/2021 10am - 5pm

The Sorrento Festival aims to connect our community post-COVID, support local community organisation and the traders.

Hosted by Sorrento Community Centre and the Rotary Club of Sorrento

Sorrento Museum will be open on Sunday 7th March 2021, 10am - 4pm

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members to the Society and we look forward to meeting them at future meetings and functions.

Wendy Stewart Susan & Terry Henderson Jane Hopkins

Ray & Lynette Herbert David & Renate Eagle

Val Stieglbauer - Membership Secretary

LAST OF THE BAY STEAMERS

S. S. Sorrento

After the war, the **PS Weeroona**, having been sold to the Americans in 1942 for use in the Pacific, looked unlikely to return to the bay.

An enterprising group of three merchant seamen took it upon themselves to provide a 'post war' bay service by forming 'Port Phillip Ferries'. In February 1946 the **S.S. Sorrento** arrived.

The Sorrento was to be skippered by Captain Gray, formerly skipper of the Weeroona.

The Argus (Melbourne, Vic. : 1848 - 1957) / Sat 16 Feb 1946 / Page 5

TASMANIAN VESSEL ARRIVES FOR BAY SERVICE

Newly purchased SS *Sorrento*, which will take over the prewar bay service of the old *Weeroona*, arrived at Port Melbourne from Tasmania yesterday. She will begin the service—probably to Queenscliff, *Sorrento*, and *Dromana*—within the next few weeks.

A gala and official opening in aid of the Red Cross will be held on the vessel on February 28. The owners said yesterday that Sunday excursion fares would probably be about 8/.

Sorrento was originally used for excursion trips on the Tamar River, Launceston. Later she was used as a ferry at Hobart, and after that was taken over by the Army.

On the trip from Hobart she averaged 11½ knots. On bay trips the new excursion vessel will carry about 300 passengers. There will be a cafeteria on board. The owners have also applied for a liquor licence.

LET ARGUS CLASSIFIED
Ads be your salesman at small cost. THE ARGUS gets quick results because more people read them than any other classified newspaper in Victoria.

Built in 1909 at Battery Point, Hobart, Tasmania, by Purdon and Featherstone for the River Tamar Trading Co. Length 104 feet 5 inches. Width 20 feet 5 inches. Depth 7 feet 7 inches. Weight 113 ton gross. Originally named **Rowitta**, the Sorrento was a wooden screw-steamer, built for the run between Launceston and George Town. She continued in this trade until the Hobart Bridge Co. purchased it for use in connection with the construction of the new bridge in 1941. On its completion, the Sorrento was sold to the Australian Army which commenced considerable alteration to the vessel. But before they were completed, the war ended.

- Down the Bay, T.K. Fitchett

Having only a 300 passenger capacity, and further hindered by the transport strike of 1947, the Sorrento struggled to make ends meet. Despite publicly listing and an attempted capital raising of £130,000 to purchase a larger vessel, and expand the service to Mornington, 'Port Phillip Ferries' went into

Cont...

receivership in August 1949.

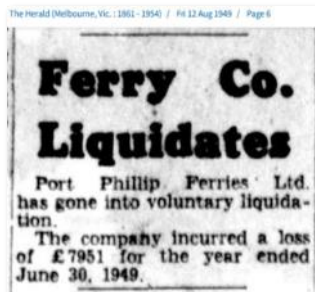
At the time Captain Gray was living aboard with a salary of £10 per week.

The liquidators found a buyer in Sydney where she was used for a time on the harbour. In 1951 she was sold to Richards Brothers and returned to Hobart where she was restored and used for excursion trips on the Derwent and to New Norfolk.

In 1968 she was converted for use as an abalone diving 'mother ship' and renamed **Takarri**. In 1972 the *Takarri* was sold to the Warrnambool Maritime Museum, without her steam engine, where she was restored and renamed **Rowitta**. She remained on static display at Warrnambool until her demolition in 2015.



- from NHS Collection



A sad end to the 'last of the bay steamers'.

STREET STALLS

6th March 2021	Sorrento
20th March 2021	Blairgowrie
3rd April 2021	Blairgowrie
17th April 2021	Sorrento
18th April 2021	Point Nepean Mkt
8th May 2021	Blairgowrie
22nd May 2021	Sorrento

Look out for our Street Stalls which are held every month in either Blairgowrie (outside the IGA) and Sorrento (outside the Commonwealth Bank). Please ring Jan Weston 0413 040 057 to enquire about joining our stall team.

NEPEAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

PO BOX 139

827 MELBOURNE ROAD
SORRENTO 3943

Phone: (03) 5984 0255

Email: admin@nhs.asn.au

Web: www.nepeanhistoricalsociety.asn.au



Sorrento Museum

OFFICE-BEARERS 2020-2021

PRESIDENT: Clive Smith

VICE-PRESIDENT: Annette Buckland

SECRETARY: Val Stieglbauer

TREASURER: Clive Smith

COMMITTEE: Marie Clarke, Joy Kitch, Jenny Nixon, Cathy Stirling ,
Judy Walsh & Natasha Wicks

OTHER NHS VOLUNTEER POSITIONS:

Archivist & Research Officer: Janet South

Collection & Displays: Joy Kitch

Cataloguer & Indexer: Bergliot Dallas

Librarian: Kaye McGrath

Photograph Curator: Maggie Broadhead

Volunteers Co-Ordinator: Annette Buckland

Street Stall & Bookshop: Jan Weston

Tours: Natasha Wicks

The Nepean : Annette Buckland & Cathy Stirling

To send articles/ideas for *The Nepean* to thenepean@nhs.asn.au

