

# Botany Historical Trust

NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2022

## Staff News

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*Our festive cover image of Elizabeth Taylor holding a kitten is from the December 1948 issue of the Johnson & Johnson staff newsletter.*



**Robert Hanna**

# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Since my last report in the June Newsletter there has been mixed news for the Botany Historical Trust.

Sadly, we lost Carolyn McMahon, our newest Executive Committee member. She died on 30 June. Carolyn would have been an asset to our Executive, and though only with us for a short time, will be missed. She was active in other community organisations and was a regular participant in BHT excursions over the last few years. Vale Carolyn. RIP.

On a brighter note, we have managed to fill two vacant BHT Executive positions. At our August Executive meeting, we welcomed Denis Muller, an old Botany boy, as a new Executive member. Denis has been involved in BHT activities, and we look forward to his further contributions to the Trust.

Our appeal through this newsletter for other members to nominate for the Executive had a positive result. Warren Hensley, another old Botany boy, offered his services. Warren has been an active BHT member, and we welcomed Warren at our November Executive meeting. Unfortunately, with Carolyn McMahon's death, we still have one vacant Executive position, and I'm hoping we may persuade someone from the general membership to volunteer their services.

I undertook to look at organising excursions in and around the City of Sydney for July and August this year. I had hoped to visit such places as the Hyde Park Barracks, the Sydney Mint and the City of Sydney Museum. I contacted the Sydney Living Museums but regrettably, because of COVID, they were not conducting guided tours.

With the resurgence of COVID the Executive agreed to defer the excursions program until 2023.

On 25 August, I attended the Nancy Hillier Memorial Lecture at Botany Town Hall. Fellow Executive members Chris Hanna, Jacqui Milledge, Richard Smolenski and Peter Orlovich also attended. The lecture was reasonably well attended, though I think the inclement weather kept some away. Ron Hoenig MP, our former Mayor; Jemima Mowbray, a Policy and Advocacy Manager with the Tenants' Union of NSW; and UTS Professor, Alan Morris; all presented informative presentations on the theme of gentrification in the South Sydney area. They explored how communities can address the challenges raised by increasing housing costs and outside investment in previously underserved areas.





On a disappointing note, I see where a significant part of the Banksmeadow shop front was demolished to make way for yet more “modern development”. Included in the demolition was the historic La Perouse House building. There was hope that the façade may have been preserved, but this did not happen. Yet another part of the Banksmeadow Village precinct gone forever. The Executive has sought advice from Bayside Council to examine whether the developer has adhered to the approval provisions of the Development Application.

I was pleased to see Leonie Bell win yet another Ron Rathbone History prize this year with her essay “Stannumville: suburb in the Sand”, a history of a temporary housing settlement in the old Botany Municipality during World War 1, which I confess I’d never heard of. You can find the essay here: [bit.ly/3UZ55ca](https://bit.ly/3UZ55ca)

You will recall Leonie won the Ron Rathbone Prize in 20W18 with her history of the wool industry in Botany, called “Botany Wool”, which you can find here: [bit.ly/3hNcAnQ](https://bit.ly/3hNcAnQ). I’m hoping we may be able to have Leonie give a presentation on Stannumville at a BHT sponsored event in 2023.

The Botany Historical Trust was pleased to support Bayside Council’s application for funding from the NSW Government’s Anzac Community Grants Program 2022, for the purpose of conserving, digitizing and providing better access to World War One Memorabilia relating to Alfred and George Benham. The service of these two brothers was not profiled in Postings from the Front: The City of Botany Bay and World War I, as the book was published in 2016, prior to this donation being received. This grant would allow Bayside Council to share this war memorabilia with the local community in a way that also protects the items into the future.

(L-R) Les Haggett, Paul Slater, David Williams, Chris Hanna (BHT Vice-President), Cain Slater (Botany RSL sub-branch President), Bayside Mayor, Dr Christina Curry; Graeme Trewin and students from St Bernard’s Catholic Primary School on Remembrance Day at the Botany War Memorial at Booralee Park.





The items donated are over 100 years old; very rare, fragile and unique, and therefore irreplaceable; and it is important that they are handled by professionals. Paying for professional conservation and digitization costs money, and we support Bayside Council's application for funding to undertake this work. Also, my thanks to the relatives of the Benham family who donated these precious items.

The Botany Historical Trust is proud to support this funding application and, if the application is successful, will publicise the role of the NSW Office of Veterans Affairs in keeping the Benham family archive within the local community while making it publicly accessible in a safe way, to the members of the BHT and the wider community. This project fits perfectly with one of the aims of the Botany Historical Trust, which is to raise the community's awareness of Botany's local heritage and history.

On 11 November, I attended the Remembrance Day ceremony at the Botany War Memorial along with members of the Botany and Mascot RSL Sub-Branches; Bayside Mayor, Dr Christina Curry; and BHT Executive members Chris Hanna and Richard Smolenski. I was also pleased to see members of the public and pupils from Botany Public School and St Bernard's Primary School at the ceremony. I laid a wreath on behalf of the BHT, as did the groups mentioned above.



An ornately designed, large Certificate of Thanks presented to Alfred Benham by the 'Mayor, Alderman, and Citizens of the Municipality of Botany', 1919; which Bayside Council wants to preserve and digitize.

**Robert Hanna**  
President, Botany Historical Trust

## THE COMMITTEE



**Robert Hanna**  
President

**Christopher Hanna**  
Senior Vice President

**Jacqueline Milledge**  
Vice President

**Carolyn McMahon**  
Secretary

**Richard Smolenski**  
Treasurer

**Peter Orlovich**  
Committee Member

**Jennifer Muscat**  
Councillor

**Jo Jansyn**  
Councillor

We have Committee Member positions vacant and we invite members to apply. If you are interested please email: [council@bayside.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@bayside.nsw.gov.au) for the attention of the Botany Historical Trust



# 2022 Ron Rathbone LOCAL HISTORY COMPETITION

Leonie Bell was announced as the winner of Bayside Council's annual Ron Rathbone Local History Competition by the Mayor Dr Christina Curry in a ceremony at the Rockdale Town Hall on Tuesday 20 September.

Leonie Bell was awarded the \$5,000 prize in the Open Category for her essay:  
***Stannumville: suburb in the sand.***

Stannumville, unofficially known by local residents as 'Canvas Town' or 'Tin Town', was a NSW Government housing scheme to alleviate the state's housing shortage. Leonie Bell's work is the first to fully investigate and describe the rise and fall of this housing settlement and it provides a wealth of new historical insights and information, making it a wonderful addition to our collection. A short version of her winning entry is included in this newsletter.

A total of 79 entries were submitted in this year's competition, which aims to encourage the research, writing and sharing of Bayside's history. The entries were judged by Dr Peter Orlovich and Anne Slattery, both members of the Botany Historical Trust; Dr Lisa Murray, the City Historian at City of Sydney; and Natalie Funston and Nina Walton from Bayside Library Service.



Leonie Bell and Mayor Dr Christina Curry at the 2022 Ron Rathbone Local History Awards

Leonie Bell's win was in the Open Category of the competition. The competition had three categories this year, and the winners in Categories One and Two, designed for primary and high school students, were:

- ★ **Lola Melia**, *A Special Place: Joint Winner - Years K to 2*
- ★ **Kyla Silke**, *Around Where I Live: Joint Winner - Years K to 2*
- ★ **Annabelle Woo**, *Cooks River: A Long Rive with a Long History: Joint Winner - Years K to 2*
- ★ **Ivy Zhong**, *Mr Angelo Anestis - A great man to be remembered: Winner - Years 3 to 4*
- ★ **Carlton Public School, Year 5/6, Rockdale Library** - *A Journey Through Time: Winner - Years 5 to 6*

Two Encouragement Awards were also made in Categories One and Two:

- ★ **Sebastian Gatt**, Sir Joseph Banks Park
- ★ **Margaret Oszywa**, An Exploration of the Streets in Daceyville

A special mention must be made of the outstanding participation of Gardeners Road Public School students. A total of 66 students entered the 'Then and Now' competition designed for K to 2 students. The students compared their school in 1883 - a wooden building consisting of one room designed to hold 200 pupils - with the modern facility they attend today.

In the open category, an Encouragement Award was given to Alan Russell for his entry *The Eve Street Wetlands*. Diamadis Panayiotis received a Recognition of Effort Award for his work, *A History of the Bexley Bowling Club: 1946 - 2022*.

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See the full details of all entries, visit Council's website at: [bayside.nsw.gov.au/ronrathbone](https://bayside.nsw.gov.au/ronrathbone)

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# Stannumville

Leonie Bell

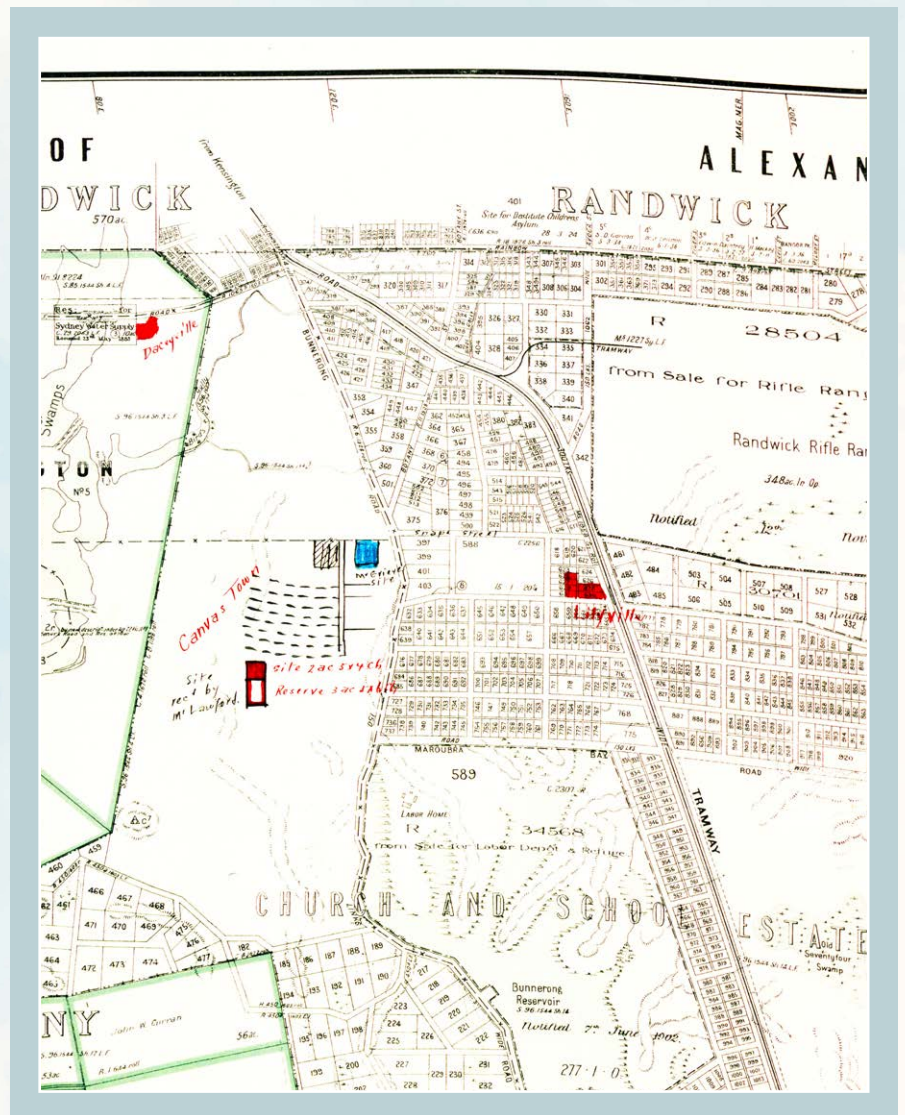


Below is a short version of Leonie Bell's winning entry in the open category for the 2022 Ron Rathbone Local History Prize.

You can access the full essay on the Bayside Council website ([bit.ly/3UZE5ca](http://bit.ly/3UZE5ca)) or at a Bayside Council Library.



Many people are aware of the canvas and tin shacks that were erected by desperate people on the sandhills of La Perouse and Sans Souci during the throes on the Great Depression of the 1930s. However, few will have heard of a New South Wales State Government scheme to house families in a purpose-built tent town during World War I.



Parish Map of Botany, County of Cumberland, Metropolitan Land District Eastern Division of NSW, 3rd Edition. 10th April 1905 with 1915 hand drawn annotation showing the location of Canvas Town and its school. The map shows the rejected school site, initially proposed by Grieves, in blue, and the second successful Lawford site in red. Source: NSW State Archives and Records



Canvas Town, sometimes referred to as Calico Town or Tin Town, and later known as Stannumville, was built 3½ miles (5.6km) from Sydney, about a mile south of Daceyville. It was constructed just off the western side of Bunnerong Road, between Gardiner's Road (now Gardeners Road) and Maroubra Bay Road 'on a fine healthy site commanding views of La Perouse and Maroubra Bay which is not far distant. ' It does not appear on maps of the period, which were either printed before its construction or after its demolition. This made its precise location subject to speculation until the discovery was made of a hand drawn addition to an existing Parish Map of Botany.

The outbreak of World War I on the 28th July 1914 had serious consequences for a housing market already tightly squeezed. Just five weeks into the war on 8 September 1914, the New South Wales Government Cabinet announced that in order to employ as many men as possible on the available finance, it would be necessary to reduce working hours.

The consequent reduction in wages placed public servants in a severe case of housing rental stress. Homeless civil servants were not a good look for a Labor government, which felt obliged to provide cost-effective housing for their workforce. Swift erection of a cheap canvas town was seen as the short-term answer. Stannumville was never intended to become a permanent accommodation solution.

Rent would be cheap at one shilling per week. If residents wanted a tent with a floor they would pay two shillings for the first 30 weeks, followed by one shilling per week thereafter.



An official inspection of Calico Town, 1914. Source: State Library of NSW

Once the fees covered the £10 cost of the structure, the occupants would own it, although they would not own rights to the land on which it stood. It was estimated that it would take several years to pay it off, although the general consensus was that unprotected calico would only last a few months exposed to the weather.

Mascot Council sent a deputation to inspect the result when it was completed by late October 1914. What they found was dozens of poorly constructed, windowless, greyish tent houses ranged along the slopes of the Botany sandhills. There were no streets and no street lighting.

Construction was flimsy, with studs, plates and rafters in 3"x 2" hardwood, and 3"x 1" collar ties and supports. This was covered by unbleached calico, a thinner and less durable fabric than the canvas which might be used for a camping tent. The two rooms each measured 8'x10' (2.4m x 3m), with a low 6' ceiling (1.8m). There were no floors.

It was customary in country areas to tamp an earth floor in such circumstances, but the fledgling town was constructed on sandhills, so this was not an effective option. Neither was a sink, wash tub or laundry copper provided.



Calico town from Bunnerong Road, looking East. Source: State Library of NSW

If residents needed toilet facilities, there was one toilet pan for every 25 houses. One can only imagine the lengthy line-up for the toilet in the morning.

By the end of 1914, there was still no sewerage or garbage collection in the new 'suburb', but outdoor taps had finally been installed. Women had to carry buckets of water up the sandhill to their tent. Wastewater was thrown out of the tent door onto the grimy sand.

In the early days some women would wash their children in the lagoon, a reedy swamp at the bottom of the hill. Now if people wished to shower, they made their way to a large central tent where one shower bath was provided for every 24 residents.

Incredibly, the government intended to eventually expand this inadequate suburb to 500 dwellings, although at this point only 169 'houses' had been constructed, with a mere 17 tents occupied.

The government and the newspapers reported that the residents were happy; 'General satisfaction is expressed by the tenants with the improvements, and the cheap, healthy conditions under which they live'.

The calico did not wear well. During high winds it would tear from the timber framework. Many residents had commenced renovations by adding a tin roof or walls, although the government announced that all tents would be re-constructed in tin in the near future. The conversion to tin was completed swiftly by early June. Two-room dwellings were placed side by side to form one, four-room home, with the promise of a verandah soon to come. The promised laundry facility was completed by mid-May, together with the installation of several electric lights.

It soon became apparent that a school was needed, which opened in a recycled demountable building on 5th July 1915, with 73 pupils in attendance.

The end of August 1915 heralded the near completion of the conversion from canvas dwellings to corrugated iron shacks. Now that the town was no longer constructed of calico, it seemed the names 'Canvas Town' or 'Calico Town' was no longer appropriate. The obvious choice of 'Tin Town' didn't sound too salubrious. Suggested alternative names included Ferrata or Ferratum – derived from the Latin for 'furnished or covered with iron'.

Instead, a 'clever' public servant decided that the Latin word for tin, combined with the French for town might sound much better. The following month the Government Gazette announced that the official name of the new settlement would henceforth be Stannumville. By late October 1915, the little village boasted a population of 57 men, 62 women and 218 children.



Within another year the government was considering whether or not to make Canvas Town a permanent housing solution or to close it. Premier Holman admitted that the tin shacks of Stannumville were an 'eyesore,' and it was time to move forward with plans for the provision of reasonable priced housing.

Once the tin sheeting was installed, the government failed to invest any further in either Stannumville houses or facilities. When the Botany Health Inspector paid a visit to Stannumville mid-1917, what he found appalled him. He called for the closure of the site or at least better supervision of the facilities.

The reporter from the Evening News paid a visit. Dispiritingly, the landscape was not much changed from the early visits by the journalist from the Sydney Morning Herald four years previously.

After trudging down the road for around a kilometre from the nearest tram stop at Daceyville: 'Crossing Bunnerong Road a full view of Stannumville was obtained. Canvas Town is best described as a collection of leaden eruptions on the bleached white slope of a sandhill. The huts -about 50 in number— are huddled together, and low, as though seeking to submerge their identity in the sand.

The settlement does not boast of roadways or footpaths, while gardens are noticeable by their absence. Beyond the noise of several children playing about the damp sand, and a couple of spiral threads of smoke issuing from paint-less chimneys, there was no sign of life'.

As the composition of the Stannumville settlement changed and residents either found work or alternative accommodation, it was clear that neither the tin town or its school would survive much longer.

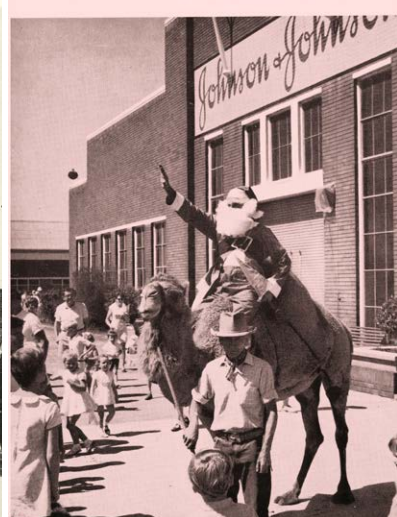
By the 15th of August 1917 Principal Horne reported that here were only 14 children left. His recommendation to close the school was approved two days later.

Stannumville had been in decline for some time. The media, trade unions, and Botany Council had heavily criticised the housing experiment since its inception. The Health Inspector would soon have his wish granted. The remaining twenty tenants had recently been notified that they had three months to find alternative accommodation, as the site would be closing, and the land auctioned.

The area was later subdivided for housing. No sign of Stannumville exists today.

Stannumville, c. 1917. Source: Bayside Council Local History Collection





# A Very Johnson & Johnson Christmas!

The Johnson & Johnson brand is iconic for many Australians, with products such as BAND-AID®, Johnson's® Baby Bath, and Johnson's® Baby Powder once having a permanent place in many of our homes. Established in 1887 in the United States, Johnson & Johnson Ltd. commenced in Australia in 1931 manufacturing baby powder and surgical dressings. When their original leased property on Dowling Street in the city became too small, they started constructing a factory in Botany in 1937. The site on Stephen Road was chosen because of its access to water.

During World War II, the Johnson & Johnson plant was producing surgical dressings, cotton wool, mosquito repellent and ready-packed surgical kits. The company employed over 360 people during that time. After the war, the demand for baby products, cotton wool, plaster and gauze products ensured further expansion of the factory site.

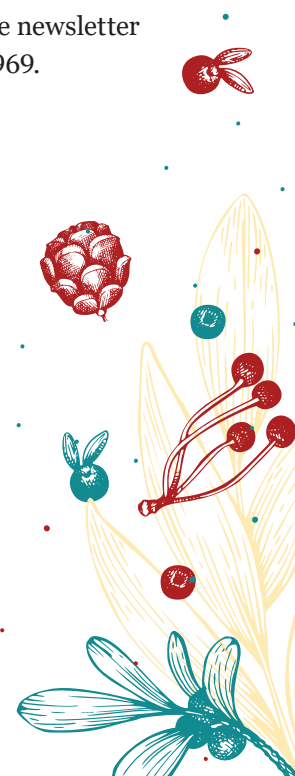
The company was involved with many community and employee staff welfare programs, including first aid/nursing and medical facilities, food services, superannuation, disability protection, retirement planning, work clothing, subsidized product purchasing, educational assistance, and support for social and sporting activities.

They also assisted in community sponsorship relating to health, safety, and baby care, such as the Save the Children Fund, Red Cross, First Aid Courses and Children's Hospital initiatives.

The Bayside Local History Collection holds an extensive collection of Johnson & Johnson staff newsletters dating from 1946 through to 2000, when the company moved all manufacturing offshore. These newsletters were an important way of sharing news about the business, and staff achievements from births, weddings, and bereavements, to staffing promotions, sporting news, photographic competitions, and an annual Christmas message from the Managing Director.

The Staff Christmas Party appears to have been a fun opportunity for the Managing Director to dress up as Santa and use increasingly creative modes of transport to travel from the North Pole to the party, as seen on the newsletter covers from 1966-1969.

**Alison Ingram**  
Library Graduate





# SERENDIPITY WITH A NOOSE AT MASCOT LIBRARY



## AN UNCOMMON HANGMAN

THE LIFE AND DEATHS OF ROBERT 'NOSEY BOB' HOWARD

The past met the present on 13 August when the BHT and Bayside Local History Team hosted an author talk at Mascot Library. Dr Rachel Franks, author of *An Uncommon Hangman: the Life and Deaths of Robert 'Nosey Bob' Howard*, gave an engaging author talk to an appreciative audience of about 30 locals. Prior to the talk, she was introduced to Anne Slattery, past President of the Botany Historical Trust. Rachel recognised 'Miss Slattery' as her Year 9 history teacher! There were a few misty eyes in the audience when Rachel acknowledged that Miss Slattery had nurtured her love of history, to the extent that she was now speaking about her own history book.

Robert Howard (1832–1906), better known as Nosey Bob, was the longest-serving executioner for New South Wales (1876–1904). He was responsible for hanging the notorious 'Borgia of Botany': Louisa Collins. Howard's work, including the execution of Collins, is vital to understanding changing attitudes towards capital punishment in Australia. Copies of Dr Franks' book can be borrowed from Bayside Libraries or purchased from the State Library of NSW bookshop, with free delivery.



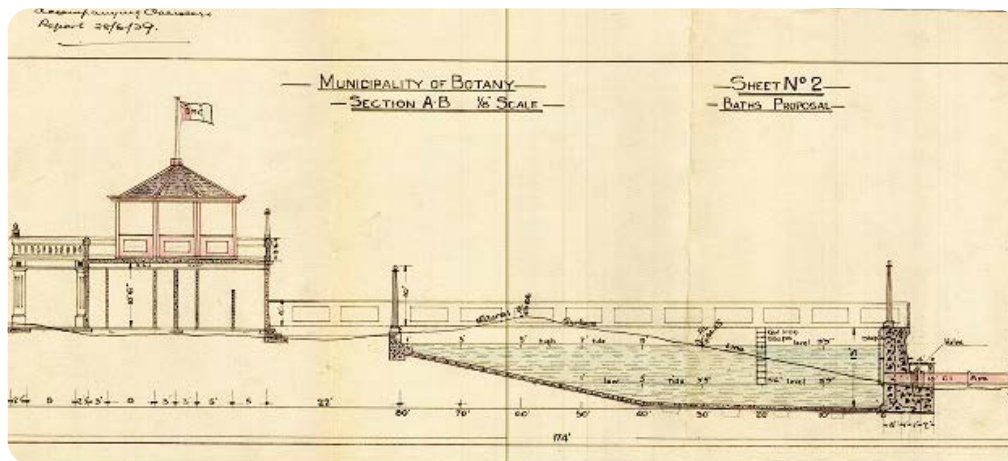
Anne Slattery stands behind Dr Rachel Franks as she signs her book.



(L-R) Cr Jo Jansyn; Ron Hoenig MP, Member for Heffron; Mayor Dr Christina Curry; Chris Hanna, Senior Vice-President, BHT; Magistrate Jacqueline Milledge, Vice-President, BHT; and Cr Jennifer Muscat hold their copies of *An Uncommon Hangman* at the event.

# Swimming

## IN BOTANY AND THE BAY



One of the designs submitted in 1929 for the proposed sea baths at Botany. Botany Council held a design competition and offered a prize of 50 guineas (£521/2) for the winning design. Architects Rudder and Grout won the competition. They designed and built the North Sydney Olympic Pool (under the harbour bridge) in 1936.

Do you remember swimming in Botany Bay, or the opening of the waterslides at Botany Pool in 1983? The next social history exhibition at Mascot Library will take you back through the history of swimming in Botany and the Bay and look forward to the redevelopment of the Botany Aquatic Centre.

Swimming is a central part of Australian culture. Whether it's in a bay, river, pool, or beach, Australians love being in the water. On our island continent, learning to swim is almost as fundamental as learning to walk.

The local swimming spot is a very public, social space. It's the Aussie equivalent of the Italian piazza or English pub.

It's where people gather. It's also a place where social class recedes – when everyone is wearing togs and a towel, you can't tell how rich or well educated they are.

The opening of the Botany Municipal Olympic Swimming Pool in 1966 (now called the Botany Aquatic Centre) was a momentous occasion, as was the opening of the 'giant' waterslides in 1983. After 60 years of use, and a massive hailstorm in 1999, the Botany Aquatic Centre is being re-vamped for the next generation of swimmers. Come to the exhibition and see the proposed designs for the new waterslides and three new pools, which are due to open in 2025.

**Alison Wishart**

Local History Librarian



The ticket machine that issued tickets to ride on the waterslides at Botany Pool. Rides initially cost 50 cents for a single ride, \$3 for half an hour (the waterslides were cleared of patrons every 30 minutes) or \$20 for a concession booklet of 10 x 30-minute rides. In 1986, admission to the pool cost \$1 for adults and 40 cents for children.

# Swimming

## IN BOTANY AND THE BAY

On display at Mascot Library  
3 January - 31 July 2023

Monday - Friday, 10am - 6pm  
FREE!



# The Botany Historical Trust

## LIFE MEMBERSHIP AWARD

The Botany Historical Trust has recently awarded two life memberships to some long-serving members.

Clarence (Clarrie) Jones served on the BHT Executive for 24 years until he retired in 2021. He grew up in Booralee Street, Botany, and his family were part of the fishing community that lived and worked nearby. Clarrie's wealth of knowledge of the history of the Booralee Fishing Village, and other places in the former City of Botany Bay was invaluable to the BHT and will be appreciated by future generations. His commitment to preserving and sharing the history of Botany is recognized through his life membership of the BHT.



Bayside Mayor, Dr Christina Curry, presents Clarrie Jones with his Life Membership certificate at the BHT Christmas party on 29 November 2022 with BHT President Rob Hanna and Tracey Jones, Clarrie's daughter, looking on.



Alice McCann was the inaugural Vice-President of the BHT in 1994 and worked for over 20 years on the Executive Committee. She grew up in Mascot and is a dedicated community volunteer. Alice served as President of the JJ Cahill Memorial High School P&C for many years and has spent Christmases past serving lunch to the less-well-off. Her knowledge of the Mascot area was invaluable to the BHT. She continues to advocate for the preservation of the Botany's heritage and the promotion of its unique history.

(L-R) former BHT President Anne Slattery, Alice's niece and BHT Executive member Jacqueline Milledge, Ron Hoenig MP, Member for Heffron, and Bayside Council General Manager Meredith Wallace present Alice McCann (seated) with her Life Membership certificate in December 2021.



# Botany Historical Trust Christmas Function



Clarence Jones receiving his Life Membership certificate from Mayor Dr Christina Curry, with his daughter Tracey Jones and BHT President Rob Hanna



Former BHT President Anne Slattery with Pamela Brown



The traditional Christmas Quiz required concentration



Leslie and Robyn Haggett



Charmaine Piaud with John and Carole O'Brien





Ellaine Pickering, the winner of the lucky door price with Mayor Dr Christina Curry and BHT President Rob Hanna



Maria Privitera and Giovanna Fuoti



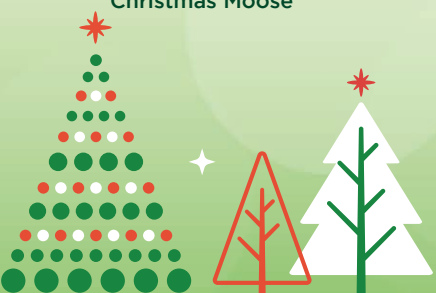
Councillors and BHT Executive (L-R): Richard Smolenski, Chris Hanna, Mayor Dr Christina Curry, Cr Jennifer Muscat, Rob Hanna, Cr Liz Barlow, Dr Peter Orlovich, Jacqueline Milledge and Ron Hoenig, MP



Richard Smolenski, Chris Hanna and the singing Christmas Moose



Jacqueline Milledge and Mayor Dr Christina Curry





*Merry Christmas*  
and Happy New Year!