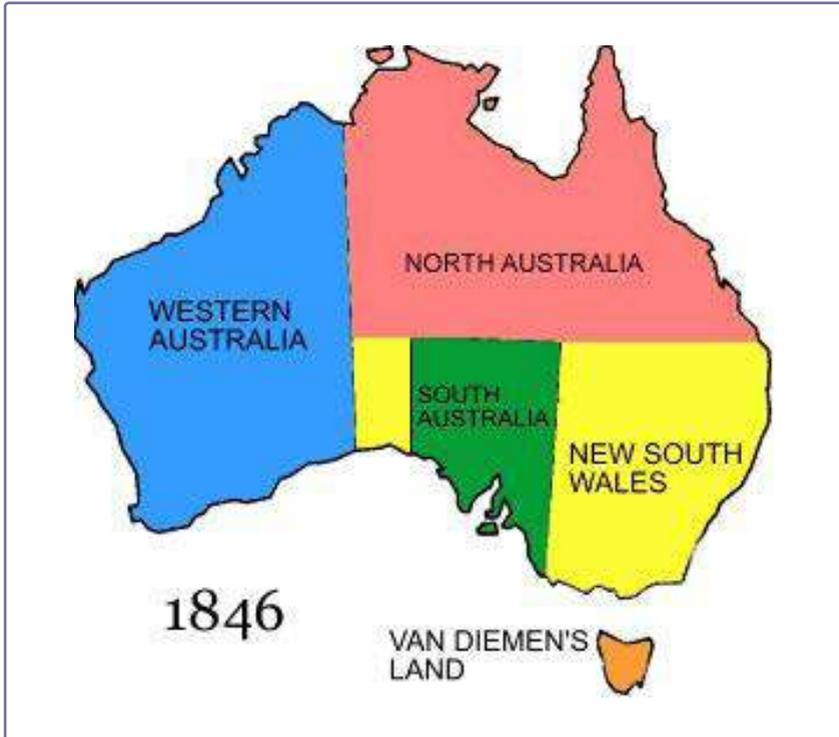


The Pioneer



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The Pioneer

Away from its headline pieces ... the *Endeavour* plan, Harbour Bridge ribbon, *Dunbar* table ... the Club holds many artefacts whose existence would be unknown to more than a few members. The menu card from the former Sydney Athenaeum Club's testimonial dinner for Sir Edmund Barton [see *The Pioneer*, April 2021] is one example. Among others are two small wax impressions ... one of the seal of a doomed colonial venture and the other of a signet ring belonging to an official involved in it, Edward Christopher Merewether,¹ which were presented to the Club by his descendant and former member, John Merewether, when entertained at lunch by then president Hugh (now Sir Hugh, Bt) Gore. The 1846 experiment, just one of several imaginative (or illusory) ideas in the 19th century for redrawing colonial borders, was an attempt to hive off from New South Wales as a separate colony most of what is now Queensland north of Gladstone and the Northern Territory (see cover). Forty six years later, in 1892, Sir Hugh's great grandfather, the Hon John Ferguson MLC (Qld), was president of the Central Queensland Separation League and would proceed to the United Kingdom to put another separation petition before the Colonial Office. According to family legend, Sir Hugh says, his ancestor "built his home in Rockhampton with a view of it becoming Government House (and no doubt he as governor)."

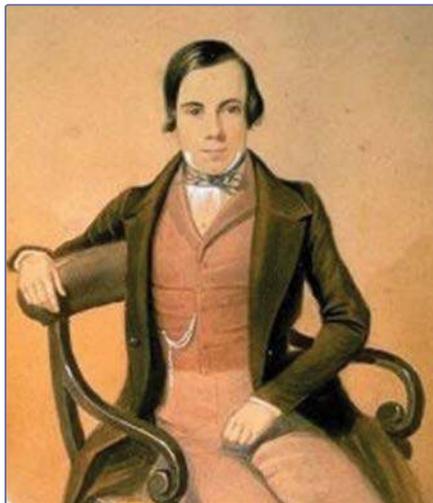
The story of the stillborn 1846 settlement ... it lasted only a few weeks ... is not even mentioned in most history texts but a recent piece of research by retired Anglican priest Dr Brian Roach devotes a chapter to it.² What drove the ill-conceived experiment? As far back as 1822 Commissioner John Bigge (Governor Macquarie's nemesis) had recommended the establishment of a convict settlement at Port Curtis (now Gladstone on the east coast of Queensland) and the idea was

periodically revived when difficulty was being experienced in finding work for time-expired convicts in Tasmania. In 1845 William Gladstone, the Tory politician who would change parties to become known as the “Grand Old Man” of English liberalism, became Secretary of State for the colonies and was confronted with the claims of English-speaking colonists to govern themselves. With convict transportation to New South Wales to end in 1847 the concept of a colony in the northern empty spaces, which would be exclusively penal and thus not in conflict with other members of society, was attractive to Gladstone’s ambition to attempt the reform of convicts generally. His intention was to populate the new colony with prisoners who “had mostly learned a trade while incarcerated and were not criminals in the ordinary sense...their offences being of a light character and, as a rule, the outcome of poverty and distress.” They would be sent to the new settlement where they were to be given pardons and “could be trained in habits of industry.”³

The man selected to establish the new settlement was Colonel George Barney, a military engineer who had originally been sent to the colony in 1835 at the request of Governor Bourke to take charge of the construction of Circular Quay at Sydney Cove. He proved to be an engineer of ability, clearing obstructions to the navigation of the Parramatta River and showing an interest in colonial defence by recommending establishment of a fort on Pinchgut Island to help protect Sydney Harbour from attack by foreign vessels. Gladstone’s directions as to the new settlement, created by an Order in Council of 17 February 1846, virtually set up a new state with an administration modeled on the colonial government in Sydney. Barney was offered the position of Lieutenant Governor with freedom to choose those he wished to go with him. As his Colonial Secretary he chose 27 year old Edward Christopher Merewether, the aide-de-camp to Governor Sir Charles FitzRoy (and before that to Sir Maurice O’Connell, lieutenant governor under Macquarie and ancestor of former member the late Maurice O’Connell).

Things went badly from the start. A founding party left Sydney on 8 January 1847 aboard the *Lord Auckland* and after an unpleasant voyage through rough seas which inundated the passengers’ cabins the ship was, on 25 January, at last within view of the site of the projected capital of the new colony. Colonel Barney and his chief officers attired themselves in splendid uniforms and made preparations for landing with all the ceremony befitting the birth of a new dependency of the British Crown. Guns were to be fired, flags displayed, and Colonel Barney was to land officially, amidst all the available pomp and circumstance of Vice-Regal display. Alas,

the planned ceremonial ran aground, literally, when at the entrance to Port Curtis the *Lord Auckland* became stranded on a shoal. With all hands labouring to lighten the ship by bringing the cargo to land it was not until 30 January that the interrupted formalities of swearing-in Colonel Barney and the other officials, now shorn of the picturesque accessories originally planned, could proceed. The first *Government Gazette of North Australia*, issued the same day in manuscript, proclaimed that all the land lying to the north of the 26th degree of south latitude should thereafter be called and known as North Australia.⁴



Edward C Merewether

The privations these pioneers then faced are recorded in a letter from one of them:

“We have three great evils to contend with here - excessive heat, heavy rains, and mosquitoes in millions, particularly after wet weather. We are thus in constant misery. After enduring a day of overpowering heat, and when we would fondly welcome the cool of the evening, we are literally tortured by these vagabond insects. We have no retreat either from the heat or the rain. On a warm day the atmosphere in the tents is suffocating, the thermometer ranging for days together at 110 degrees (Fahrenheit). I can compare it to nothing but an oven, the heat appearing all to concentrate in these delightful habitations. In wet weather (and we have experienced very heavy rains) the tents are of very little service. We have already undergone four weeks of these miseries, and from what we have suffered I believe I am correct when I say that there is scarcely one amongst us who does not regret coming on this mad expedition, which, I fear, must ultimately be a failure ...”⁵

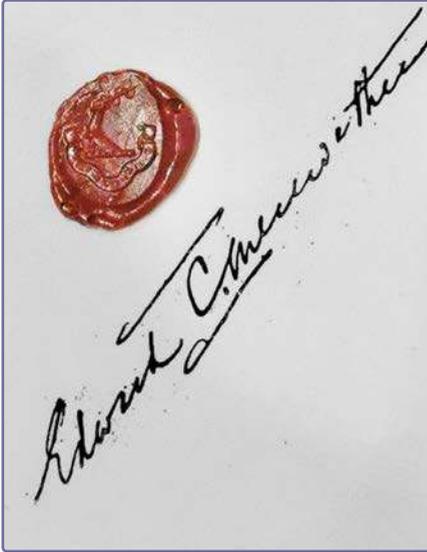
The thinking was prescient and the sufferings were destined to be short lived. Robert Peel’s UK government had fallen in June 1846 (having fractured over repeal of the Corn Laws), bringing Earl Grey to succeed Gladstone in the Colonial

Office on 3 July. Six weeks earlier, on 19 May 1846 while still in opposition, he had inquired whether any measures had been taken for establishing a new colony to be called North Australia and Gladstone's Parliamentary Under-Secretary replied that the scheme had already been carried out to a great degree. On 15 November 1846 Earl Grey wrote to Governor FitzRoy informing him that, "on a full review of the subject, Her Majesty's Government had determined to abandon the design, carried into effect by Mr Gladstone, for establishing in North Australia a colony for the reception of pardoned convicts ... Her Majesty had therefore been advised to revoke the letters-patent under which North Australia had been erected into a separate colony. The establishments formed there are immediately to be discontinued."⁶ In a later memoir Grey would argue against forming a society mainly composed of those who had been criminals.

On 7 April 1847 the steamer *Kangaroo* left Sydney for Port Curtis, carrying to Colonel Barney Earl Grey's dispatches ordering the abandonment of the Gladstone colony. How the news was received by the pioneers of North Australia is described in a letter dated 18 April:-

"We have been anxiously awaiting the arrival of the *Kangaroo*, which made its welcome appearance here on the 15th inst., bringing the joyful intelligence that the colony was not to be proceeded with, and that we were all to return to Sydney. Some few, indeed, who 'dreamed bright dreams of future glory,' might be seen mopish and melancholy at being thus so suddenly deprived of their short-lived honours, but they were lost - annihilated - amidst the general gladness that was diffused around. It will not be wondered at that we were thus rejoiced, when it is considered that for twelve weeks we have been living on soldiers' rations, some of which were so bad that they were altogether unfit for consumption, and that during that long period, in wet and dry weather, we have had no covering for our heads but canvas tents, which were totally inefficient to protect us from either heat, cold, or rain."⁷

The *Thomas Lowry* returned to Sydney on 9 May with 67 of the North Australian settlers, Barney remaining behind to explore the hinterland before returning to Sydney. So short was the notice of closure that ships proceeding to Port Curtis and bearing convicts from Tasmania and other ports encountered returning ships, whose captains conveyed news of the decision. Many then turned about and sailed back to their port of departure. Close cognizance of the timeline reveals that, as a consequence of the long delays in communications between London and New South Wales, by the time the founding party departed Sydney to establish the new



Edward Merewether - signet ring impression and signature
Photo: David Miller



Crown Colony of North Australia - seal
Photo: David Miller

colony on 8 January 1847, the decision to abandon it had already been taken in London, two months prior, on 15 November 1846. Thus the settlement proclaimed on 30 January 1847 lasted only until mid April, a period of about nine weeks. Whether the seal of the nascent colony held by his ancestor, of which the Club holds the imprint presented to it by John Merewether, was ever impressed on any official document must be in doubt.

With the recall of the settlers the recriminations began. Both Governor FitzRoy and Captain Barney were castigated in the press for not having taken into account the widely published report by the colony's former Surveyor-General, John Oxley, that the location, "with shoals at the Boyne River mouth dangerous to shipping, with an inadequate water supply, with insufficient arable land, with universally small and useless timber and steep, rocky mountainous country to the west,"⁸ was totally unsuitable for a settlement. Correspondence subsequently published proved both pro and anti the Governor and those involved in the experiment. FitzRoy was both blamed for costing the government several thousand pounds (the final cost to the British Exchequer came in at £15,402-6-2, about AUD3.4 million in 2021) without

apparent public benefit and defended for following Gladstone’s directive. Of longer term significance was denunciation of Earl Grey for abandoning the project, which evidenced dissatisfaction with administrative decisions made in London and a greater desire for local autonomy.

Dr Roach’s thesis is a study of the workings of political patronage in colonial New South Wales and in the aftermath of the failed North Australia experiment he finds but one example:

“Those of the official party did rather well for themselves: not only did they remain on the salaries paid in Port Curtis until they gained new and prestigious appointments [but] Colonel Barney became Chief Commissioner for Crown Lands in New South Wales, a member of the Legislative Council [and later] Surveyor General of NSW.”⁹

Other officials in the founding party were variously appointed as Inspector of Distilleries, Crown Solicitor for Civil Business and first Registrar of the Supreme Court at Bowen, Queensland. As for Edward Merewether, the 27 year old Colonial Secretary for the ill fated colony, his salary continued to be paid in full until he was appointed by Governor FitzRoy at the end of 1847 to be Commissioner of Crown Lands for the Lower Darling District.

So being associated with a profligate waste of public money harmed nobody’s political prospects.

Nothing’s changed.

John Lanser

- 1 Edward Merewether’s image is among the Club’s Beecroft portraits.
- 2 Roach, Brian: *Edward Christopher Merewether, A Study of Patronage and Benevolence in Colonial New South Wales, 1842–1893*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Newcastle, 2019.
- 3 Roach, op cit, at page 49.
- 4 Hogan, James: *The Gladstone Colony*, T Fisher Unwin 1898, at page 40.
- 5 Hogan, James, op cit, at page 42.
- 6 Hogan, James, op cit, at page 52.
- 7 Hogan, James, op cit, at page 63.
- 8 Unnamed correspondent to *The Sydney Morning Herald* quoted in Roach, op cit, at page 53.
- 9 Roach, op cit, at page 59

The Open Air School

Abbotsholme College, Killara¹

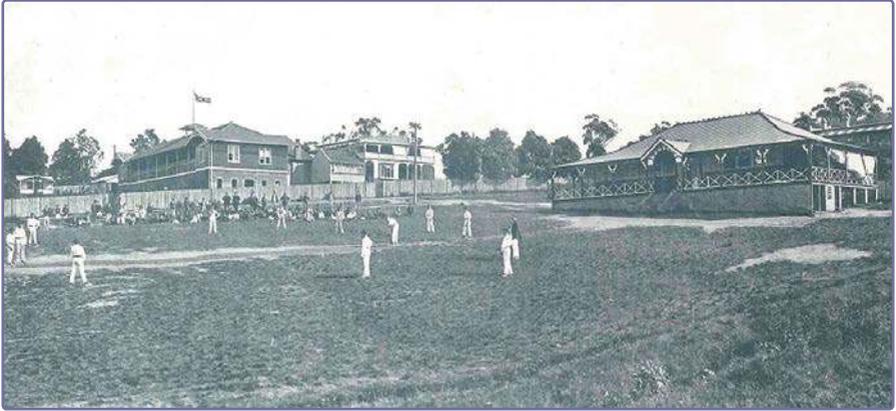
Victoria's proposal to build open air quarantine cabins as alternatives to hotels, and a return to school closures as part of in NSW's covid-19 control strategy, stir dormant memories of a long forgotten college in the Sydney suburb of Killara, which was reputedly the only such institution not to be similarly shut down in 1919 as part of the response to the Spanish influenza epidemic.

Abbotsholme College, one of many small, private venture schools of the early 20th century and better known in its time as The Open Air School, occupied almost all of both sides of Greengate Road between the Pacific Highway (then called Lane Cove Road) and the railway line. Its proprietor and principal was John Fitz-Maurice, a veiled figure (possibly a remittance man) from the English branch of an Irish titled family who claimed to have served during the Boer War as ADC to Lord Roberts before arriving in Australia around 1901. Said to be big, vigorous and dominating, about 22 stone, "an athlete, sportsman and out-of-doors man ... with a genial smile,"² he was ambivalently described by one former student as having "more charm and common sense than one is used to in the teaching profession."³

He founded and owned Abbotsholme and it did not long survive him. An astute observer of the school was Bernard Corlette, junior master there from January 1914 to April 1915, whose career would later take him to the headmastership of Tudor House. In



John Fitz-Maurice.



The College grounds and buildings on both sides of Greengate Road (looking south) with cricket in progress on a pitch which would have greatly assisted bowlers to surprise batsmen.

a reminiscence half a century later he speculated that Fitz-Maurice “had a past,” recalling:

“...for some reason he confided to me during my service with him [that] he was a younger son of a titled family in England ... I don’t know what he did but apparently his family was displeased and he came to Australia about 1900.”⁴

The Killara site was, the school prospectus enthused, “from a health point of view a real sanitarium ... the air is pure, dry, bracing ... the location is all that can be desired, *away from the excitements and temptations of large towns*”⁵ ... the italics are mine but the text conveys what the North Shore was like in 1908.

At first Fitz-Maurice leased only a two storey building on the southern corner of Greengate and Lane Cove Roads. He finally purchased the property in 1920,⁶ having already acquired, in October 1916, all of the land on the north side of Greengate Road reaching from the Greengate Hotel to the railway. Adjacent to the hotel was constructed a large classroom with verandah so it could double as a sports pavilion overlooking the *Abbotsholme College Playing Fields No 2*, as the sloping, uneven stretch of turf was grandly proclaimed to passengers on passing steam trains. The rear wall of the classroom was against the hotel fence, making it possible for enterprising

truants to climb through the windows and jump into the hotel grounds, whence they could scoot up to Gordon which, presumably, provided the “excitements and temptations” about which the school prospectus was so apprehensive.

Abbotsholme appears to have enrolled its first classes from January 1909.⁷ The school took forest green and gold as its colours and a 1922 prospectus shows the prefects in a grey uniform of military style, apparently modeled on that of The King’s School save that, instead of red, a green stripe ran down the seam of long trousers⁸ and there was a green, military-style peaked cap with gold badge.⁹ Fitz-Maurice adopted for his school his family coat of arms and its motto, *Virtute Non Verbis* (“by courage not words”), but the maxim by which Abbotsholme marketed itself was a manipulation of Aristotle: “Send us the Boy and we will return to you the Man.”

Why he chose the name Abbotsholme is not known. There is an English school of that name but he did not attend it. He understood marketing, so the name Abbotsholme may have appealed simply because it would be at or near the head of the many private schools alphabetically listed in directories. If that were the intention it led to embarrassment on at least one occasion recalled by a former student:



One of the open air dormitories.



Open air classes in progress.

“One Saturday the boys were waiting for the clean laundry to arrive, they were late for a cricket match. When the box opened up instead of cricket clothes it contained girls’ undergarments. *Abbotsleigh* laundry had been switched for *Abbotsholme*. The girls may have been able to get along with the boys [sic] clothes but the boys jibbed at turning out in girls [sic] panties.”¹⁰

Health problems are reputed to have forced Fitz-Maurice out of the army so it is unsurprising that health became a byword for his school. “UNEQUALLED IN ITS HEALTH RECORD” boasted an advertisement in 1914¹¹ which claimed that “there has not been a single case of sickness in the school since its foundation” and pointed to “open air classrooms ... open air dormitories” as a factor. Sleeping accommodation and teaching facilities were, for the most part, all exposed to the elements:

“the [verandah] sides were only about four feet nine inches high and there was a good overhang on the roof but there were no blinds [and] sometimes when it rained we became wet.”¹²

Classes were also largely open air, conducted on verandahs and separated only by low partitions, an arrangement which readily made for distraction:

“I could hear the senior class next door and, sitting there having finished ahead of [my] class, I often wanted to call out the answers when I could hear the pupils stumbling along with maths or Latin or French...”¹³

Corlette commented that:

“we all had to wear mortar boards and gowns when teaching as most of the classes were quite visible to the street ... the only protection from wind and rain were canvas blinds which could be let down but this was restricted to very bad weather so as not to deprive the public of the spectacle of the thriving educational establishment.”¹⁴

So successfully was Abbotsholme marketed as ‘The Open Air School’ that in later years it was alphabetically listed under O rather than A. During the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1919 it was exempted from closure but tightly quarantined for many months. “Strict observance of the rule – NO VISITORS PERMITTED”



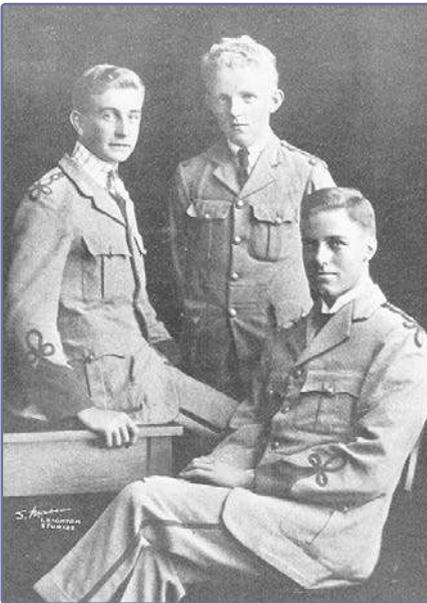
Morning drill.

was announced in the press,¹⁵ prefects acted as pickets at the gates, letters were fumigated and gauze face masks worn.¹⁶ A photographic darkroom was requisitioned for “bacteriological spraying,” as one student called it¹⁷ and another remembered it:

“every morning we were lined up and filed into a room with a steam kettle contraption spouting steam and eucalyptus which we all had to take our turn at inhaling several times. We had no sickness, other than three or four of us being off colour for a couple of days, being isolated, dosed with castor oil and eventually let loose again.”¹⁸

Open air church services at the College temporarily displaced the weekly march to St John’s Church at Gordon, while the requirement that students stay *14 feet* apart makes today’s social distancing strictures at just 1.5 metres look like compulsory close contact. Moreover the distancing rule did not apply when playing contact sports, which just shows that irreconcilable exemptions are not new.

The ethos of the school was certainly Spartan. The day commenced with compulsory cold showers, daily in summer and every second day in winter, then



Prefects in school uniform.

after breakfast there was drill.¹⁹ Ex-pupils recall a very military basis with much marching up and down to and from class and from meals, frequently to the beat of a kettle drum.²⁰ The school had its own senior and junior cadet corps and Corlette found it amusing that:

“when War was declared in 1914 Fitz thought it a great opportunity to declare a sort of private war and made the boys march up and down, blowing bugles, on a vacant piece of land adjacent to a property occupied by an inoffensive German couple.”²¹

Class work began with scripture reading and prayers and every Sunday (save during the ‘flu lockdown) the boys marched to St John’s for the morning service.²² Sunday afternoon was set aside for writing home to parents and mail was ‘monitored’ so that nothing hinting at homesickness was allowed to undermine Abbotsholme’s ethos as a “home school” (one student expressly remembering the College as “more like a home than the traditional boarding school”).²³ Another former pupil summed up: “the discipline was firm but the charm of Fitz-Maurice pervaded the whole school.”²⁴



Blazer pocket of Lloyd Lucas.

The prospectus emphasized that:

“great pains are taken to ensure that the boys are instructed in correct social forms and usages. Each dining table is presided over by a master so that the boys’ table manners are properly supervised.”

Billy Bunters were deterred by enjoining parents not to send their sons “indigestible” supplementary rations in “boxes from home.”²⁵

“Loafing in leisure time is always discouraged” warned the prospectus and there seem not to have been many unstructured hours. Boys were permitted a weekly excursion to Gordon’s primitive picture theatre in Werona Avenue, the *Empire*,²⁶ and there were rugby, cricket, tennis and bush walks in the undeveloped Killara area. Fitz-Maurice owned a week-end bungalow at Woy Woy, designated the Abbotsholme Holiday House, where students lived from time to time, an old idea which is new again in a number of private schools.²⁷

Alumni

In the absence of proper records, listing alumni of note is reliant upon student recollections or serendipitous discoveries in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. So far, I have identified among latter day politicians Herbert Fitzsimons, who became a member of State Parliament²⁸ and Graham Pratten, destined to be both an

MHR and later an MLC. One former student insists that (Sir) Vernon Treatt, who would be leader of the NSW Liberal Party, was briefly at the school before moving to Shore²⁹ and rather too much has been made of the fact that two future Liberal prime ministers, Harold Holt and (Sir) William McMahon, passed briefly through Abbotsholme before moving to Wesley College (Melbourne) and Sydney Grammar School respectively.

In the world of finance and commerce Abbotsholme can claim Ernest Richardson, who became deputy governor of the Commonwealth Bank, and (Sir) Theo Kelly, head of Woolworths, who claimed to have got his start in retail running the Abbotsholme tuckshop.³⁰ Ron Patrick (later of Patrick Steamships) is remembered, as are the scions of Hardie and Gorman (auctioneers) and Nock and Kirby (hardware).³¹ (Sir) Frank Packer, “a mischievous youngster and poor student ... who frequently switched schools,” was at Abbotsholme for a while.³²

In the military, Kenneth Eather, commissioned as a second lieutenant while in Abbotsholme’s cadet unit in 1919, would become Major General Eather and lead the Australian contingent in the London Victory Parade on 8 June 1946. In the legal world Jack Cassidy (later a knighted QC) paid his way as an evening law student by teaching at Abbotsholme (when Harold Holt was a pupil).³³ While the



The tuck shop.

school was an unlikely nursery for artistic talent, it was there that ink and water colour artist Cedric Emanuel first felt the impulse to draw:

“I often stayed in the classroom after school to draw from the comic strips. I remember being dragged out for football practice. Of course art in those days was looked upon as something queer in a boy’s make-up and it certainly was not taught.”³⁴

Social prominence

What put Abbotsholme on the map and Fitz-Maurice into the social calendar was a succession of generous bursary schemes. In April 1918 he offered scholarships covering “full board, residence and tuition ... to sons of the next 12 married men enlisting in Carmichael’s Thousand.”³⁵ In July 1919 he offered a further 20 scholarships to the sons of fallen servicemen to commemorate the signing of the armistice.³⁶ In 1920 the Prince of Wales’s visit to Australia was marked with an offer of 50 scholarships, tenable for a period of two years, and when Abbotsholme’s Prince of Wales Scholars marched through the city in an official welcome they carried (with the Prince’s consent) his three-feathers insignia.³⁷ The



Prince of Wales Scholars marching through Sydney.

following year the Repatriation Department was offered a further 50 scholarships for deceased soldiers' sons, leading *The Sydney Tatler* to laud:

“Had others followed the example of Mr FitzMaurice the whole question of the education of dead soldiers' children would have been solved long ago.”³⁸

By January 1923 Fitz-Maurice was routinely receiving public acclaim and Abbotsholme, with its extensive playing fields, tennis court, own cows, orchard, vegetable garden and the “remarkable health record” qualified for inclusion in *The Sydney Tatler's* series “Stories of Success.”³⁹ At speech day 250 people assembled in the school dining hall to see the school captain, Theo Kelly, present Fitz-Maurice with a clock and gold wristlet watch. Presentations were also made to all staff, led by headmaster John Boyle.⁴⁰ No one present could have thought, even for a moment, that within six weeks Fitz-Maurice would be dead, within six months Boyle would be gone, and within 16 months Abbotsholme itself would have ceased to exist.

Fade out

In mid January 1924 Fitz-Maurice entered Bayview House private hospital at Tempe after supposedly collapsing at the wheel of his car. Reported to be suffering from a nervous breakdown he died suddenly on 28 January. The following day eight pall bearers of old boys and staff followed over 100 Freemasons in regalia past the entire student body from the chapel to the graveyard of St John's and an interment with Masonic rites in the presence of a Who's Who of state and local dignitaries.⁴¹

In the short term it appeared to be business as usual, the *SMH* announcing that “notwithstanding the death of Mr Fitz-Maurice the college will be conducted as formerly by the same staff.”⁴² That was wishful thinking, for Fitz-Maurice had died intestate, a single man without heirs, and on 12 March 1924 letters of administration were granted to the Public Trustee to administer his estate.⁴³ The goodwill was acquired by Robert Cordell Firebrace, an ordained Liberal Catholic priest and Theosophist,⁴⁴ but without Fitz-Maurice's financial resources he could not make a go of it and “there was a lot of speculation about what would happen, everybody knew that [Fitz-Maurice] owned the school and there was a bit of a scramble to get to other schools.”⁴⁵ Headfort School (in Stanhope Road, Killara), took some and Knox, which had opened only a year beforehand, was on the

lookout for pupils. Barker also picked up quite a number. “We knew it was going to close” recalled another, but Abbotsholme seems not so much to have closed as just faded away, without fanfare, in April 1925.⁴⁶

On 23 May 1925 the subdivided real estate was offered for sale by auction. Then, on 1 June, a blaze, believed to have been arson, broke out in the empty junior dormitory block.⁴⁷ Only smouldering ruins remained the next morning.⁴⁸

The Fitz-Maurice legacy

On 24 October 1924 a group of former students and staff gathered at Sargents in Market Street Sydney for the only known Abbotsholme Old Boys’ Dinner, although for many years about a dozen former students annually gathered in St John’s churchyard for a ritual remembrance of their respected principal.⁴⁹

Sadly, the United Kingdom beneficiaries of his intestacy⁵⁰ evinced no similar respect for their unwitting benefactor’s creation, Abbotsholme, nor for his earthly remains. There were no funds provided for a headstone and the grave was to remain unmarked until 2005 when Ku-ring-gai Historical Society put that right.⁵¹ By the simple omission to make a will the man who “had more common sense than one is used to in the teaching profession” allowed The Open Air School to be blown away by his own passing. Only one public artefact of Abbotsholme is known to survive: the College’s First World War honour roll, now mounted on the north wall of the nave in St John’s, is the only tangible testament to Abbotsholme College’s one-time existence.

John Lanser

- 1 For a more detailed history of Abbotsholme see my article in *The Historian*, journal of Ku-ring-gai Historical Society, volume 41, number 1, November 2012.
- 2 *Millions*. [journal of the Millions, later Sydney Club], 15 September 1922, page 13.
- 3 Recollection of Eric Moore, 1967. Moore was one of many former Abbotsholme students who responded to a published request from Sydney University academic, Dr Bob Peterson, for information about the college. I thank Dr Peterson for making this correspondence available to me.
- 4 Bernard C Corlette [hereafter “Corlette”], letter to Dr Peterson dated 13 December 1967 at page 1.
- 5 *Abbotsholme College, Killara, NSW*, no date but about 1923, Mitchell Library 373.911/38.
- 6 NSW certificate of title volume 1843 folio 36. The *Kilmont* unit block now occupies

the site of the main building and the mixed commercial/residential building (formerly a service station) on the Greengate Road and Highway corner sits where the Abbotsholme tennis court used to be.

- 7 Although it is frequently said to have opened in 1908, the first advertisement that I have been able to locate is in the *Sydney Morning Herald [SMH]* of 25 November 1908 and the first to specify a commencement of term appeared on 16 December 1908, advising that classes would begin on Wednesday, 20 January, 1909. This suggests that although the school may have been formally in existence in 1908 it was not operating until the following year.
- 8 Frank Sharp [a Peterson correspondent], letter dated 7 November [sic December] 1967.
- 9 Recollections of Athol Davies in letter dated 29 November 1967; Paul Laurence in letter dated 27 November 1967; E B Hart in undated letter.
- 10 Malcolm Hirst, [a Peterson correspondent], 25 November 1967.
- 11 Singleton *Argus*, 19 March 1914, page 2.
- 12 SH Roberts, [a Peterson correspondent], 4 December 1967.
- 13 Roberts, note 12 supra.
- 14 Corlette, note 4 supra, page 3.
- 15 *SMH*, 19 July 1919.
- 16 Cornwell, Harry: *History of Abbotsholme College, Killara, 1908-1925*, unpublished typescript, 6 pages, no date, with whom I had many conversations when researching *The Historian* article [supra note 1].
- 17 Cornwell, Harry, note 16, supra.
- 18 Roberts, note 12, supra.
- 19 Roberts, note 12, supra.
- 20 Cornwell, Harry, note 16, supra.
- 21 Corlette, note 4 supra, page 4.
- 22 The daily routine is published in the prospectus. St John's, during the lifespan of Abbotsholme, was not the current brick structure but a smaller, Blakett-designed stone building running north-south, the north end of which survives as the present chapel.
- 23 HR Robertson, [a Peterson correspondent], letter dated 26 November 1967.
- 24 Eric Moore, note 3, supra..
- 25 Prospectus [no date].
- 26 For more about this very basic building see *The Historian*, volume 36 number 1, October 2007 at page 102.
- 27 Prospectus [no date], also *Millions*, 15 September 1922, page 13.
- 28 J Alford Walker, [a Peterson correspondent], letter dated 18 December 1967; *Daily Telegraph*, 30 January 1924.
- 29 Claude Booth, [a Peterson correspondent], letter dated 28 November 1967.
- 30 Confirmed by Sir Theo in conversation with me in 1990.
- 31 Bruce Smith, [a Peterson correspondent], 25 November 1967.

- 32 *Australian Dictionary of Biography* volume 15, MUP, 2000.
- 33 *Australian Dictionary of Biography* volume 13, MUP, 1993.
- 34 Oral history interview recorded in 1986 and held by National Library of Australia, OH ORAL TRC 2094.
- 35 *SMH*, 16 April 1918. The offer was valued at £70 per annum per pupil and was later said to have been “availed of by a number of men who went to the front”: *SMH*, 15 November 1920. *Carmichael’s Thousand* was the second so-named (successful) recruiting programme (the first being in 1915) led by Ambrose Carmichael, MC, a former minister in William Holman’s NSW Labor government, to raise a thousand rifle reserve recruits to join the AIF.
- 36 *ibid.*
- 37 *SMH*, 18 October 1921.
- 38 *The Sydney Tatler*, 11 January 1923.
- 39 Note 38, *supra*.
- 40 23 December 1923. Fitz-Maurice had no tertiary qualifications. John Boyle, a graduate of Dublin University, was the academic brains of the school and had the title “headmaster,” Fitz-Maurice always being designated “principal.”
- 41 *Daily Telegraph*, 30 January 1924; *Millions*, 15 February 1924, page 1. The burial plot is A24.
- 42 6 February 1924.
- 43 NSW Probate Index number 123097.
- 44 Theosophy was fashionable at the time and the original broadcasting licence for station 2GB was held by the Theosophical Society, “GB” being the initials of Giardina Bruno, an Italian philosopher highly regarded by Theosophists.
- 45 Cornwell, Harry, in conversation with me, 1990.
- 46 I have been unable to locate anywhere a press report of closure. However Morris Ochert, who was a seven year old student at the time, told me in 1996 that the school closed over the Easter vacation in 1925, when Easter Day fell on 12 April.
- 47 *SMH*, 2 June 1925. There was a fire in Gordon Public School the same night.
- 48 *Daily Telegraph*, 3 June 1925.
- 49 Recollection of Diana Cornwell, who accompanied her father, Harry Cornwall, to one of these memorial meetings, which Sir William McMahon attended.
- 50 According to the Public Trustee [letter 25 November 1981] the estate was sworn at £18,035 and shared between a brother, four nieces and a nephew.
- 51 On 17 July that year members of the Society, Masonic brethren in regalia, and parishioners, more than 100 in all, gathered in the graveyard to dedicate a headstone newly placed on the plot which had remained unmarked for 81 years.

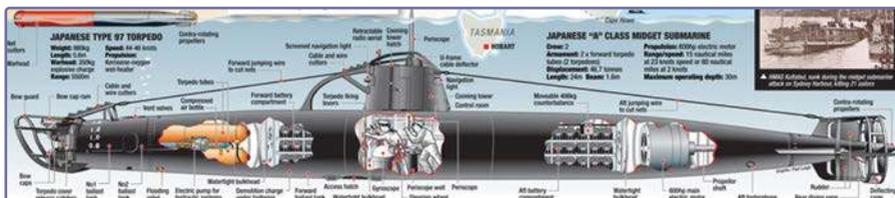
Discovery and Management of the M24 Japanese Midget Submarine

*Address to the History Lunch, 8 June 2021, by Stirling Smith**

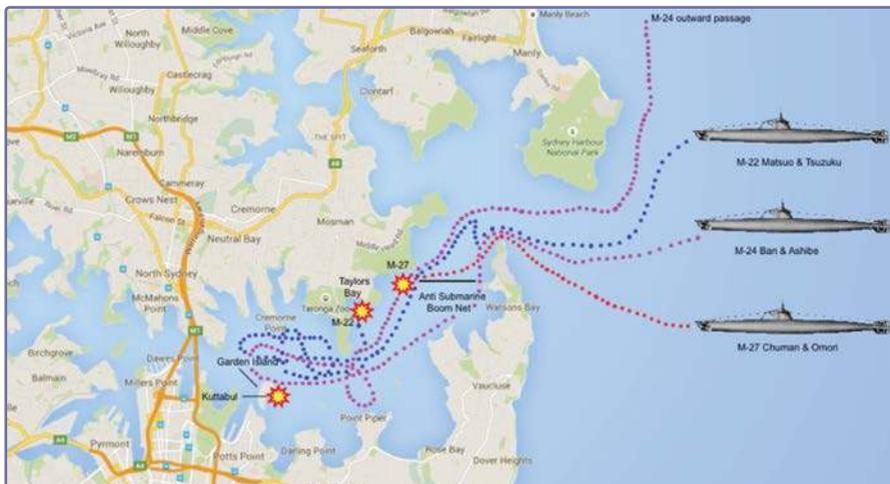
This is a tale of considerable planning and personal bravery, but ultimately one of failure.

On the night of 29 May 1942 five large I-Class Japanese submarines positioned themselves approximately 56 kilometres north-east of Sydney Heads. Three of the I-Class submarines carried Type A Kō-hyōteki-class midget submarines on their hulls and the other two carried *Glen* float planes in watertight hangers.

At 3 am the next day the I-21 launched its *Glen* plane to undertake a reconnaissance mission. This aircraft circled around Sydney Harbour several times before returning to its carrier submarine. Although it was spotted on several occasions it was assumed to be an American aircraft and no alarm was raised. When the *Glen* rendezvoused with the I-21 it attempted to land but crashed into the sea. Both of the crew survived and the pilot, Warrant Officer Susumu Ito, was able to report the presence of a number of large ships moored in the harbour, including the American heavy cruiser USS *Chicago* and HMAS *Canberra*. The flotilla's commanding officer decided to launch his midget submarines to attack the allied shipping. Next day the Imperial Japanese Navy submarines approached to within



Type A Kō-hyōteki-class midget submarine [Image from Heritage NSW]



11 kilometres of Sydney Heads and released the three midget submarines, M22, M24 and M27. The *Ko-hyoteki* midget submarines had a crew of two and were armed with two 17.7 inch torpedos.

In 1942 Sydney was considered to be well behind the front lines and under little threat of direct attack. However, on a cold clear night in May 1942 World War II officially came to a sleepy and ill prepared Sydney.

All three midget submarines were able to enter the harbour. However, M27 became entangled in anti-submarine defences and when the crew realised they could not escape they detonated a scuttling charge, destroying the submarine and killing

themselves. M22 was cornered in Taylors Bay and repeatedly depth charged. The crew of M22 chose to commit suicide by shooting themselves rather than be taken prisoner.

After being recovered from the harbour the remains of M22 and M27 were joined together and sent on a tour of Australian regional towns to raise funds for the Royal Australian Navy Relief Fund and the King George Fund for Merchant Sailors. This composite submarine is now on public display at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

However M24 was able to avoid a partially constructed anti-submarine boom net and work its way up the harbour towards Garden Island. It was then able to fire both its torpedoes at USS *Chicago*. Both torpedoes narrowly missed the *Chicago*, but one hit the seawall at Garden Island and failed to explode. The other passed under the Dutch submarine *K9* and struck the harbour bed beneath the depot ship HMAS *Kuttabul* where it exploded, killing 21 sailors (19 Royal Australian Navy and two Royal Navy). M24 then managed to slip out of the harbour and completely disappear.

For over 64 years one of the great Australian wartime and maritime mysteries was the whereabouts of the third and last Japanese midget submarine, M24, which



HMAS Kuttabul after the attack by M24. [Australian War Memorial]



Trial M24 Diver Open Day on the 75th Anniversary of the raid on Sydney Harbour

attacked Sydney Harbour on that night. It was not until November 2006 that a group of weekend divers called 'No Frills Divers' located M24 off Bungan Head, Newport, Sydney. The wreck was immediately identified to be of national heritage significance. It was listed as an Historic Shipwreck under the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act and placed on the NSW State Heritage Register. The M24 is seen as a unique heritage site internationally, representing one of only a handful of such submarine wreck sites located worldwide and in its original battle context.

Since its discovery in 2006, Heritage NSW (Department of Premier and Cabinet) in conjunction the Commonwealth and Japanese governments has developed several innovative and award-winning management strategies to protect and interpret the site. These include an offshore video monitoring system, web-based exhibition, onsite commemorative events, 3D modelling and a trial public diver access program.

***About the speaker**

Stirling Smith is Senior Maritime Archaeology Officer with Heritage NSW (Department of Premier and Cabinet). In addition to being project manager of the M24 site he specialises in maritime archaeology, military and polar heritage. He has also worked extensively in Aboriginal, historical and military archaeology and is president of the Australasian Institute for Maritime Archaeology (AIMA).

The Warrigal Club

1884-1931

This is the second in a series. The first dealt with the Athenaeum Club, Sydney (1881-1920) which in its heyday had been favoured by Sydney's self-proclaimed literary and professional elite and by parliamentarians of intellectual aspiration (published in The Pioneer, April 2021).

The Athenaeum's demise was the accumulative result of:

- *an ageing membership,*
- *the sharp operating impact of World War I, and*
- *the expiry of a generous 25-year Castlereagh Street clubhouse lease granted to it in 1885 by the visiting British politician Lord Rosebery.*
- *From 1905, the Athenaeum had also been progressively overtaken by the more vibrant, younger membership of the neighbouring, newly founded University Club.*

This article discusses the Warrigal Club (1884-1931) which in its day leased distinguished townhouse properties in Macquarie Street. It became known as a preferred accommodation venue for pastoralists and country parliamentarians when in Sydney.

The northern extension of Macquarie Street (created in the 1840s) had resulted in a long row of classic townhouses that enjoyed sweeping views across the Botanic Gardens to the Harbour.

By the 1880s many of the original owners had moved to grander properties on acreage in the Eastern Suburbs and the townhouses became surplus to need. They were usually leased out for use as boarding houses, schools and Government agencies. This classic streetscape remained largely intact into the 1920s when, sadly, the creep of the medical profession from Sydney Hospital resulted in modern office replacements as Macquarie Street consultants' rooms.



Macquarie Street looking north c 1889

Between 1887 and 1931, the Warrigal Club variously leased two of the most distinguished of these townhouses for its clubhouse. Both, as it happened, escaped by chance the demolition fate of their neighbours and still stand as sole survivors of the one-time glorious Macquarie Street Victorian terrace row: *History House* and the *Royal Australasian College of Physicians*.

But let us go back to the Club's 1884 beginning. Proudly rural, the Warrigal Club drew its name from the aboriginal word for a *wild dog* or *dingo*. The Club started in leased rooms in O'Connell Street close to the Australian, Union and NSW clubs and to the shipping and commerce centres of the day. It had, as its clubland niche, the particular purpose of

“promoting frequent social intercourse between gentlemen engaged in pastoral pursuits in NSW and adjacent colonies”.



George Oakes 1813- 1881

A former Warrigal Club member reflected in 1938:

“the idea was to get away to a place of our own and not always be under the eye of our bankers and financial agents.”

Many Warrigal Club members would also additionally have had membership of the Australian, Union and NSW clubs.

Quickly prospering with 145+ members, the Club outgrew its original temporary O’Connell Street rooms and in 1887 took out a lease on the large, former townhouse of George Oakes at 133 Macquarie Street.

Born at Parramatta in 1813, Oakes was a wealthy pastoralist, politician and the eldest son of colonists Francis Oakes and Rebecca Small, whose colonial portraits are a prominent part of the Australasian Pioneers’ Club art collection. Built in 1871-72, the Oakes townhouse had a capacity for accommodation, large public rooms and servant quarters at the rear. It had become available for lease as a result

of George Oakes's earlier untimely death in 1881 (run over by a steam tram when leaving Parliament House).

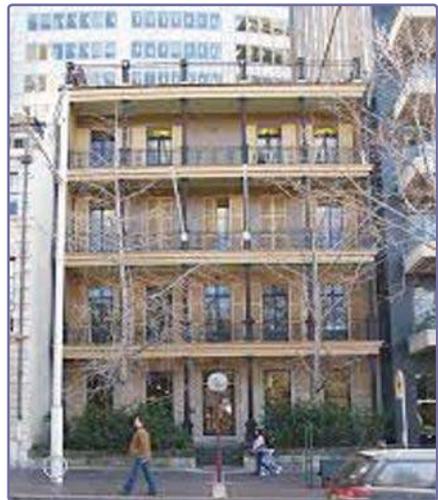
The Oakes townhouse remains standing. Subsequent to the Club's relocation in 1889 a few doors further up Macquarie Street, it variously became boarding house rooms, medical consulting rooms and a doctor's residence. Since 1970, it has been the headquarters of the Royal Australian Historical Society.

In 1889, the Warrigal Club took a long lease of a former 1847 Fairfax family townhouse at 145 Macquarie Street. Sir James Reading Fairfax (1834-1919) was a Club member and, as with the Athenaeum Club, the convenience of a long lease from a generous benefactor would prove to be fatal for the Warrigal Club, postponing as it did the need to address owning its own clubhouse.

The Warrigal Club moved into 145 Macquarie Street in August 1889. Later, ownership of the building passed down within the Fairfax family to (Edward) Ross Fairfax (1843-1915), the younger brother of Sir James. He had earlier that year retired to England, where he remained until his death in 1915. The resulting long overseas absence by the owner would eventually impact the club's future.



Warrigal Club 1887-89
(now Royal Australian Historical Society,
History House)



Warrigal Club 1889-1931
(now Royal Australasian College
of Physicians)

Meanwhile, the years after the move were good for the Warrigal. In 1910, seemingly secured with its lease, the Club sympathetically remodelled the Fairfax building, adding an extra storey, six additional bedrooms, a basement billiard room, a roof promenade and an elevator. Newspapers reported that it had “*all the comforts and convenience of a well-appointed home*”. This description probably conveys the real niche of the Warrigal, “a well-appointed home” rather than a classic gentlemen’s City Club.

Supporting this home-away-from-home argument the Warrigal had a *female secretary*, a Mrs Florence Collins, who had resided at the Club with her three children. Some members would later describe her simply as the *housekeeper*. Somewhere in there may lie the origins of the later problems between Ross Fairfax’s estate and the Club in 1921-22.

During its heyday prominent Club members were Sir John Lackey, Sir William Lynne, Sir Henry Braddon, William Abbott and Tom Stirton. There were dinners for parliamentarians and the Governor-General was the occasional resident guest. The Club had few intellectual aspirations and was better known for quirks such as (a) a long-standing Japanese waiter (Kinji) and (b) two older retired rural members resident in the clubhouse who had not spoken to each other for 20 years.

During 1921-22, it would appear that the English-based executors of Ross Fairfax moved to sell the Macquarie Street property (with the Warrigal Club as a tenant and 10 years remaining on its lease). In 1938, a former member would claim:

“we made an offer, never heard anything more about it and then one day we found it had been sold over our heads without giving us an opportunity to buy it at their price”.

It is a moot question whether senior Club members had taken their eye off the ball and/or had grown too comfortable with the Fairfax family connection. The Club had probably also lost a critical connection when Ross Fairfax’s older brother, Sir James Fairfax, died in 1919.

During the last years of its lease, the Warrigal fell into hard times. The rural depression reduced its economic base and members drifted to the more viable Australian, Union and NSW clubs. In August 1931, after some 45 years, the Club was wound-up and the remaining furniture, crockery, etc were sold at public auction.

1931 was not a year for great sentimentality. The newly-formed Macquarie Club looked at the property, as did the Union Club which had been under threat of land resumption at the time in Bligh Street from the City of Sydney Council.

Between 1931 and 1937 the building was unattractively sub-leased into boarding house and medical consulting rooms awaiting re-development. In 1933, the Women's Pioneer Society leased a floor (following the demolition of Burdekin House).

Happily, in 1937 the building was rescued by the decision of the members of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians to establish its new College in Macquarie Street (close to Sydney Hospital and not next to the Medical School on the University's main campus), further cementing the medical profession's creep along Macquarie Street. The first president of the new College was Sir Charles Bickerton Blackburn.

Both History House and the Royal College record their buildings as once being the clubhouse of the long-lost Warrigal Club.

Robert Whitelaw
Honorary Librarian

*The next in this series will be the short-lived, politically-focussed, **Sydney Club** (1857), which re-emerged as the **Victoria Club** (1859) and later still in the 1860s as the **Reform Club**. The last was located in Macquarie Street conveniently next to the Premier's Department on the site of today's Astor Apartments.*



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