



Convict Trail Project

November 2023 Newsletter

A VIRTUAL WALK UP THE GNR: The Quarries that built Circuit Flat Bridge. [Contributed by Elizabeth Roberts]

In our virtual tour along the Great North Road today we will pause to look at the quarries where the convicts cut the stone to build the Circuit Flat Bridge. Some of our CTP members visited there recently with the DLHHS outing at the end of October. My apologies for being unable to attend I was house-bound with COVID and am very thankful to the Australian tax payers for enabling me to receive the Antiviral medication.



Greg Powell a long-time member of the CTP project turned up with a map of the Quarry sites he and deceased CTP member and bushwalker, Joan Robinson, put together showing the sites. I am not

publishing the map as these are sensitive sites some containing moveable heritage. If anyone is interested in exploring these sites please contact us. The National Parks may like to think about interpretation for these sites that are between the Mogo Camp and Picnic Area and Circuit Flat Bridge.



So far six separate areas of work have been identified, five of these lie along the edge of the low escarpment. One is identified by a large mushroom shaped rock nearby. The best site lies in a separate area to the rest and contains several worked and partly worked blocks and when I saw it well over ten years ago after a fire, you could have sworn the men had downed tools just a few days earlier and walked off the site and would be back soon. The other sites are mostly worked out leaving the evidence of where they had cut rock from, were thinking of cutting rock from, and the

piles of trimmings, as they work up the stone blocks. We are indebted to Rob Cunneen for photos taken at the latest visit. Very little is known about who did the work here, as with the bridge there is no correspondence for 1831.



As the bridge was probably built by Clares Bridge Party, formed from Road Party 25, it is possible the quarrying was done by Road Party 25 who contained some skilled stone workers before they were moved back to Wisemans where we know they were by 1832. The other possibilities were Iron Gang 8 and Iron Gang 9, but from the work known to be carried out by them, they probably did not have the skill necessary. Other unanswered questions are where were the workers camped and where did they get their water from. Greg has an area marked "stockade site?" that I have not seen before and as I am still slowly recovering I have not been to look at it. This is an area that could do with a lot more physical research but given the density of the scrub coverage this is difficult.

Next month we will look at the road through the sandy area along the headwaters of Mogo Creek and move onto Mt Manning.

Thomas James Bridge Report.

The day Elizabeth Roberts tested positive to COVID, she was to meet with Miro Cujic at Thomas James Bridge. Fortunately Rob Cunneen was able to take her place and this is his report:- Liz had arranged to meet yesterday with the Hawkesbury Council representative, Miro Cujic, at the Thomas James Bridge (TJB). They were to discuss new positions for the Convict Trail signs and plaques, which will be removed during the reconstruction of the bridge. Unluckily, Liz was indisposed at the appointed time, and so I stood in for her.

Miro's title is "Coordinator for Infrastructure Recovery" for Hawkesbury Council, and he told me he had 38 projects to oversee in addition to TJB, and so his briefing was of necessity fast paced. This is a report both on what is happening at TJB and of his plans and his suggestions for our signage. FIRSTLY, a bypass above the bridge is being excavated (See the photo below courtesy of Tony Simpson). There is a waterfall coming off the cliff above the bridge, which is the source of the little watercourse that flows under it. The bypass is being formed between the bridge and the cliff, and will feature a culvert to take the water underneath. Once the bypass is completed, the

dismantling of TJB will commence (a December date still to be announced). Miro has recently worked on the restoration of the Lennox Bridge, on which the sandstone blocks were all cleaned (of grime and lichen) and now has a surface of bright fresh sandstone. He wondered what Convict Trail might think of TJB possibly receiving this treatment? He told me no decision has yet been made. I was quick to offer my own opinion that this was a horrible idea, but that I would refer the question to the Committee. I suggested that the lichen and grime would re-establish itself within 20 years in any case.

Miro also proposes to keep the current wooden railing, which I told him I think is a good idea if it's possible. There is an archaeologist stationed permanently (during the work) at TJB, in case something is unearthed. For the past month, the poor girl has been sitting there with apparently nothing to do – as yet. On Liz's behalf, I requested permission to observe the dismantling of TJB when it occurs, and Miro had no objection, and invited Liz to contact him when the time approaches. SECONDLY, a pedestrian access path is to be constructed above the road connecting the Ferry to the base of the Devine's Hill ascent. TJB is too narrow to contain this path, and so the bypass that is now being built will be repurposed as a part of this walking path, once the bridge is back in service.

THIRDLY, he proposes to construct a viewing platform (possibly reusing the old bridge decking) on the river side of the western bridge abutment (see the photo below of the current view from this position). This is the best place to view the stonework of the bridge, and it is near this platform that Miro proposes to install our two bronze plaques. The Convict Trail sign will also be installed free of charge, adjacent to the platform. He suggests the sign be aligned perpendicular to the road, rather than parallel as it is currently, and that we have the same sign printed for the reverse side as well, so that it can be seen by traffic travelling in either direction.

Is it possible to have an identical sign printed to the one made already?

The rocks, timber and earth, being excavated and removed during the work, is transported and temporarily stored at the council depot opposite the Gunderman chapel. Miro offered us free firewood or stone from this depot. If we just contact him he would have it left outside the gate there. With that, he brought the interview to an end and rounded up his troops and whirled off to coordinate the next road recovery project. [contributed by Rob Cunneen]

The Council's weekly update of a few days later reads:-

Settlers Road Major Landslip – Significant reduction of the landslide material will continue over the next week. The road is gradually being restored to two lane width, making it easier for vehicles and contractors to manoeuvre through the site.

Thomas James Bridge Restoration – Preparation works for the temporary access road around the bridge will continue this week, as well as the installation of drainage pipes, including the concrete form and pour.

These works will continue to take place between the hours of 6:30am to 6pm Monday to Friday, and from 6:30am to 2pm on Saturdays.

Delaney Civil prioritises the safety and well-being of the community. The project is progressing according to the program, however external factors and unexpected circumstances during the landslide repairs can occasionally lead to extended delays. Please plan ahead and allow for additional travel time in the event of delays due to the construction activities. Delaney Civil acknowledges that these delays are inconvenient and apologises for the inconvenience caused, every effort is being made to minimise disruptions while the project is completed as efficiently as possible and to the highest safety standards.

Please also be advised that due to the unforeseen and unknown challenges with this complex project, and with safety of residents and workers paramount, we anticipate shorter, unplanned closures at less notice. Road closures will only occur in the event a section of the road becomes unsafe for passing traffic and is deemed necessary for keeping the community and site workers safe.

We may require a full week closure of the site in December to install the temporary bridge. We will provide 3 weeks notice to residents prior to work commencing. Please do not hesitate to contact Emily Mallon at Delaney Civil if you wish to further discuss any of the above, or have any additional questions, on 0484 267 907 or on email community@delaneycivil.com.au.

St Albans Bridge, St Albans - TfNSW Project

Transport for NSW has made the decision to postpone the St. Albans Bridge Repair Project until February/March 2024 when they will commence repairs to Pier 4. There will be NO impact to the road. The aim is to increase load capacity from 15t, pending structural assessment following completion.

CTP AGM

The CTP AGM was held on Wednesday 1 November at the HSHS premises in Kenley Road Normanhurst. Mari Metzke the Chairperson presented the Annual Report and Michael Young presented Treasurers report.

All positions were declared vacant and the following Board members were elected

Mari Metzke representing Hornsby Shire Historical Society

Rob Cuneen representing Dharug and Lower Hawkesbury Historical Society

Ken Bradley representing Dural and District Historical Society

Pam Wilson representing The Hill District Historical Society

Elizabeth Roberts representing strategic members

Fay O'Donnell and Jan Kofran representing individual members

Michael Young representing business members.

Later the Board elected the following as the Executive:

Mari Metzke [Chairperson], Elizabeth Roberts [Vice Chairperson], Jan Kofran [Secretary] and Michael Young [Treasurer].

Acquittal of CTP Signage Grant

The CTP was supposed to have completed this grant by the end of 2021 but COVID intervened. More recently the collapse of Thomas James Bridge and the collapse of the road in two places at Bucketty, has meant that we are waiting to install the last two signs at these localities. We have again received an extension on the final acquittal of this grant. We would like to thank the grants team at **Environment and Heritage, Department of Planning and Environment** for their understanding in this matter. Hawkesbury have agreed to install the sign at Thomas James Bridge and we are hoping to negotiate something similar with Cessnock Council for the Bucketty signs.

Foundation for Rural Regional Renewal - Strengthening Rural Communities — Small & Vital [From Museums & Galleries of NSW newsletter and of possible interest to some recipients]

The Strengthening Rural Communities (SRC) Small & Vital stream gives small remote, rural and regional communities across Australia the opportunity to access funds for a broad range of initiatives that directly and clearly benefit local communities.

Grants up to \$10,000 are available for a broad range of grassroots, community-led initiatives that directly and clearly benefit local communities that strengthen local people, places and climate solutions, with a preference for smaller communities (populations under 15,000). Applications are accepted on an ongoing basis and assessed quarterly.

Regional Stakeholder Forum - 30 November 2023.

This free annual forum is an opportunity for Regional and Western Sydney museums to network, share stories and be inspired by current topics relevant to the regional collecting sector. This year's forum presentations highlight the efforts of regional museums to achieve sustainability through focusing on various strategies: whether that be through best practice collection management, fundraising, engaging museum volunteers, or working on sustainable collection practices.

This Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences forum is held in partnership with Museums & Galleries of NSW and Regional Arts NSW.

Bookings essential: <https://powerhouse.com.au/program/regional-stakeholder-forum-2023>

IMAGinE Awards night This event takes place the day prior to the Regional Stakeholder Forum. The awards presentation night will take place at Sydney Modern, Art Gallery of NSW on Wednesday 29 November, followed by an evening in the gallery.

Civil court records – partly digitised

[Of possible interest to researchers from the State Archives]

A selection of the minutes of proceedings from the early Court of Civil Jurisdiction, which operated from 1787 to 1814, have been digitised and are now available online.

The minutes include the date of sitting, a summary of the arguments put forward by both parties and the judgment of the court. The court had jurisdiction over all civil matters and heard pleas relating to lands, houses, tenements, debts and trespasses.

The records are **indexed** and can be searched by first name and surname. Click on details to view the full record and if it is digitised a thumbnail of the image will be visible.

Our closure and reopening dates for the holiday period are:

State Archives Reading Room, Western Sydney Records Centre

Closed from Saturday 23 December 2023

Open from – Tuesday 9 January 2024

Caroline Simpson Library, The Mint

Closed from Saturday 23 December 2023

Open from – Tuesday 16 January 2024

Possible Holiday Excursions

Museum of Sydney, open daily, 10am–5pm, free entry, permanent display

Yura Nura: People and Country presents contemporary Aboriginal reflections on the history of Sydney and colonisation.

The relationship between the British and Aboriginal peoples largely began around Warrane (Sydney Cove) on the site where the first Government House was built and the Museum of Sydney now stands (near present-day Circular Quay).

This display provides a glimpse into the complex relationship between this significant site and Aboriginal people, culture and land, then and now. Arrernte/Kalkadoon filmmaker Rachel Perkins' award-winning documentary *First Australians* explores key events in the early years of the colony and includes personal reflections on the impacts still felt by Aboriginal people today.

Three artworks by Gordon Syron, a Worimi/Biripi man from the mid-north coast of NSW, offer a contemporary artistic interpretation of the arrival of the First Fleet in Sydney Cove in 1788 and its continuing legacy.

Western Sydney Records Centre, Saturday 18 November, 10am–3pm, \$20 entry

Are you eager to dive into the fascinating world of local history research? Do you want to uncover untold stories and shed light on the past of your community? If so, join the Royal Australian Historical Society for a seminar on researching and writing compelling local histories. **MUST REGISTER** with State Records

And in closing

The final date for articles for the Pick Vol 11 is Wednesday 15 November and on that day we will be holding a short research meeting at HSHS Museum starting at 10am.