

## NEWS FROM DOWN UNDER

On 16th September Neil and Marion embarked on a great adventure to Australia with the promise of regular reports from “Down Under”. Neil has come up trumps and we are delighted to publish the first of his “dispatches”.



Neil at a desk in Newcastle, NSW

### **Rain Again Down Under**

True to form and with impeccable timing, our Boeing 777 aircraft delivered Marion and I safely on the runway at Perth airport in driving rain. How often this has been our travel experience! In some way happy to recognise this elemental greeting, we were of course thoroughly pleased to be met also by Marion's brother Richard and his son Philip. They guided us to the waiting car and then drove us to Philip's house in Rockingham where, we discovered, the rain had stopped and all was well with the world.

### **First impressions**

They can be misleading, but after 13 days in Australia, I am prepared to risk my arm for you with my first impressions!

Australia is a foreign country, of that there can be no sort of doubt. But it is also a country with a very British feel, a Britishness which I found misleading. For example, as you look at the shops and the streets, it does feel foreign and I naturally expected to drive on the right and felt the urge to prepare to speak in a foreign language. But no, we drive on the left and the language is English, albeit with variants from the home variety. So I keep feeling that some deeper foreignness is about to hit me and then it comes as a friendly and familiar experience. This disconcerting experience will abate, no doubt, in time.

### **Commander Stanford**

One of the things we had been looking forward to was visiting Philip's submarine. Philip, as I explained, is Marion's nephew but more importantly for our visit, he is the Commander of HMAS Rankin, a submarine of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). The sailor on watch shouted to the world that the Commander was boarding and we walked across the gangplank and tried to work our way down the tight rungs of several ladders which lead down from the outside to the cramped interior. Philip guided us through the submarine in great detail, explaining its intricate parts and his own role of Commander. What an enormous privilege it was to crawl all over such an amazing and complex vessel with the Commander there to answer our questions!



## Water and space



It is virtually impossible to get away from water when in the populous areas of Australia. The day after our visit to HMAS Rankin, we drove to Fremantle and took a river boat to approach Perth by water with the impressive skyline slowly moving into view. Whilst there, we visited the Botanical Gardens and enjoyed the sense of space which is Australia. In sharp contrast to home, Australians are spoiled by the abundance of space, but they rather feel it differently and more than once we heard the phrase 'the tyranny of distance' spoken. At home, suburbs sit cheek by jowl. In Australia, suburbs are miles apart, or I should

say, kilometres apart, as the Australians now use metric measurements. A shame, as we could do with a bit of support in our determination to resist the hegemony of metrication.

## Dr. Ralph Stanford

Our few days in Western Australia were now at an end and we flew to the great city of Sydney. Yes, you guessed. It was raining, very hard, as we landed, but a short taxi journey later, it was warm and fine as we knocked on the door of Marion's other Australian nephew, Ralph.

Thanks to Ralph, we had hospitality in Sydney's Randwick District for a few days. It was comforting to know that if we were to suffer from any sudden back ailments, Ralph, as an orthopaedic surgeon, was ready with knife in hand to operate on us!!

## History and prehistory



Sydney is a special place with a fascinating history and some wonderful buildings and structures, and not just the world famous Harbour Bridge and Opera House. Marion and I decided to climb the pylon of the bridge rather than walk to the top of the bridge arch itself, partly because of the value for money involved. For a tiny price, we visited a fascinating museum of the building of the bridge and slowly climbed up to the top of one of the four pylons. From here, we had spectacular views of the Circular Quay, Opera House and the old district, The Rocks. It was fascinating to read about how the bridge was built without any 'health and safety' support, although amazingly, only 2 men died after falling from the bridge under construction. The archive footage and old photographs were a moving testimony to the vitality and enterprise of the young Australia of the 1930s.



Ralph organised a visit for us to see some signs of the Aboriginal life which existed before European settlement. We travelled to Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park where we were met by 2 young men of aboriginal origin. They escorted us through the terrain and showed us a wide variety of things from the ancient past, including some powerful rock engravings dating back 2500 years. The engravings were hand cared on the face of rocks which stand in the bush much the same as 3000 years ago. The expanse of rock was electrifying and moved me. The rocks, explained our guides, were like a classroom of the past in which

younger men would learn about the animals and fish of the area. There are engravings of animals and fish, even a whale, and some of the pictures have a moral tale attached to them, mainly about the necessity for sharing in any successful community. Our Guides then sprung a surprise! We were taken to a sudden barbecue with Kangaroo meat on the menu! Just a little, washed down with freshly squeezed lemon juice, but it was delicious. Then we all played traditional Aboriginal children's games which was great fun.

This first encounter with aboriginal people was really moving and I would have loved to hear and see more, but our time was again pressed by the need to travel. But first we needed dinner! So, Ralph took us to the shores of Pitt Water and to Pasadena, a shore-line restaurant. Here we feasted on oysters and flat head fish before returning to Randwick and preparing for the next leg of our journey to Newcastle by train. Here we were invited to stay in the home of Marion's brother Richard in Blackalls Park, nearby the city of Newcastle.

### **Wine and Convicts**

It was in the Newcastle area that we came face to face with the work of convicts, the men deported to Australia from Britain in the 19th century as a punishment for crimes. The first evidence was 'The Bogey Hole' which is a basin of solid rock hand hewn out to create a swimming pool by the ocean and refreshed by each tide with fresh water. The conditions in which this work was undertaken can only be imagined as harsh. Added to the dangers of falling into the water and the tough nature of hewing out solid rock was the reality that a convict would never be in a social position to swim in the pool. The social oppression of this work was to be a mark of other convict experiences too. We had been invited to travel up the Hunter Valley which leads from the river and Lake Macquarrie into a famous wine region. Between 1826 and 1936, some 700 convicts, in teams of 50, were required to work in all weathers to make a road, the Great North Road, from Sydney to the Hunter Valley, some 240 kilometres. Some worked in leg irons. They lived in tents and make-shift shelters, and what suffering they must have endured! Walking on sections of this road and imagining the poor souls at work back in 1830 made me feel sick at the judicial cruelty of the time and I felt for the men whose liberty was snatched away by the British landed gentry who sat in magistrates courts and sent men away from home and family for



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what now would appear to be minor crimes, often committed under the strong pressures of poverty and hunger in 19th century Britain. I am not one for gesture politics but an apology from the descendants of these cruel men to the descendants of their working class victims is one that definitely appeals to me now.

### **A scourger**

The centre of this Hunter Valley in those days was Wollombi which we visited with great interest. The museum used to be the Court and we read with horror that in addition to a Magistrate, Court Clerk and various Policemen, there was a 'scourger' on the staff and paid 45 pounds for his work of beating people, mostly convicts who had, in the view of their warders, re-offended in some way. What a shocker!

Well, phase One is about to be completed and soon we will fly to New Zealand in pursuit of the Stanford Family established there.

More news from us in Magna!

**Neil and Marion**

## **Games Night**

**On Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> November, there will be a great family Games Night in the New Church. Come and try your hand at a variety of games and win prizes!**

Watch for details as soon as possible

## **Scarlet and Lace**

invite you to a

**"Christmas Come  
All Ye"**

**on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> December  
in the New Church  
£5 Tickets available**

