



Clan Forsyth

SYDNEY BRANCH

NEWSLETTER

CLAN FORSYTH SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA – SYDNEY BRANCH
PO BOX 396, ROSEVILLE NSW 2069 **DECEMBER 2007**

Merry Christmas and a **Happy New Year**

From the Clan Committee to all our members and their families.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: Greetings to all Forsyth Clan Members

A couple of Newsletters ago, we advised that an old oil painting from the 1880s had been found. To our surprise a second identical painting has also been unearthed. It appears several might have been commissioned, perhaps one for each child. One theory is that after families had become successful in Australia, if they had come from humble beginnings in England, they wanted to create an air of respectability and one way to do this was to have paintings of their forbears from England commissioned. We are not yet sure if this is the case here, but we are intending to find out if possible. The alleged subject of the painting was Martha Forsyth (nee Rosewall), who died in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1832, and is buried at Westgate Hill Cemetery. At that time the family were certainly in the poorer classes.

A second surprise came our way recently, with a Real Estate advertisement for sale of a house in Ann Street Willoughby. The advertisement noted that at the rear of the house was an 1880s stables building. Some of us went to see them, as the only stables dating from that time in that part of Willoughby would have to have belonged to the Forsyths.

It turned out that the stables were in fact the coach house from the rear of the Forsyth house 'Tyneside'. These are described in 'Willoughby: The Suburb and its People' by Esther Leslie in 1988 as follows.

'Tyneside' is at 143 High St Willoughby, and was built in 1883-84 by Robert Forsyth on land bought by his father James Forsyth from Henry Hocken Bligh in 1870. Tyneside is built on the site of James's original home on land bounded by High Street, Ann Street, Robert Street and Stan Street. The Forsyth's 'Rosewall' Tannery was just to the east of the Tyneside land. The 2 storied sandstone house was surrounded by extensive gardens, including a bridge over the creek near a rockpool. Tyneside is recorded in the register of the National Trust of Australia (NSW).

Robert Forsyth lived in the house until 1904 and owned it until 1908 when he sold it to the Bank of NSW. The house was rented until sold in 1919 to John Noble who resold it the following year to Dr J C Shand. In 1923 Frederick J Williams bought the house and was still living there in 1930.

It is known that it had a fine coach house on the northern side of the grounds up to the 1960s.

Many long standing residents can recall the interest that was created by the arrival of guests in their finery to attend balls'

Local historians thought they had disappeared long ago. It is marvelous that new discoveries continue to be found and help to fill in the picture of our family's life in the 1800s.

David Forsyth: President of the Sydney Branch
I wish you and your families all the best for
the Christmas season and a safe and happy 2008



The stables/coach house at the rear of the Forsyth house 'Tyneside'

A Family History Article

Recently an article from the London Guardian newspaper was reprinted in the Sydney Morning Herald. It was titled '*History shows the apple hasn't fallen far from the family tree*'. Written by Katherine Hughes, the article started with the line 'One of the great advantages of the family history boom is that most of us have been obliged to give up what Freud called the 'family romance' – the belief that we are related, a couple of generations back, to people richer, grander or cleverer than boring old us.'

She went on to say that a recent Ancestry web site poll showed we are 'far more likely to discover that our grandparents were not married' than to find we are related to someone rich and famous. She argues that family history research is a great way of cutting through all the rhetoric about how good things were 50 or 100 years ago. The Ancestry poll showed that people back then lived pretty much as they do today, albeit without the modern benefits of computers etc.

Family life was far from stable with a high degree of illegitimacy and a fair amount other discrepant relationships. Six percent of those polled learned that their parents were not married. A similar percentage found their grandparents were not married. These 'secrets' about family members tells us a lot about the habits then of personal reticence and the parochialism of the recent past. In the 1930s for example, 100 miles away was indeed another world, where a person could have a bigamous relationship, an illegitimate child, or change their name and start again. Up until the 1950s, the media and communication links were sluggish and it was possible to keep one step ahead of the prying eyes of a person's native community.

'Now we are catching up our recent ancestors thanks to all the documentation, civil registers and census data available on line. What that data is telling us is that our ancestors' lives were really no different from ours in terms of personal and family relationships.'

ABOUT CLAN FORSYTH

The Clan Forsyth Society was reconstituted in Scotland by Lord Lyon in 1979. There are branches in most Australian States as well as USA, Canada and New Zealand. The Forsyth/Forsythe name has firm roots in Scotland and extends back in history to the Bordeaux region of France.

To discover more about your clan's history, the clan's branches and membership, please contact us by post: **Clan Forsyth Society Sydney Branch, PO Box 396 Roseville NSW 2069.**

For your family's own Forsyth history contact Clan Genealogist: **Judy Forsyth on 02 9809 1562 or by email: jaforsyth@ozemail.com.au.**



The clan banner goes on display at the various Scottish events and gatherings around Sydney and greater New South Wales. This photo shows the banner on display at the Australian Celtic Festival at Glen Innes in May 2007.

At right shows some of the clan members at the festival. Back Row: L. to R. Jan Friar of Wallangarra, Judith Neenan of Sydney, Andy Forsyth of Inverell, Jim & Judy Forsyth of Sydney, Elizabeth Forsyth of Armidale. Front row: L. to R. Elizabeth Briggs of Combara, Val Forsyth of Inverell. Jan, Judith, Andy, Elizabeth & Val are all descended from John & Mary Forsyth. Other members of this family had left before the photograph was taken.

The Rev. A. Forsyth & his Percussion Lock

In the small town of Belhelvie, about 12 km from Aberdeen in Scotland, the **Reverend Alexander John Forsyth** succeeded his father James Forsyth as the reverend of the old Kirk (church) of Belhelvie. His dad had held the post for 52 years. Born on 28th December 1768, the Rev. Alexander was a tinkerer, someone with the fondness for smithing and alchemy. As with many Scots of the time he also liked to go bird hunting.

He had problems with the firearms of the time. Since the 1600s flintlock rifles were used, but there were drawbacks. They were unreliable with a tendency to misfire, especially when damp (and Scotland was often damp). Also the mechanism operated with a flash of gunpowder before the shot went off, thus scaring away the birds.

Somewhat annoyed by these deficiencies the Reverend set about solving the problem. He figured that if the ignition flash could occur in a closed system he would eliminate the early warning for the ducks and hopefully increase the firearm's reliability.

He finally found a compound of potassium chlorate that would, when sharply struck, ignite the black powder which fired the shot. He then set about designing and manufacturing the world's first percussion lock gun.

In 1806 the Rev. Alexander Forsyth attracted the interest of Lord Moira, Master-General of the Ordnance for the English Army. His Lordship set up quarters for Alexander in the Tower of London where he could continue his work. However there soon was a change of staff and Alexander fell out of favour with the English.

Then in 1807 he applied for a patent and set up business in Piccadilly as Forsyth & Co. and remained associated with the company until 1819.

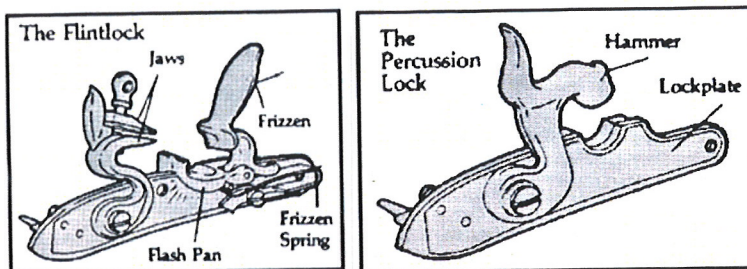
Although the English continued to show little interest in his invention that little Frenchman, Napoleon Bonaparte, offered to buy the invention for a considerable sum.

Alexander refused the offer and returned to Belhelvie where he established a local savings bank and vaccinated parishioners from smallpox with the vaccine developed by Dr. Jenner.

Finally in the 1840s the English Army adopted the percussion lock rifle for their use. The decision came too late for Rev. Alexander as he had died on 11th June 1843, a happy old man. He was buried in the cemetery next to his beloved ancestors in the old Kirk of Belhelvie.

Eventually his invention was officially recognised and in 1930 a plaque was erected in The Tower of London in honour of his achievements. There is a replica of the plaque at the "Quad" of Kings College at the University of Aberdeen.





The Rev. A. Forsyth's invention is on the right.

COMING EVENTS

Brigadoon at Bundanoon Highland Gathering on Saturday 5th April 2008.

Join other Forsyth clan members and their families for a fabulous day of highland games, food and fun.

Details: www.highlandsnsw.com.au/brigadoon

Australian Celtic Festival at Glen Innes, NSW from 5th to 6th May 2008.

140 clan chiefs are inviting their clan people from around the world to come to **The Gathering in July 2009 in Edinburgh**. Maybe some Forsyth Clan members from Australian will join in.

Start saving your pennies. Details: www.thegathering2009.com

Keep a watch out for our next newsletter giving details of the Annual General Meeting and Annual Church Service.

Some Scottish Humour

Jock Forsyth decided to call his father-in-law the "Exorcist" because every time he came to visit he made the spirits disappear.

Jock Forsyth's nephew came to him with a problem. "I have my choice of two women," he said, "a beautiful, penniless young girl whom I love dearly, and a rich old widow whom I can't stand."

"Follow your heart; marry the girl you love," Jock counseled.

"Very well, Uncle Jock," said the nephew, "that's sound advice."

"By the way," asked Jock "where does the widow live?"

DUNDEE CAKE

This cake is popular alternative to Christmas Cake. It is less rich, and not so indigestible. It is originally a Scottish Christmas cake from Dundee.

Line an 8" cake tin with baking parchment. Preferably use springform tins, as they are easier. Set aside. Cream together 8oz butter & 8oz sugar until light and fluffy.

Beat in 4 eggs, one at a time, with a little flour taken from the total weight of 10oz. This stops the eggs curdling. Stir in orange rind, finely grated.

Sift together the rest of the flour, 1 teaspoon baking powder and a pinch of salt. Use plain flour and baking powder if you can, as it gives a better stability for the heavy fruit.

Fold the flour mix into the creamed mixture and add 2 oz ground almonds, 1lb of mixed dried fruits and 4 oz candied peels.

Spoon into the prepared tin, smooth the surface, hollow it slightly in the middle so that when it rises it will not peak. Arrange whole blanched almonds around the top.

Brush all over with beaten egg white. Bake in a pre-heated oven at 170 C for about three hours. After the first hour, put a sheet of baking parchment on top, to prevent it going too dark and burning. Test with skewer.

When it comes out clean the cake is ready.

