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JOHN SUTHERLAND 1816-1889 Builder and Politician

Wor. Bro. John Sutherland was born on 16 February 1816 near Wick, Caithness, Scotland, son of John Sutherland, crofter, and his wife Louisa.

His formal education was slight and, as one writer put it "his native shrewdness unadorned by literary ability." He trained as a carpenter and in 1838 paid his passage to New South Wales where, after early struggles, he prospered as a builder in Sydney. So much so that by the time of his retirement in 1860, aged 44, his business in Abercrombie Street, Sydney, had handled some large-scale projects. In 1866 he successfully sued the New South Wales Government for 3514.0.0 pounds for contracts carried out in 1853-54. In 1863 with John Frazer and William Manson he took up 287 square miles near Port Denison in the Bourke district of Queensland; he held another 250 square miles in South Kennedy and at Lindisfarne in North Gregory in the 1870s.

Sutherland took an early interest in politics, supporting Bro. (Sir) Charles Cowper in the 1843 Legislative Council elections. In 1857-68 and 1871-72 he represented Phillip Ward on the Sydney Municipal Council and was Mayor of Sydney in 1861. From 1860-1880 he sat for Paddington in the Legislative Assembly. He professed himself to be a "workingman's M.P." He advocated improved working conditions and wages and had cordial relations with the Trades and Labor Council; but he was more concerned with economy in public works. He supported Cowper and Bro. (Sir) James Robertson, and by opposing overseas contracts and encouraging local manufacturers he gained a "protectionist" reputation; but his attitude was pragmatic and in October 1868 he helped to defeat the protectionist Premier (Sir) James Martin. He was Secretary for Public Works under Robertson and Cowper in 1868-70 and won repute, even though his early attack on treasury procedures caused public alarm.

In the same office under (Sir) Henry Parkes he broke politically but not personally with Robertson. In the Parliamentary confusion of 1877 he refused to serve with either Robertson or Parkes, but in December reluctantly accepted the Works Portfolio in Most Wor. Bro. James Squire Farnell's ministry, and in 1878 sought efficiency in railway contracting and planning.

Sutherland had become an expert in a post that needed administrative skill and political courage and, although he debated land law reform and promoted technical education, he preferred his own field. He has been described variously as "blunt", "straight-forward, businesslike and thoroughly honest," and also "warm tempered and warm hearted", happier at his desk than on the floor of the House. He accepted the popular policy of rapid railway expansion but insisted on elaborate surveys and careful planning, and argued that local iron products would encourage Australian industry and eventually be safer and cheaper. His attitude provoked long controversy that was not helped by his lack of any real consistency of action or knowledge of political economy.

Between September and December 1873 Sutherland and Parkes took up 3760 acres of mineral leases in New South Wales near Jamberoo, 40km south of Wollongong, and held another 408 under conditional purchase; they persuaded Frazer, The Governor, Bro. Sir Hercules Robinson, (Sir) Saul Samuel and others to back them in a vain attempt to mine coal. About 1874 with James Rutherford he set up the Eskbank Ironworks at Lithgow and in the next year the firm lost over 100,000.0.0. pounds under his management, despite the freight concessions he had arranged.

In 1878 John McElhone questioned whether Sutherland as a partner in the Lithgow Valley Mining Co., which had Government contracts, could remain in parliament; he was cleared by the Elections Qualification Committee. In February 1880 he resigned his seat because his un-limited liability company had accepted a government contract for re-rolling old rails. He re-entered Parliament in November of that year by winning the seat of Redfern but did little.

During the period of his term as Minister for Works he fought for the extension of the railway south across the George's River.

In 1875 a survey was completed for a line that commenced at Balmain where a deep water terminal was planned as a coal loader for the mines in the south. The line would pass under the Western Railway at Petersham thence to Rocky Point (Sans Souci) where the George's River was shallower thus providing lower bridge costs than at Tom Ugly's Point where the road ferry crossed. It was planned that the line would skirt Thomas Holt's oyster leases then climb the Goumea (Gynea) Range then drop down to the Hacking creek and along that creek's western bank to Otford where a 505 metre tunnel through the Bulgo Range would bring the line back to the coast at Stanwell Park, a sea-side village 29kms north of Wollongong, thus giving access to the southern coal mines.

Holt sought too high a price for the sale of his land required for the Railway Right of Way. The National Park had been declared and he had lost his rights to mine coal in that area so he tried to recoup some of his loss by the sale of the land for the Right of Way. The residents of Hurstville seized the opportunity and offered an alternative route at a very low cost so the Government, or Sutherland, then planned the present route.

The area south of the George's River into which Sutherland pushed the new railway was known prior to 1835 variously as "the land south of the George's River", "the southern land", "the Port Akin district" and finally "the Port Hacking district".

In 1817, The Governor, Bro. Lachlan Macquarie had commenced a survey of the whole of the penal colony. Governor Brisbane continued the work as best he could, but the survey was not completed until Governor Bourke's time, by Surveyor-General (Sir) Thomas Mitchell. The colony was divided along English lines into Counties, "Hundreds" (an area approximately 10 X 10 miles = 100 square miles), and Parishes.

In the general Proclamation of May 27 1835 Governor Bourke proclaimed "...and we do further will and ordain that the said Hundred of Woronora shall be.." and in the same proclamation that there was to be "...Four and distinct Parishes-the Parish of Southerland, Parish of Wattamolla, Parish of Bulgo, and Parish of Heathcote..". The Parish of Southerland embraced all that area between the George's River, in the north, and Port Hacking and the Hacking River, in the south, and between the Kurnell-Cronulla coastline in the east and the Woronora River in the west. Mitchell adopted "Southerland", from the area named by the Norse in the 9th century when, chafing under Danish rule, they migrated to the islands of Orkney, Shetland, Faroe and Hebrides and the northern tip of Scotland. This spelling was retained on most maps until after 1881 when it was standardised as Sutherland. The linking of Forby Sutherland, humble sailor, who died of consumption and was buried at Kurnell during Cook's 1770 exploration of Botany Bay, and the Parish of Southerland makes a sentimental appeal; but there is no historical basis or authority for the perpetuation of this myth.

Sutherland Railway Station was opened on 26 December 1885 and was named after John Sutherland and the township that followed took its name from the station. The Shire was proclaimed in Government Gazette on 16 May 1906. According to the (Shires) Proclamation the name was selected by The Governor, Most Wor. Bro. Sir Harry Holdsworth Rawson, on the advice of the Executive Council.

In 1881 John Sutherland was nominated for the Legislative Council but did not take his seat; he represented Redfern in the Legislative Assembly in 1882-1889. A moderate supporter of Bro.(Sir) Alexander Stuart's 1883-85 government he was bewildered by the mid-1880s political confusion produced by recession and fiscalism. Despite this he joined Parkes's 1887-89 Ministry in his old portfolio. As railway administration deteriorated and the use of the unemployed on public works grew, his contracting methods proved a problem for the free-trade ministry.

From the 1860s Sutherland had been a magistrate for Sydney, a Vice-President of the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts and a committee-man of the Benevolent Society of New South Wales. He was a Trustee of the Mutual Benefit Building Societies and Chairman of the Australian Mutual Fire Insurance Society. As well as being a member of the Craft he had a long connexion with the Oddfellows' and Foresters' friendly societies. He was a Trustee of the Savings Bank of New South Wales and Vice-President of the Highland Society of New South Wales. he was a member of the Board of Technical Education from 1883 and of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works in 1889.

John Sutherland married Mary, daughter of Captain Ogilvie of Campbelltown on 2 May 1839. They had three children, two sons who died at an early age and a daughter. He died of diabetes at his home in Abercrombie Place, Sydney, on 23 June 1889 and was buried with Masonic Rites in the Congregational section of Rookwood Cemetery. He was survived by his wife Mary and by their daughter. Although his estate was valued at probate at 11,286.0.0 pounds his liabilities necessitated a memorial fund to assist his widow, which the Trades and Labor Council supported.

Wor.Bro.John Sutherland had an interesting Masonic Career.

His date and place of initiation remain unknown.

He joined the Lodge Australian Social Lodge No.260 Irish Constitution, now Lodge Antiquity No.1, United Grand Lodge of NSW, as member No.57 but interestingly enough the records show:

John Sutherland Age 41 Builder 49 Abercrombie St. Redfern

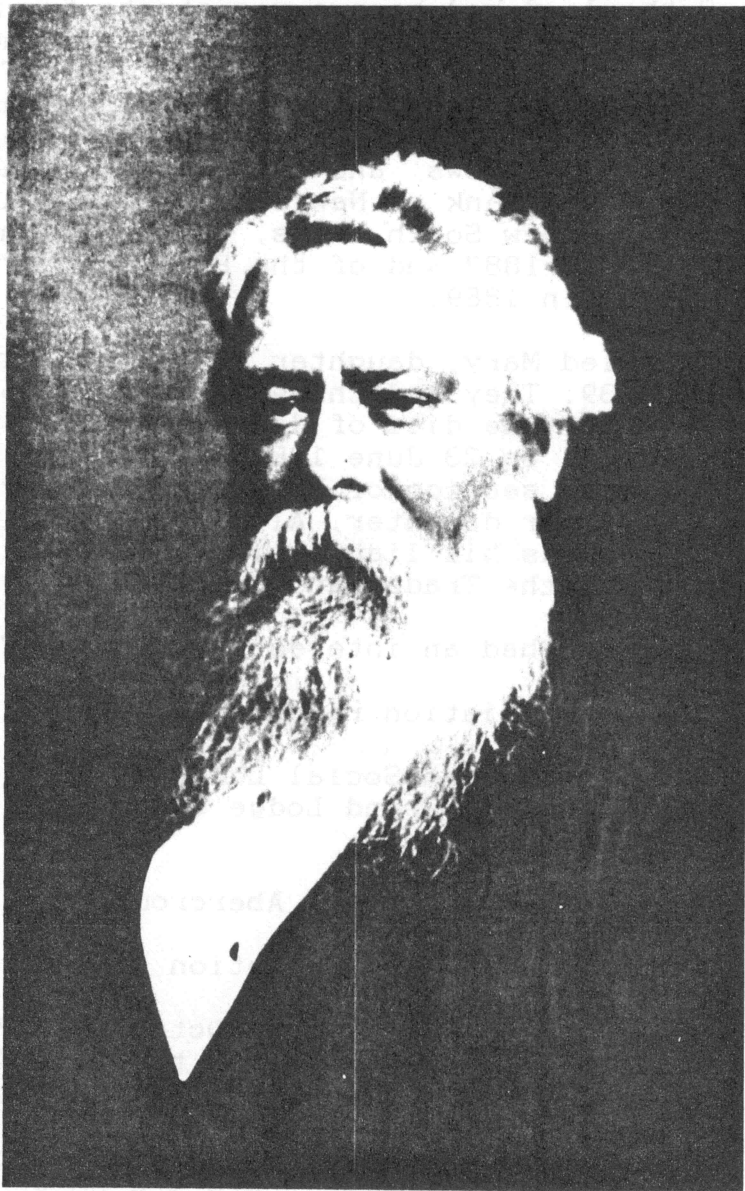
Proposed.... Seconded..... Investigation Comm.... Ballot.....

He was passed to the Second Degree on 5 October 1857, raised to the Third Degree on 16 November 1857 and received the Past Master's Degree on 28 December 1857. He became Junior Warden of the Lodge on 7 June 1858 but did not proceed any further. Minutes reveal that before he could take his second degree he had to pay back dues of one pound. He continued to attend the lodge for the next 4-5 years but as there are no Attendance Books for the period 1862-1911 his further attendance cannot be verified.

He became a member of Unity Lodge No.1169 E.C., now The United Lodge of Sydney No.11 United Grand Lodge of New South Wales, and was a member of both these lodges when he became Foundation Master, at the age of 65, of The Glebe Lodge No 1944 E.C., now The Glebe-Cambrian Lodge No.96 United Grand Lodge of New South Wales, which was consecrated on 18 July 1881. At that time he was still serving as Minister of Works in the NSW Government and consequently he missed a number of meetings and then the Chair of the lodge was occupied by the first Immediate Past Master, Wor.Bro.W.D.Banks.

E.F.WAUGH

18 JANUARY 1993



JOHN SUTHERLAND