



THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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SIR JAMES ANDERSON MURDOCH, KBE, CMG, MLC. (1867-1939)

When I was a boy at Gladesville Primary School, I was allowed, as a treat, to miss school on my birthday.

I remember the postman bringing a letter marked 'Master G Cumming' which contained a greeting card.

I recall asking my mother 'How did Mr Murdoch know it was my birthday?' I don't remember her reply.

I had turned seven and when other cards arrived in subsequent years, I was still none the wiser.

This Mr Murdoch, who, I was told, was a kind man and who sent me birthday cards, was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on 10 March 1867. 1.



James A Murdoch

He received a basic education at Adair's and Herriot's schools and, at age 13, he joined a firm of wholesale woollen merchants. 2.

In 1884, he migrated to Melbourne and then to Sydney where, whilst employed by Hordern Brothers, he became the founding Secretary of the Shop Employees' Union.

After a brief period in Brisbane, he returned to Sydney to work for F J Palmer and Co, the firm of hatters and mercers.

On 26 August 1891, James Murdoch married Isabella Binning at St Stephen's Presbyterian Church, Sydney.

They established their home *Midhope* and a wonderful, widely recognised garden at 60 Burns Road, Wahroonga.

He became Secretary of the Wahroonga Progress Association and, as an indication of things to come, wrote to the Postmaster-General asking that 'the post-boy be provided with a horse or a bicycle, so that mail can be delivered more quickly!' 3.

In 1893, Murdoch opened his own men's mercery store

in Park Street, Sydney. By 1914, he had 400 employees and a profit sharing scheme.

Then came the First World War.

In October 1915, Murdoch, who believed in the righteousness of the British cause, handed over control of his Park Street business to others and, at his own expense, volunteered for service with the Australian Branch of the British Red Cross. He equipped depots at his own expense and took them closer to the scene of action than they had been before. 4.

He was appointed a Commissioner and, in 1916, he was appointed an honorary Lieutenant-Colonel and administered depots at Rouen and Boulogne in France.

In 1917 he moved to England as Chief Commissioner.

He was Mentioned-in-Despatches four times and, after special mention by Bro Earl Haig, he was created a Companion of St Michael and St George.

After the war, his business expanded rapidly and included a large factory at Surry Hills.

He was committed to a number of organisations including the Master Retailers' Association which he re-formed to provide an organised front against the solidarity of unions and the arbitration system.

It was a complete turn-around from his days on the Shop Employees' Union.

He advocated applying business principles to politics and, at one stage, expressed his admiration for Mussolini.

Murdoch was a director of a number of companies and an influential back-room organiser.

He was nominated to the Legislative Council in 1923. *The Keystone* reported: 5.

He will be popular in the Upper House. That is assured. His wealth of business experience will be of immense value to the country, and his speeches will be full of good common-sense, brightly delivered, and attentively listened to. What is generally known as "all nonsense" is abhorrent to Colonel Murdoch - hence there is plain speaking when he talks. But even if he is a plain speaker, he is never heavy in debate. Look at those eyes and you will understand why. He is a Scotsman, who has a fine sense of humour, and enough of it to turn away the wrath of a nation.

His appointment to the Upper House is a good one. The country benefits.

He was interested in all things Scottish and he became a director of the Burnside Presbyterian Orphan Homes and ensured their ongoing operations with substantial donations.

He was knighted in 1928.

Sir James Murdoch, who spoke with a marked Scottish accent, was a slightly built man with a jovial personality who, it was said could 'argue with a smile'. 6.

He was keen on golf, yachting and fishing and especially horse racing, although his stud *Bendooley* at Bowral never produced a top-class winner.

He was a public-spirited man whose success was based on honesty and integrity.

Sir James Murdoch died on 30 January 1939 and, in 1951, the department store which had expanded to occupy the north-east corner of Park and George Streets was sold to Cash Orders Amalgamated. Two years later the name was changed to Walton Limited, and, in 1955, it became Walton-Sears after the American firm of Sears, Roebuck and Co. became the major shareholders. 7.



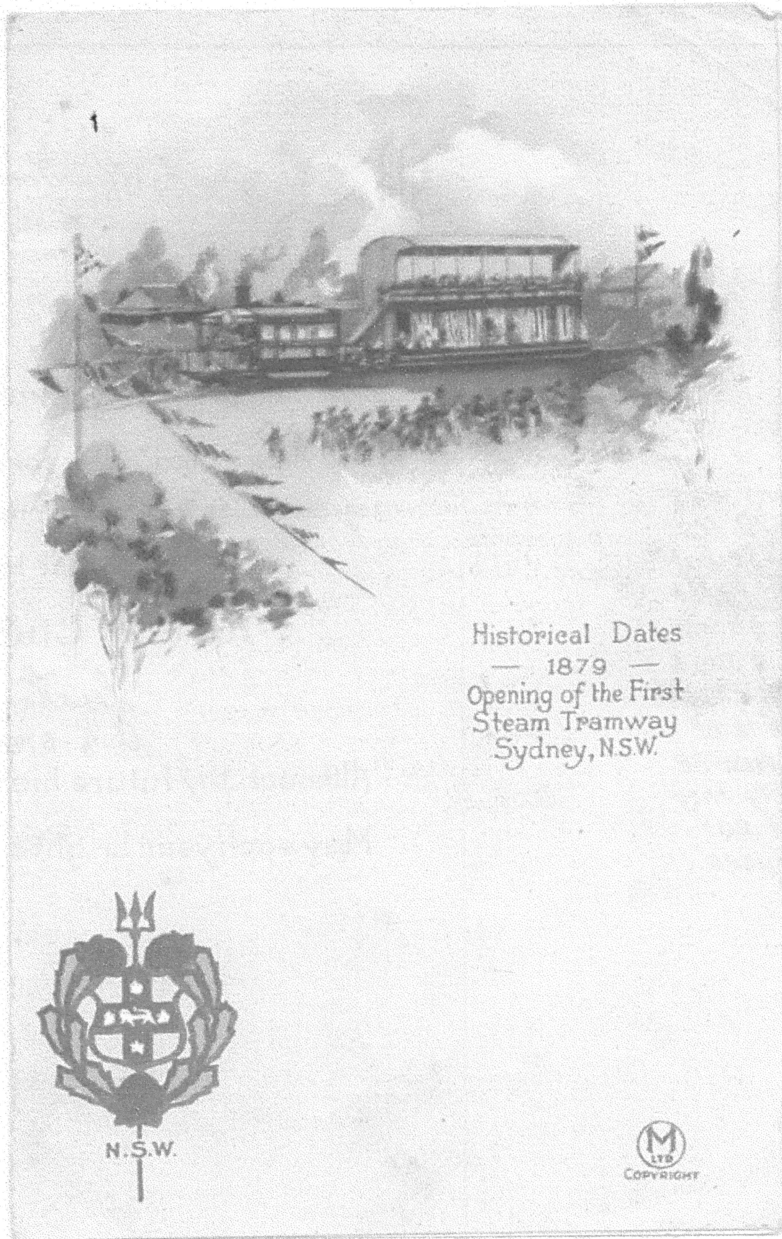
The former Murdoch's Store

Wor Bro James Anderson Murdoch was made a mason in Sydney in Lodge Oxford No 85, United Grand Lodge of New South Wales on 18 October 1900. He was passed to the Second Degree on 20 December 1900 and raised a Master Mason on 17 January 1901. He was installed as Master of the lodge on 28 April 1907.

He was a foundation member of Lodge Royal Colonial Institute (now Lodge Royal Empire) No 613 at its consecration on 29 October 1927.

At the time of his initiation, he gave his occupation as hatter. 8.

APPENDIX 1 - BIRTHDAY CARD 1940



Historical Dates
— 1879 —
Opening of the First
Steam Tramway
Sydney, N.S.W.



N.S.W.





*Murdoch's Ltd.
Park & George Streets,
Sydney.*

GREETING

With sincere Good Wishes for a joyous Birthday
together with Health, Happiness and Prosperity
throughout the year

To our Club Chum

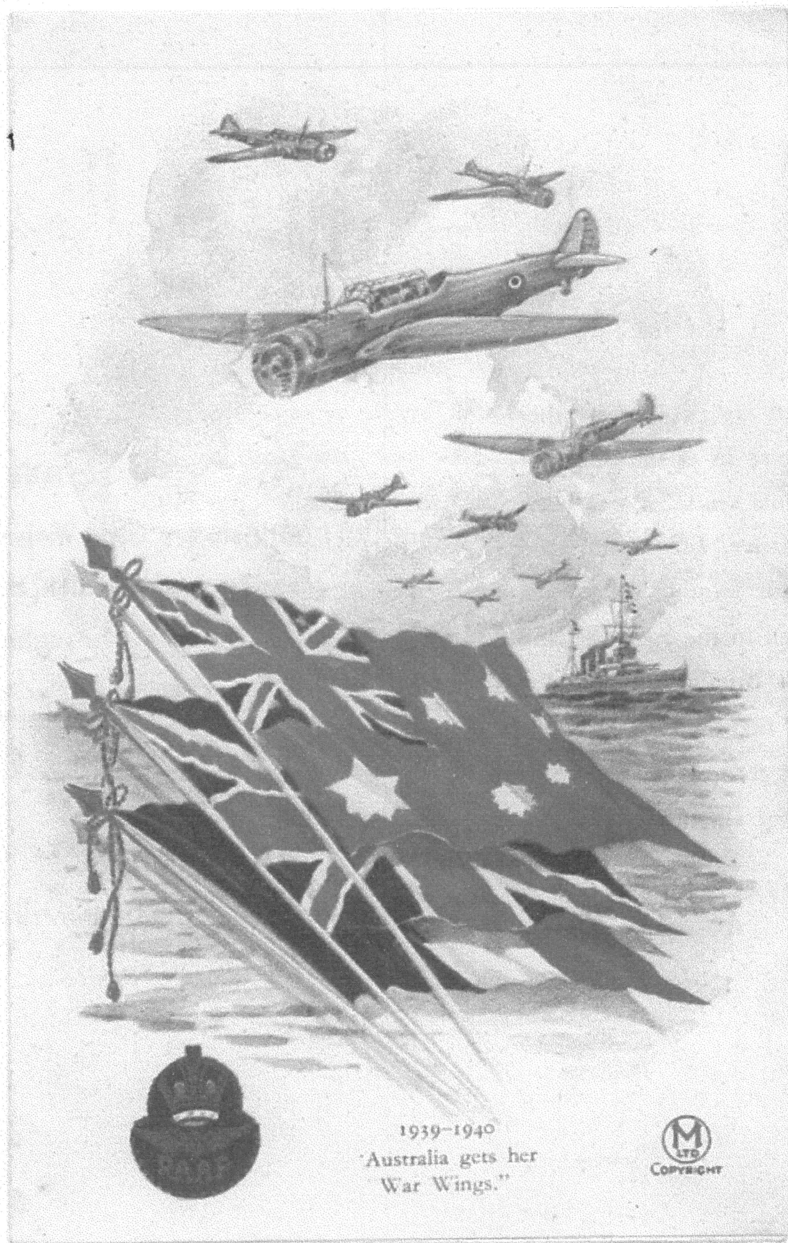
Graham
16.3.40.

"Although thy future hidden be,

May each year brighter prove to thee"

*The First Steam Tram was
run in Sydney in 1879. Its
terminus was Hunter St but
later it was extended to the
outer Suburbs. This shows
the quaint type then in use, a
change to our present Electric
Services. This picture is of
especial Interest in view of
the fact that probably they
will build no more but
revert to Trolley Buses.*

APPENDIX 2 - BIRTHDAY CARD 1943





*Murdoch's Ltd.
Park & George Streets,
Sydney.*

Australia has joined up with the other nations of the Empire in establishing her Air Force. Her Pilots are second to none in bravery and initiative, and when called on will be found not wanting. Australia is proud to be linked in the Air, on Land and Sea with Great Britain and her ally, France, and to show that the Empire stands as one against the aggressor, and for a just and lasting Peace—for all time.

GREETING

With sincere Good Wishes for a joyous Birthday together with Health, Happiness and Prosperity throughout the year

To our Club Chum

J. Galum
16.3.43

"Give to the world the best you can,
And the best will come back to you."

APPENDIX 3 - BIRTHDAY LETTER 1948
(Sent to member, Jim Ruxton).



18th July, 1948

Dear James,

Bless your heart, 20 years old!

Whoever would think that 12 months have passed since we sent to you that little cheerio for the "19th".

Only one more year to the "Key of the Door".

A happy birthday old Chum, - and an abundance of good wishes for this important stage particularly, - the final before reaching man's estate. And it is important! so much so that we ransacked our library to find a real help, - an inspiration for the journey, - and here it is! The title is "Wisdom".

"Dreaming a little, and working a lot;
Making the most of the things that you've got;
Always quite willing to start a fresh page;
Ready to learn from the child and the sage.
Changing your mind - and admitting it to!
When you can see you've held the wrong view;
Pocketing pride with a lift of the chin -
Only a fool thinks it's weak to give in.
Keeping close check on your thoughts and your speech
Learning the lessons that Life has to teach:
Making allowance for folks' funny ways,
Bearing in mind that its kindness that pays.
Fitting yourself for the things you desire;
Earning the right to go up a step higher.
Counting your blessings each day that you live -
Taking with thanks all the good God can give."

There you are old friend, all the wealth of the Indies could not equal the treasure you have in that gem of wisdom.

With kindest regards,

Always your chum,
MURDOCH'S LTD.
Per: *[Signature]*

NOTES

1. Errol G Knox [Ed] *Who's Who in Australia*, VIIIth Edition, 1933-4, Daily Telegraph, Sydney, p.235.
 2. Bede, Nairn and Searly [Eds] *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 10, 1891-1939, Melbourne University Press, 1986, p.620.
 3. Les G Thorne *A History of North Shore Sydney from 1788 to Today*, Revised Edition, 1979, Angus and Robertson Publishers, p.120.
 4. *The Keystone*, Sydney, September 1923, p.9
 5. *Ibid.*
 6. *Ibid.*
 7. Frances Pollon *Shopkeepers and Shoppers*, The Retail Traders Association of New South Wales, Sydney, 1989, p.116.
 8. The United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, Membership records.
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