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PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY: G.H. Cumming

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SIR JOSEPH CARRUTHERS, KCMG, BA, MA, LLB. (1857-1932)

Joseph Hector McNeil Carruthers was born at Kiama, New South Wales, on 21 December 1857. 1.

The family moved to Sydney and his boyhood home was in Goulburn Street, just above Pitt Street where there was once an orchard which young Joseph sometimes raided by climbing the fence. 2.

Carruthers Place, the rather pretentious name for the lane at the rear of the Sydney Masonic Centre, was later named in his honour.

He was educated at William Street and Fort Street Schools, as a boarder at Goulburn High School and the University of Sydney. 3.

He was admitted to practice as a solicitor on 28 June 1879 and, six months later, on 10 December, he married Louise Marion Roberts at Sydney's St James' Anglican Church. They later divorced.

He began investing in land on the western shore of Botany Bay when he became the solicitor for the Reform Land Investment and Building Co. Ltd., who were subdividing the Sans Souci estate. 4.

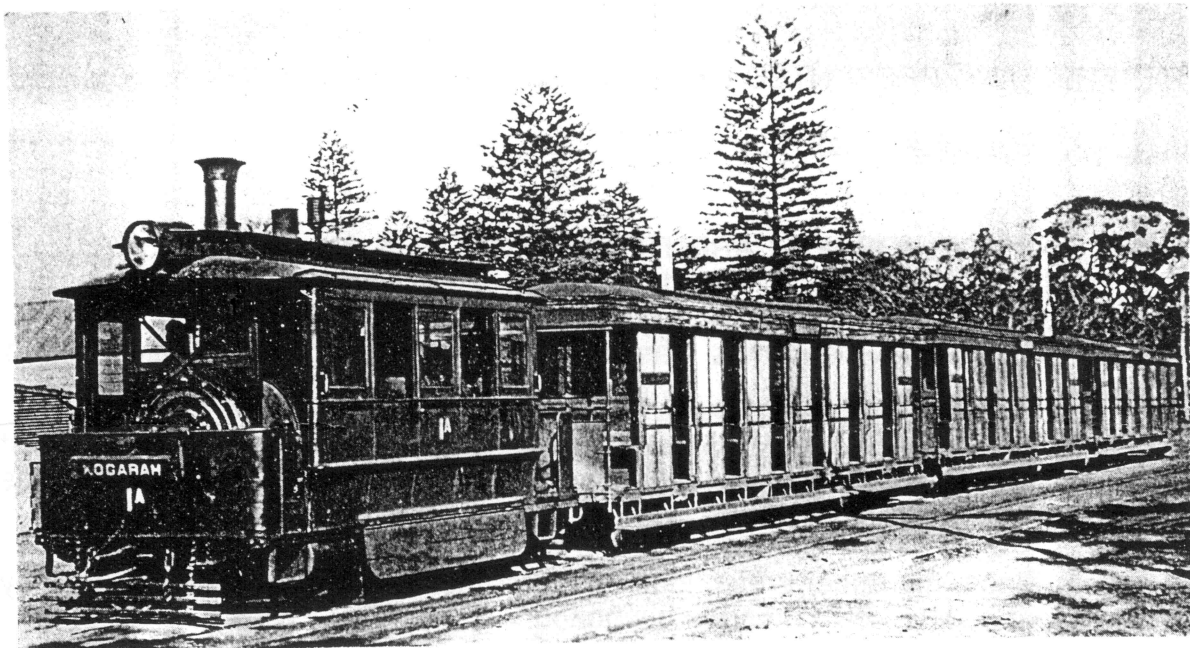
In 1887, he was elected to the Legislative Assembly as the member for Canterbury which then included Rockdale and Kogarah.

He had built his home, *Ellesmere*, at Sans Souci after the opening of the railway line to Hurstville on 15 October 1884 and his maiden speech to the House strongly advocated a tramway from Rockdale to Sans Souci. A steam tram service opened on 10 September 1887. It was later electrified and, in 1937, it was replaced by electric trolley buses which were, in turn, replaced by diesel buses in 1959.

A slightly built man who often suffered ill health, Carruthers was an enthusiastic and astute politician who strongly opposed the Labor Party and socialist policies.

From March 1889 to October 1891, Carruthers was Minister for Public Instruction in the Parkes Government and he enthusiastically promoted the enlargement and beautification of school property and he introduced Arbor Day at Ryde Public School, attended by the Governor, Most Wor. Bro. Lord and Lady Carrington, on 16 July 1890.

He was responsible for the introduction of technical subjects in schools and the establishment of the Sydney Technical College at Ultimo.



Kogarah - Sans Souci steam tram.



Reprinted from Wilson's Authentic Director, 1924.



Bro. J.H. Carruthers.

In 1894, in the government led by Bro. (Sir) George Reid, Carruthers was Secretary for Lands and introduced the Land Act of 1895. It won him political acclaim which later stood him in good stead after his divorce in 1895.

As Colonial Treasurer in 1899, he supported the Federation of the Australian colonies but opposed equal representation of States in the Senate as he predicted conflict between both Houses in the proposed parliament.

He did not enter Federal politics in 1901 as, on 15 January 1898, the 40 year-old Carruthers had married the attractive 21 year-old Alice Burnett and he was said to be enjoying family life.

In September 1902, Carruthers replaced Bro. Charles A. Lee as leader of the Liberal Party in spite of his opposition to allowing the vote for women.

Bro. Sir John See became Premier in 1901 and he was followed in 1904, for a term of just two months, by Thomas Waddell.

At the elections held on 6 July 1904, the Liberal Reform group, helped by an alliance of Liberalism, temperance and Protestantism, swept Labor from office and, on 29 August 1904, Joseph Carruthers was sworn in as Premier and Treasurer.

His was an energetic government intent on reform and were responsible for the implementation of economic measures that aided business and, by reducing rail freight costs, gave added stimulus to regional development.

This led to the Local Government Act of 1906 which created the modern system of municipalities and shires.

In 1905, there was unsuccessful moves by the Labor opposition to establish a

Royal Commission to investigate land scandals. The charges recalled attacks on Carruthers in *The Truth* in 1897 which claimed irregularities in his divorce, immorality in his private life and self-interest in land dealing.

Carruthers was an ardent patriot and generations of school children benefitted from his introduction of Empire Day to commemorate Queen Victoria's birthday on 24 May and the great virtues of the British Empire.

Carruthers was involved in two other important events. The first was when he received the first ticket issued at Central Sydney Station which he officially opened with a gold key on 4 August 1906. ⁶

His friend and Minister for Works, Bro. Charles Lee blew a golden whistle to start the first train and couldn't resist the opportunity to tell his Premier and everyone else that, in his opinion, the station had been built in the wrong place. ⁷

The following month, on 11 September 1906, Carruthers set the foundation stone for the superb sandstone Mitchell Library building. ⁸

For a man who did so much to improve the New South Wales education system, it was strange that he had a standing rule that 'no fiction whatsoever be allowed in any Municipal Library.'

This rule which was relaxed just in time, nearly cost the State David Scott Mitchell's vast collection.

Carruthers' health had finally failed him and he resigned the Premiership on 1 October 1907.

He was appointed to the Legislative Council where he became Vice-president in Bro. Sir George Fuller's Ministry which lasted just seven hours on 20 December 1921. He continued as Vice-president from 1922 to 1925.

He remained an active member of the Council until a few months before his death on 10 December 1932. He was survived by his second wife, three sons and four daughters.

Typical of the man, he was involved in many community activities including:

- * Fellow of the Senate of the University of Sydney.
- * President of the NSW Chamber of Agriculture.
- * Member of the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW.
- * Trustee of the Royal National Park.
- * Trustee of the National Art Gallery.
- * President (in 1907) of the NSW Cricket Association.
- * Trustee of the Mutual Life and Citizens' Assurance Co. Ltd. (M.L.C.).
- * Director of Kembla Grange Racecourse Ltd.
- * Director of Moorefield Racecourse Ltd.
- * Director of Timor Oil Co.
- * Director of the Monaro Community Settlement Co-operative Society.
- * Director of the National Insurance Co.
- * Director of the Australian Widows' Fund.
- * Patron of St George Bowling and Recreation Club.

Sir Joseph who had been knighted in 1908, was fascinated by Captain James Cook R.N. and, in 1930 he published a book entitled *Captain James Cook R.N: One Hundred and Fifty Years After*.

He was Chairman of Trustees of Cook's Landing Place at Kurnell.

Bro. (Sir) Joseph Hector McNeil Carruthers was made a mason on 4 November 1880 in the Sydney suburb of Woollahra in the Empress of India Lodge No.1761 English Constitution (later No. 57 United Grand Lodge of New South Wales). 9.

He called off on 16 July 1885. This was at the time of his move to Sans Souci and two years before he entered Parliament. He joined Lodge Carrington No. 151 at Rockdale on 12 October 1887 and left the lodge in March 1890.

He was a foundation member of Lodge Illawarra St George No. 219 at its consecration at Rockdale on 8 April 1895 but he resigned on 8 December of the same year.

NOTES

1. *The Australian Encyclopedia*, The Grolier Society of Australia Pty. Ltd., 1983, Vol. 2, p 181.
2. Brodsky, I., *The Streets of Sydney, Old Sydney*, Free Press, 1962, p 119.
3. Serle G., and Nairn B., (General Editors), *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Melbourne University Press, 1979, Vol 7, 1891-1939, p 574.
4. Geeves P., and Jervis J., *Rockdale, Its Beginning and Development*, Revised Ed., R.W. Rathbone, The Council of the Municipality of Rockdale, 1986.
5. Burnswoods J., and Fletcher J., *Sydney and the Bush*, The NSW Department of Education, 1980, p 123.
6. State Rail Archives.
7. Sharpe A., *Streets of Old Sydney*, Atrand Pty. Ltd., Sydney, 1987, p 126.
8. Tyrrell, J.R., *Old Books, Old Friends, Old Sydney*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1987, p 150.
9. *A History of the First Fifty Years of the Empress of India Lodge*, Privately published, Sydney, 1927, p 63.

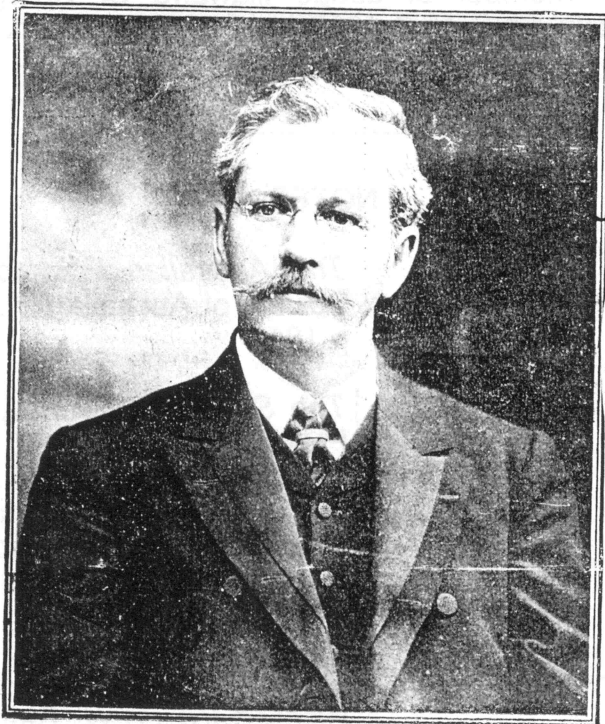
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Bro. The Hon J. H. Carruthers, late Premier of New South Wales, now Representing the State at the Franco-British Exhibition.



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