PAPER No. 72

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Bro. NORMAN SELFE, M.I.C.E., M.I.M.E.
(1839 - 1911)

Norman Selfe was born on 9 December 1839 at Toddington in the English county of Middlesex. 1.

He received his education at Kingston-upon-Thames after which he accompanied his parents to Sydney where the family arrived in January 1855.

At the age of 17 he became apprenticed to the engineering firm of Peter Nicol Russell and Co. where he later became Chief Draughtsman. 2. Whilst with the firm, he ventured into naval architecture with the design of gunboats for service in the Maori wars in New Zealand.

Selfe left Russells' and joined in partnership with James Dunlop and was responsible for the design and construction of major civil engineering installations for the Australasian Mineral Oil Co., the Western Kerosene Oil Co. and the Australian Gaslight Co.

In 1869, Norman Selfe was appointed Chief Engineer for Mort's Dock and Engineering Co. One of his first jobs was the design of the machinery for the 500 tonne vessel *Governor Blackall*.

In 1870, Selfe was a foundation member of The Engineering Association of New South Wales where he served as President from 1877 to 1879. He published a number of papers in the Association's proceedings. 3.

In 1882, his brother Henry, also an engineer, joined the Association and he also published papers including *On Our Harbour Steamers* in 1888. 4.

They were contemporaries of the aviation pioneer, Bro. Lawrence Hargrave.

In 1876, Selfe set up in private practice and quickly established a reputation as an outstanding and versatile engineer.

There were no diploma or degree courses in engineering in Sydney in those days and those who practiced as engineers were largely, self-taught and very practical.

Selfe designed some fifty steamships including two torpedo boats for the New South Wales navy. He also designed the *Wallaby*, the first double-ended screw driven ferry and, it is believed that he was the first to instal a compound steam engine in an Australian-built boat.

He became expert in dock design and he built the first concrete quay wall in Port

Jackson and most of the wharves for ocean-going freighters.

His mind was engaged on other projects and he designed the first ice-making machines in New South Wales and the first lifts and he patented a new system for wool pressing. 5.

He was also involved in other hydraulic installations as well as being among the pioneers in electric light installations.

He published papers on the application of compressed air to railway braking systems and he designed friction winches and an acetylene gas storage plant for the New South Wales Government Railways.

He also planned mills, waterworks and pumping stations.

Norman Selfe truly was an 'all-round' engineer.

During 1884-5, he toured North America, Britain and Europe where he went to some seventy cities and visited engineering works and investigated bridge construction.

The lack of formal technical education concerned Selfe and, beginning in 1865, he taught mechanical drawing at the Sydney School of Arts.

In 1883 he was appointed to the Board of Technical Education. He was President from 1887 to 1889 during the time the Board was at odds with James Inglis, the Minister of Public Instruction, and his senior departmental officer.


THE SYDNEY MECHANICS' SCHOOL OF ARTS was established in 1833, and by 1880 there were 76 Schools of Arts or Mechanics or Literary Institutes, offering a wide range of adult education. Technical education originated in the Sydney School of Arts, where a mechanical drawing class was established in 1865 and several other courses were underway by 1870. The School of Arts Committee established a Technical College in new classrooms at the rear of the building in 1878, with the aid of a parliamentary grant. The Committee ran the College until the statutory Board of Technical Education was established in 1883.
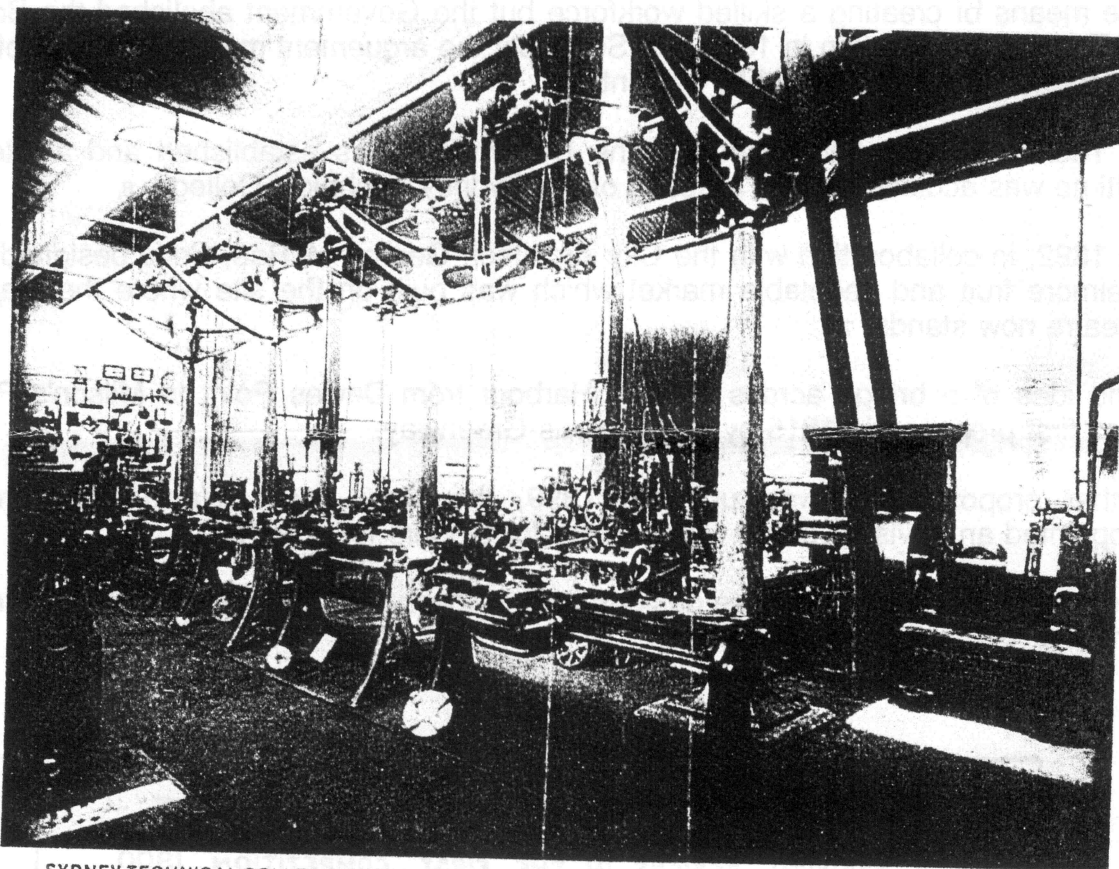
SYDNEY TECHNICAL COLLEGE WORKSHOPS, 1888

Sydney Technical College was run by the Sydney School of Arts committee [145] until the establishment of a Board of Technical Education in 1883. As enrolments grew and courses were diversified, the Board rented several buildings, including the workshops in Kent Street. Technical classes were also established in a number of country towns, and by 1888 the total enrolment was over 2,800. The increasing importance attached to technical education led in 1889 to the replacement of the Board by a Technical Education Branch of the Department, an administrative arrangement which continued for 60 years. At the same time a site for Sydney Technical College was acquired, and the new buildings were occupied in 1892.

SYDNEY TECHNICAL COLLEGE, 1891
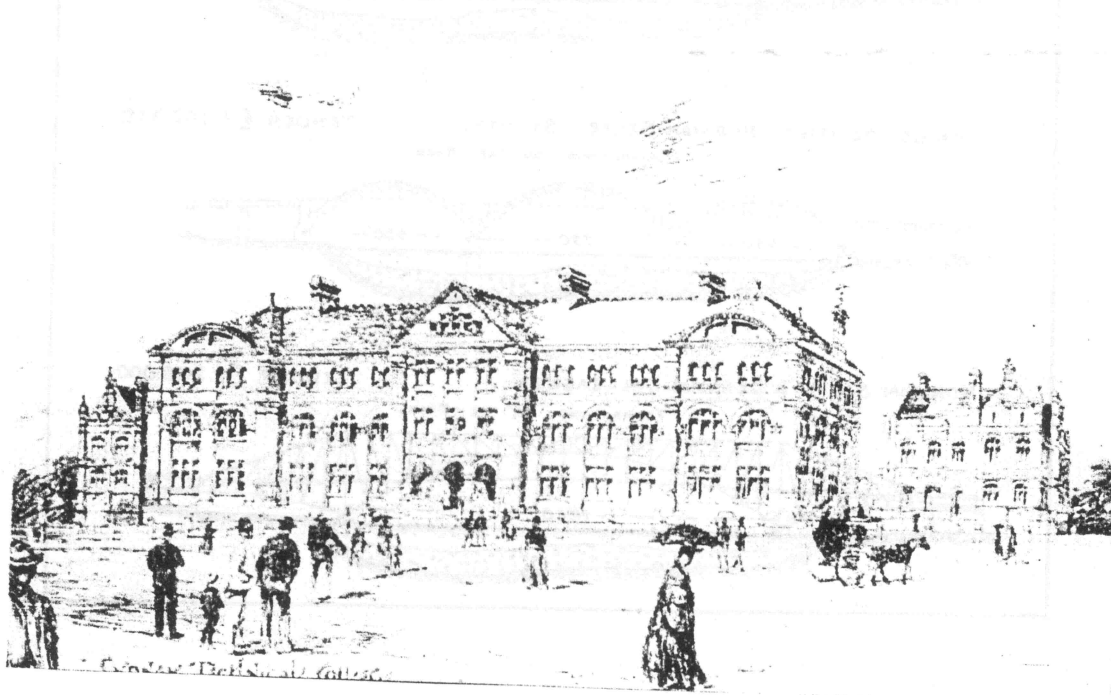
Selfe advocated an independent and specialised approach to technical education as the means of creating a skilled workforce but the Government abolished the Board of Technical Education in 1889 and Selfe lost the arguement mainly because of his outspoken contempt for public servants.
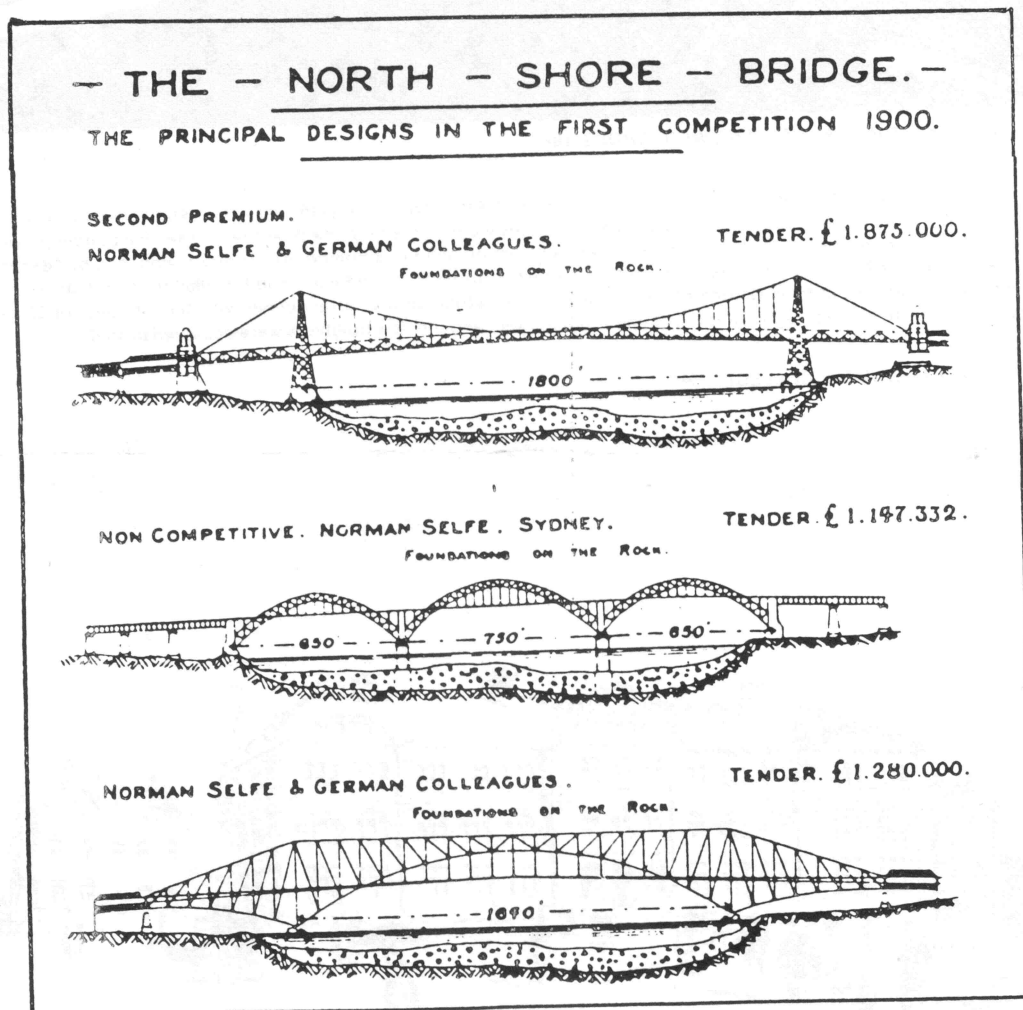
A Technical Education Branch of the Department was established and a site at Ultimo was acquired for the erection of the Sydney Technical College. 6.

In 1892, in collaboration with the City Architect, George McRae, Selfe designed the Belmore fruit and vegetable market which was built on the site where the *Capitol* theatre now stands. 7.

The idea of a bridge across Sydney Harbour from Dawes Point to Milson's Point was first proposed in 1815 by Bro. Francis Greenway.

Other proposals followed until, in 1899, the New South Wales Gonernment appointed an advisory board which called for tenders for a bridge.

Norman Selfe submitted three designs, two of them in conjunction with two German firms. 8.

- THE - NORTH - SHORE - BRIDGE. -

THE PRINCIPAL DESIGNS IN THE FIRST COMPETITION 1900.

SECOND PREMIUM.
NORMAN SELFE & GERMAN COLLEAGUES.   TENDER. £ 1.875.000.
FOUNDATIONS ON THE ROCK.

—— 1800 ——

NON COMPETITIVE. NORMAN SELFE. SYDNEY.   TENDER. £ 1.147.332.
FOUNDATIONS ON THE ROCK.

— 650 — — 750 — — 650 —

NORMAN SELFE & GERMAN COLLEAGUES.   TENDER. £ 1.280.000.
FOUNDATIONS ON THE ROCK.

—— 1690 ——

In November 1903, the advisory board adopted a tender submitted by Stewart and Co. for Norman Selfe's cantilever design to span the harbour from Dawes Point to McMahon's Point. The design was based on a span of 411 metres, a 10 metre roadway, two rail tracks and a 3 metre wide footpath.

Unfortunately for the tenderers, who had gone to considerable expense, and very fortunately for a later generation of Sydneysiders, the state was not in good economis shape and the work did not proceed.

These bridge designs by Norman Selfe, one a cross-section and one a longitudinal view, were approved by the Advisory Board in 1903, but Selfe's proposal suffered the same fate of all earlier designs. Mitchell Library Small Picture File
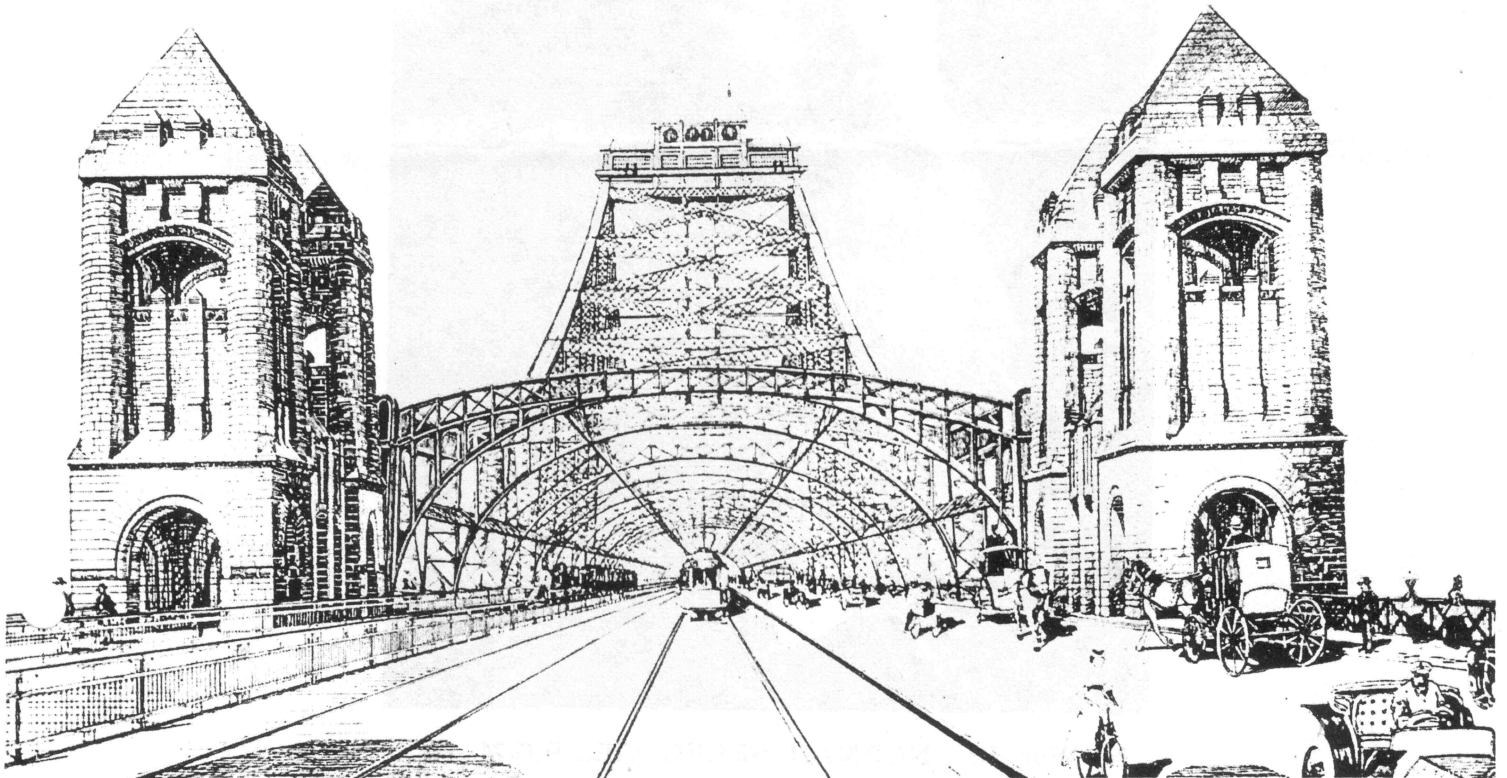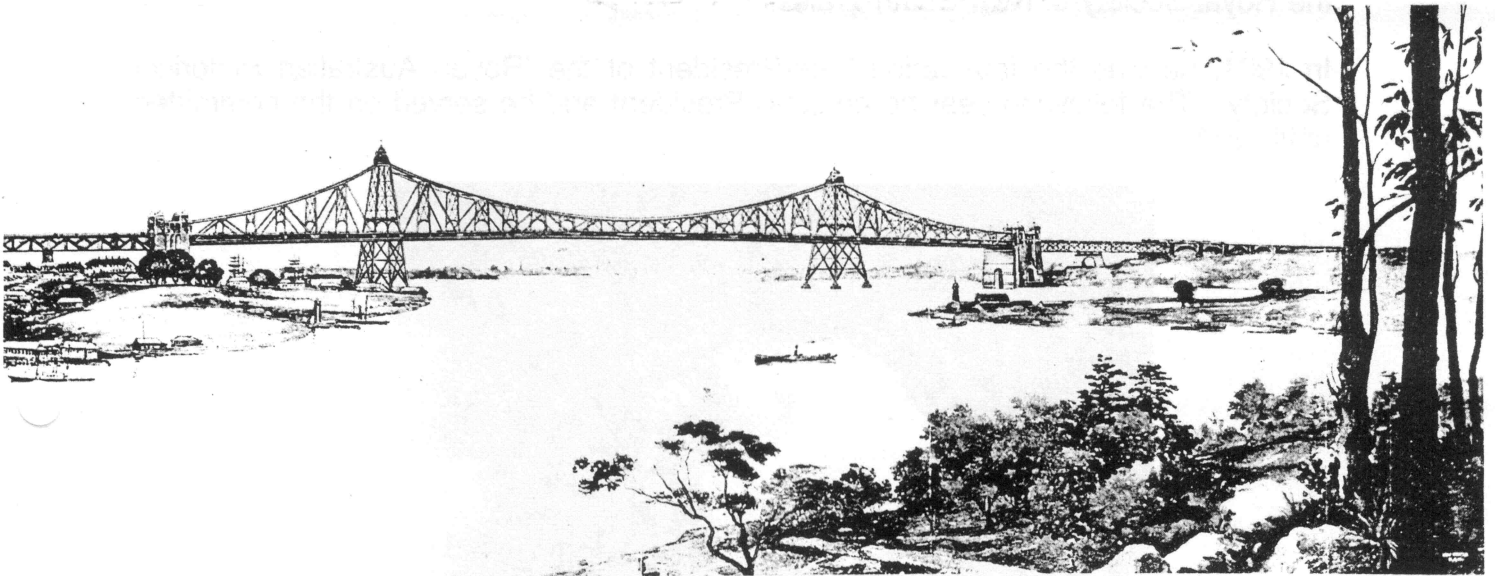
Selfe also prepared plans for a circular city railway which was to link the outlying suburbs to the ferries and for the re-modelling of The Rocks area in conjunction with the bridge.

Norman Selfe was ahead of his time and it would fall the lot of Bro. Dr Bradfield to bring a more modern version of the same ideas to reality.

Norman Selfe had a strong sense of natural justice and a paper he published in 1900 in the Proceedings of the Engineering Association entitled *Sydney and its Institutions, As They Are, and Might Be.* clearly shows his forthright personality and his professional and public interests. 9.

These included active membership of the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts and of the Royal Society of New South Wales.

In 1901, he was the foundation Vice-President of the (Royal) Australian Historical Society. The following year he became President and he served on the committee until 1911.
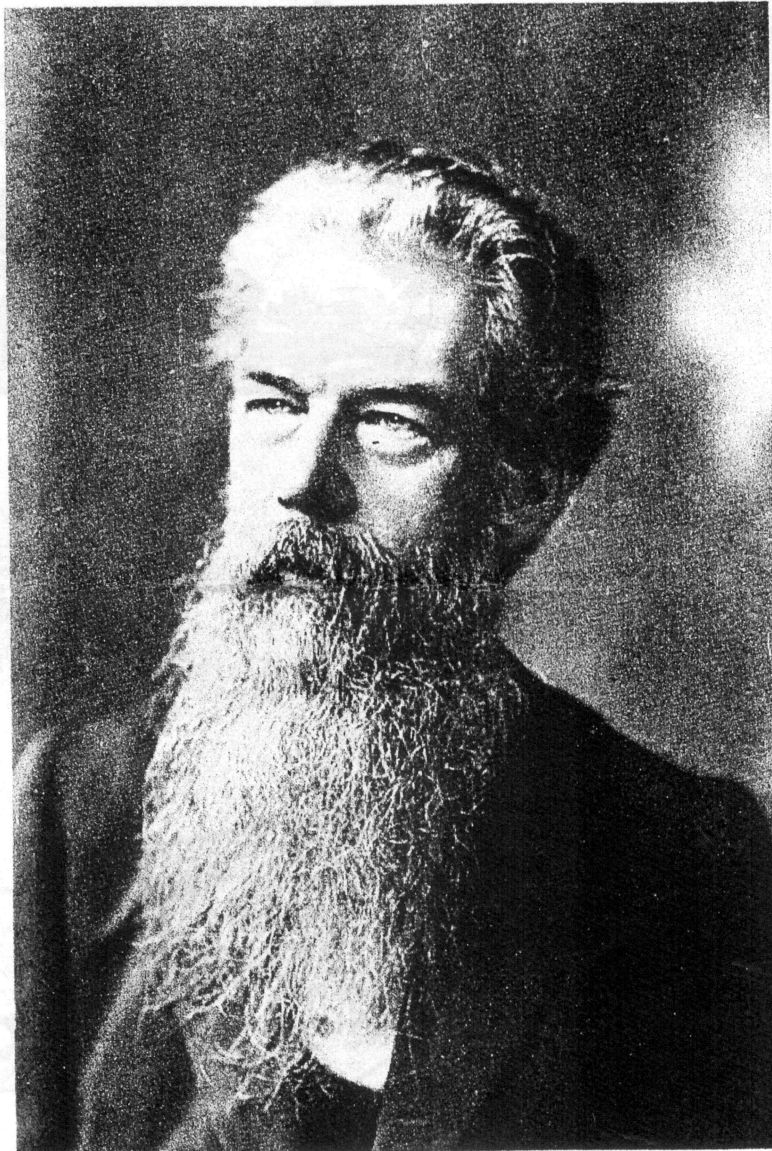

M. Wor. Bro. NORMAN SELFE, C.E., P.G.M., &c.,
First Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of M.M.M of N.S.W.

Norman Selfe married Emily Anne Booth in Sydney on 10 October 1872 and there were two daughters, Rhoda and Norma, from the marriage.

In 1888, Norman Selfe built *Anesbury* in Alt Street, Ashfield. 10. The house was designed by him in the English Queen Anne style. The exterior featured large verandahs and an unusual roof tower while the interior was notable for the lavish use of exotic timbers and a grand oak staircase.

Anesbury.
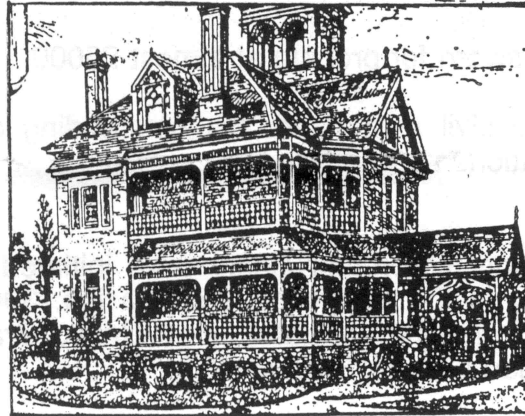
In 1893 he built Gilligaloola on 5 hectares of land at what is now No. 82 Pennant Hills Road, Normanhurst where he planted an orchard and an Itialian garden and erected a tennis court and summer house. 11.
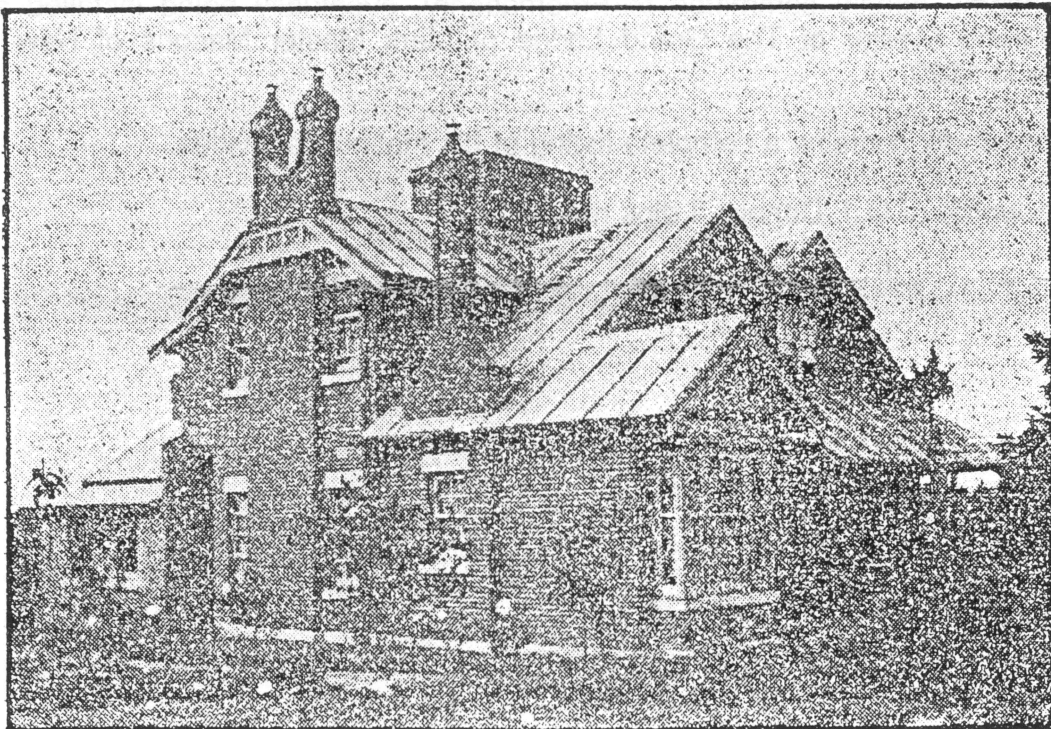
Gilligaloola

Shortly after *Gilligaloola* was built, there were two railway stations named Hornsby. One was Hornsby Junction, later re-named Hornsby, and the other, opened on 21 November 1895, was named Hornsby, but in 1898, the name was changed to Normanhurst in honour of Norman Selfe.

On 12 May 1906, Norman Selfe married Barbara Marion Bolton, BA (Syd).

He died from heart failure at Gilligaloola on 15 October 1911 and was buried at Gore Hill cemetery.

His estate was sworn for probate at almost £5000.

He received no civil awards for his outstanding contribution to engineering and technical education.

Norman Selfe and his brother Henry were initiated into Freemasonry on 7 August 1865 in Sydney in the Lodge of Australia No. 390 on the register of the United Grand Lodge of England and later No. 3 United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

Both brothers gave their occupation at engineer and the address of their office at New Pitt Street which became No, 141 near the later intersection with Martin Place.

Norman was passed a Fellowcraft on 2 October 1865 and raised a Master Mason on 10 May 1866.

He became deeply committed to Freemasonry, eventually being installed as the first Grand Master of The Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of New South Wales in 1890.

The appendix contains a complete listing of his masonic activities.

In the words of C.J. Dennis, 'I dips me lid.'

APPENDIX

NORMAN SELFE

MASONIC ACTIVITIES

1. Initiated into Freemasonry on 7 August 1865 in The Lodge of Australia No. 390, United Grand Lodge of England. This Lodge is now No. 3 United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. He remained a member until his death on 15 October 1911.

2. Installed as Worshipful Master of The Lodge of Australia No. 390 in 1873.

3. He held the conferred rank of Past President of the Board of General Purposes of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the rank of Past Grand Warden at the time of his death.

4. Advanced to the Honourable Degree of Mark Master Mason on 30 December 1867 in the Sydney Lodge of Mark Master Masons No. 25 Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of England and Wales and The Dominions and The Dependencies of the British Crown.

5. Exalted into the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch on 19 February 1868 in the Robert Burns Chapter No. 817 on the register of The Supreme Grand and Royal Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of England. (This Chapter met in Sydney).

6. Installed as Worshipful Master of the Sydney Lodge of Mark Master Masons No. 25, English Constitution for 1874-76.

7. Appointed Past Grand Senior Deacon of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of England etc. on 14 August 1875 by the Grand Master, The Earl of Limerick.

8. Installed as First Principal of Robert Burns Chapter No. 817, English Constitution on 21 June 1876.

9. Elevated to the Ancient and Honourable Degree of Royal Ark Mariner in Panmure Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners on 2 March 1885.

10. Installed as Worshipful Commander Noah in Panmure Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners on 2 March 1885.

11. Perfected in a Sovereign Chapter Rose Croix, London, 1885.

12. Admitted to the degrees of:
    Grand High Priest, St Lawrence the Martyr, the Red Cross of Babylon and Knight of Constantinople in the Four Kings Council No. 7 on the roll of the Grand Council of the Allied Masonc Degrees in London, March 1888.

13. Installed as the first Provincial Grand Master of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of New South Wales under the English Constitution on 25 July 1888.

14. Appointed a member of the Committee of General Purposes of the Supreme Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of New South Wales, 1889-90.

15. Installed as the first Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of New South Wales in the Masonic Hall, Castlereagh Street, Sydney on Friday, 28 February, 1890.

16. Became a foundation member of The Athenaeum Lodge No. 195 on 16 July, 1890.

17. Conferred Past First Grand Principal of the Supreme Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of New South Wales on 24 November, 1890.

18. Joined the Sedgwick Sovereign Chapter Rose Croix No. 15, Scottish Constitution in Sydney in 1900.

19. Died 15 October 1911. Despite his significant contribution to Mark Masonry and his establishment of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of New South Wales, the proceedings of that Grand Lodge afforded him only a one line obituary.

NOTES

1. S. Murray-Smith   *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 1851-1891. Melbourne University Press.

2.   *The Australian Encyclopedia*, The Grolier Society of Australia, 1983.

3.   *Proceedings* of The Engineering Association of New South Wales, Vol. II, 1887.

4.   *Ibid.* Vol. III, 1888.

5. Balint, Howells and Smyth,   *Warehouses and Woolstores of Victorian Sydney*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1982.

6. Burnswoods & Fletcher,   *Sydney and the Bush*, NSW Department of Education, Sydney, 1980.

7. Geraldine O'Brien,   *Hip Hurrah for the Old Hippodrome*, The Sydney Morning Herald, Tuesday, 17 January, 1995.

8. Peter Spearritt,   *The Sydney Harbour Bridge*, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1982.

9.   *Proceedings* of the Engineering Association of New South Wales, Vol. XV, 1900.

10.   The Sydney Morning Herald, Monday, 3 September, 1984.

11.   *Op.cit.*, Friday, 20 November, 1981.