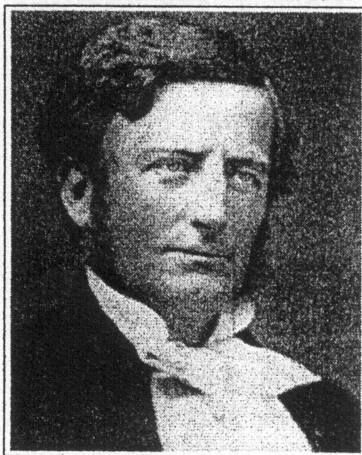**PAPER NO.** 138
PREPARED & PRESENTED BY: J. Scullion
DATE: 27 November 2006

Rt. Wor. Bro. GEORGE THORNTON
(1819-1901)
MERCHANT AND POLITICIAN

George Thornton was born on 23 December 1819 at a place in Macquarie Street, Sydney, son of Samuel Thornton, a publican and his wife, Sarah, a needlewoman furrier.
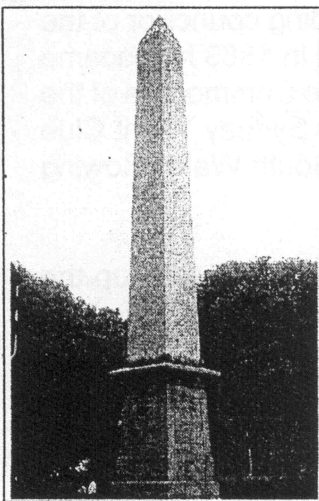

Bro. George Thornton

Sarah under the alias of Sarah Thorn along with two other women, Mary Smith and Ann Williams, had beensentenced to death at the Old Bailey in November 1813 for shoplifting three cards of lace valued at 31 pounds, 7 shillings and sixpence. These sentences were commuted to transportation to the penal colony of New South Wales. These three, along with another one hundred and fifteen females arrived in Sydney in 1814 aboard the ship *Broxborne Bury*. Samuel Thornton, a freeman, reached Sydney in the same year aboard the ship *Somersetshire*.
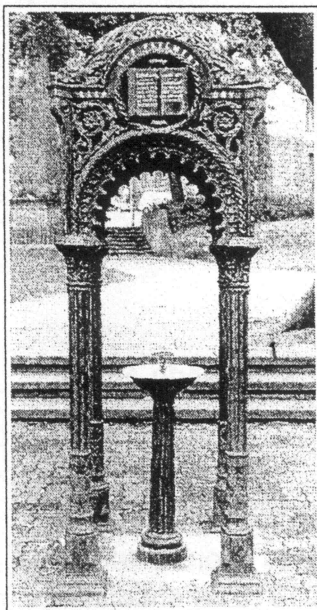
George Thornton was educated at St. Philip's Primary School, then W.T. Capes Academy and the Reverend J.D. Lang's College.

At about 17 years of age, he joined the Customs Department as a storekeeper, later becoming a clerk. In 1840 he was a Customs House Agent and married Mary Ann Solomon on 4 August of that year.

By 1844 he was bankrupt, sequestering his estate for five shillings in the pound. In 1850, he went into partnership with Walter Church as Customs House Agents and Shipbrokers owning the schooner *Tom Tough*.

From 1847 to 1853, he was an alderman of the Sydney City Council for the Cook Ward and from 1857 to 1858 for the Fitzroy Ward. This was the year he was Mayor of Sydney. While Mayor, he succeeded in obtaining the removal of the stocks and pillory and established the first public baths at Woolloomooloo. He was also responsible for the obelisk in Elizabeth Street facing Bathurst Street. Built as a ventilator shaft over the early city sewer grid, it was dubbed "Thornton's Scent Bottle". Unveiled with much fanfare and speeches, it was said that the Lord Mayor George Thornton was carried on the shoulders of the citizens to Simpson's Pub situated between Liverpool and Bathurst Streets.

On the pavement in Macquarie Place stands a drinking fountain covered by an ornate canopy inscribed: "Mayor, Aldermen and Citizens of the City of Sydney 1857. Keep the Footpath Dry. St. John Chap. IV, Ver. XIII and XIV." Another reminder of his year as Mayor.

From January 1858 to December 1868, he had parliamentary service as a member of the Legislative Assembly. George Thornton sat on many committees being Chairman of the Irish Female Immigrants Committee, St. Philip's Parsonage Bill, Question of Privilege - Governor-General's Answer to the Proposed Despatch of Artillery to India, and Secretary of Mines and Representative of Government. In 1860, he was an Alderman and first Chairman of the Woollahra Council, and was also commissioned as a Justice of the Peace that year.

He built a cottage called *"Longwood"* in Darling Point Road and a street later named Thornton Street after him, He resided there until 1876.

Drinking Fountain

He returned to parliament in 1877 and served as a Member of the Legislative Council until his death in November 1901.

On 7 October 1865 whilst returning from England, he was shipwrecked off the coast of Pernambuco for ten days until rescued and returned to London where his fellow passengers presented him with an address of gratitude for his organisation and distribution of rations.

Thornton had many occupations and interests. He was a founding director of the City Bank of Sydney and Chairman from 1885 to 1888; director of two insurance companies and Trustee of the Savings Bank of New South Wales.

Between 1873 and 1886 he was commissioner for five international exhibitions and a member of the Royal Commission into Fisheries. He was a founding councillor of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Association in 1880 and in 1883 he became the first Chairman of the Aborigines Protection Board. He was Vice Commodore of the Sydney Yacht Club in 1859 and a founding member of the Royal Sydney Yacht Club in 1862 also President of the Sydney Rowing Club and the New South Wales Rowing Association.

In December 1868, Thornton resigned from the Legislative Assembly to take up the administering of the Agent-General's Office in England for twelve months.

George Thornton died of dysentery on 23 November 1901 in "Lang Syne', a house he had built at Parramatta in the vicinity of the present Sorrell Street East between Grose and Fennel Streets.

MASONIC HISTORY

George Thornton was a member of the Leinster Marine Lodge of Australia under the Irish Constitution.

While Master in 1846 he presented the Lodge with an elegant sword.

In 1859, the Secretary of Lodge No. 260 sent a letter to the Grand Lodge of Ireland recommending Bro. George Thornton be appointed Provincial Grand Master of the Irish Constitution for New South Wales. He was duly appointed on 8 September 1862. On 18 May 1868 he resigned his position as Provincial Grand Master nominating Wor. Bro. James Squire Farnell as his successor.

REFERENCES

Australian Dictionary of Biography.
The Freemason May 7 1888.
The Sydney Morning Herald, 10 September 1857.
Sydney City Council Library. City Aldermen 1842 - 1992.
Woollahra Council Library. Old Bailey Net Records.
100 Year History of Lodge Leinster Marine.
Parliament House New South Wales Former Members.