

## WHO IS ON THE COMMITTEE?

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

PRESIDENT/SECRETARY

GLENN DICK

[glenn dick@outlook.com](mailto:glenn dick@outlook.com)

+61 0411 344 471

VICE PRESIDENT/

TREASURER

DAVID BAWDEN

[dbawden77@gmail.com](mailto:dbawden77@gmail.com)

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

STEVE O'CONNOR

JUDE DURRANT

ANNA UNDERWOOD

ALLEGRA MARSHALL

### HONORARY MEMBERS:

ANNA UNDERWOOD:

Family historian; W.A.

ALLEGRA MARSHALL:

Becke historian and caretaker of his grave at Waverley Cemetery, Bronte, N.S.W.

DR. CHRYSOPHER SPICER:

Cultural historian, author and Senior Research Fellow at James Cook University, Cairns, QLD.



## THE LOUIS BECKE SOCIETY (PORT MACQUARIE) INC.

### A NOT FOR PROFIT COMMUNITY PROJECT

To foster a greater recognition and understanding of the life and writing of the “adventurous” Australian author LOUIS BECKE, born Port Macquarie 1855 and died Sydney 1913. Recognised internationally within his lifetime, he wrote mainly about his 20 or so years travelling in the Pacific during the 1870’s—90’s as well as historical accounts of Colonial Australia.

### PRESIDENT’S “DESPATCHES” by Glenn Dick

Welcome to our sixth Newsletter!

Our AGM for 2022 was held on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 2023 in Port Macquarie due to Covid restrictions and other difficulties.

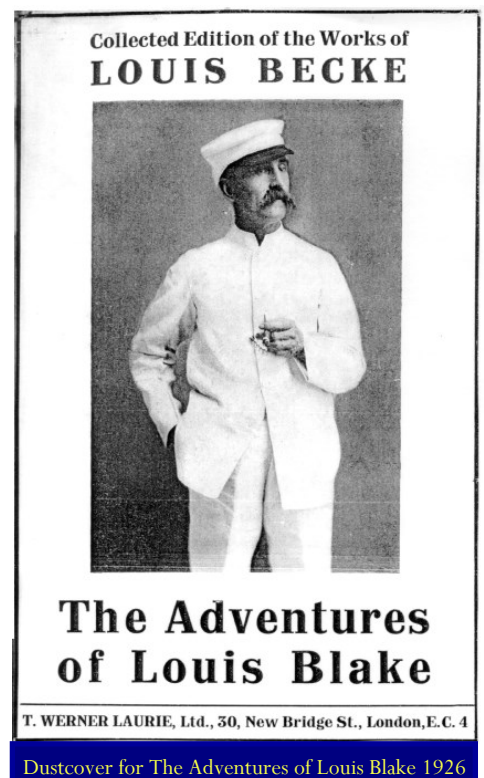
General business included:

Committee meetings to now be conducted twice a year in Port Macquarie.

Marketing:

- Logo/letterhead – enquiries are still in process of being made with Danny Burke regarding costs;
- Display of Louis Becke related material at the Maritime Museum Cottages in Port Macquarie, are being negotiated. Special display cabinets, for safety reasons, have to be considered;
- Social events and market stalls will coincide with the Maritime Museum agenda;
- Merchandising (bags, T shirts etc) to be followed up in regard to products for sale at the above events.

Pursuing Louis Becke inclusion on “Writer’s Walk”, Circular Quay Sydney and also how we can feed-in and capitalise on other literary societies (Henry Lawson & D H Lawrence).



<https://marshall.csu.edu.au/people/LouisBecke/Bibliography/LouisBlake.html>

---

## PRESIDENT'S "DESPATCHES" continued

The Becke Family Reunion will be held in June, 2025 in Port Macquarie and to be organized by Anna Underwood (descendant of Cecil Aubrey Becke, brother to Louis). More information will be sent out in 2024.

Allegra Marshall to present *"Louis Becke - Pacific Adventurer & Author"* at the Auckland Central Library, NZ (*"Heritage Space"*) at noon on 16 August 2023. This presentation will be repeated at the Becke Reunion in 2025.

Our previous five newsletters are now available on the Port Macquarie Hastings Library website: <https://catalogue.mnclibrary.org.au/libero/WebOpac.cls?VERSION=2&ACTION=DISPLAY&RSN=675825&DATA=PPP&TOKEN=Ru6CUsb1u3175&Z=1&SET=1>

Also on the website is a paper: *"Towards a New Biography"* by Dr Chrystopher Spicer.

Thank you to Jim McGuire for showing keen interest in promoting Louis Becke at the Library. Also thanks to Allegra and Chrystopher for their input into this newsletter. Makes for interesting reading!

Glenn Dick

President/Secretary

---

## LOUIS BECKE'S LIFE IN SYDNEY IN THE EARLY 1890s

Louis Becke had travelled extensively from 1869 until the time he married Mary Elizabeth "Bessie" Maunsell in Port Macquarie on 10 February 1885. Not long after their marriage they moved to Sydney where their 2 sons were born (Nora their daughter was born in late 1888 in Townsville, but Louis and the family were back in Sydney a few years later). Despite being an intermittent resident in Sydney, Louis certainly knew his way around town and lived in various locations.

"Old Sydney"



**The Australian Joint Stock Bank,  
George Street Sydney, 1900**

<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection>

We have some evidence of two locations where Louis resided at the beginning of his writing career.

These are 82 Rowntree Street, Balmain (from his correspondence in 1892 to the Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences (MAAS), now the Powerhouse Museum – refer to our previous Newsletter – although technically the suburb was Birchgrove and not Balmain) and 8 Lower Fort Street Sydney (from an Electoral Right document dated 1894 held in the

Mitchell Library). [We also know he lived in Marrickville & North Botany in 1892/1893 from the SANDS Directory]



I have visited these locations on a number of occasions with some family members on the footsteps of our Louis, reminiscing on how his life would have been in Sydney at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Birchgrove and Balmain, on the other side of Sydney Harbour, were heavily frequented by the maritime population. There was an abundance of hotels (on almost every street corner many of which still exist well over 150 years later).

Many of the houses in this area were built as part of the Waterview Estate—construction for those who worked on Mort's Docks. Louis boarded for a short while here in Rowntree Street in early 1892, most likely with others involved in the Docks. He would have greatly appreciated living near the water, meeting friends at the numerous watering holes and also being so close to the city.

**Balmain 1886-1888 (highlighting where Louis lived in Rowntree Street)**



<https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/74VvrG0epe4b/XGdw3EDPzQDj6>

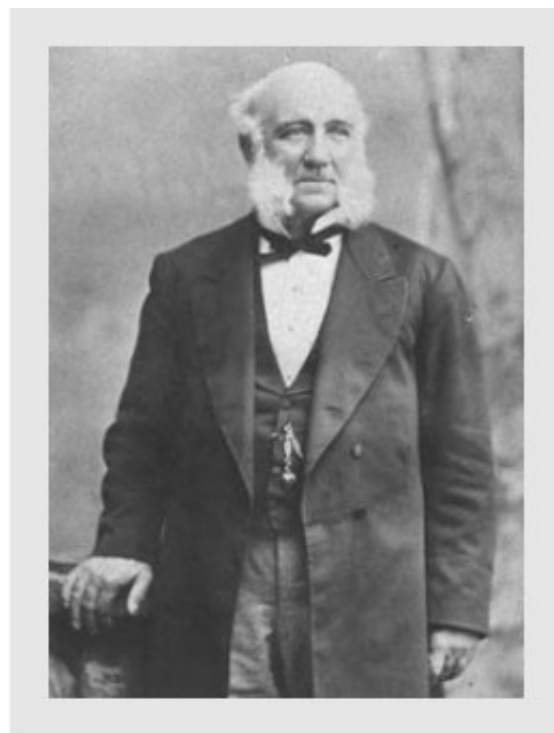


Mort's Dock at Waterview Bay, Balmain; source Wikipedia



Captain Thomas Rowntree (1818-1902), an English master mariner and shipbuilder, had in 1853 bought significant portions of land in this area by selling his ship the "Lizzie Webber" (primarily built to carry English passengers to the goldfields). In doing so he met leading auctioneer Thomas Sutcliffe Mort. Mort was an entrepreneur ahead of his time, rapidly realising the potential of livestock (mainly wool – in fact Mort was one of the first wool exporters to London) and property. In 1853 Mort and Rowntree formed the "Waterview Bay Dry Dock Company" (later "Mort's Dock & Engineering Company").

Thomas Rowntree Monument, Rowntree Street  
Photo credit Allegra Marshall



**Thomas Stephenson Rowntree (1818-1902)**, by  
unknown photographer  
State Library of New South Wales, GPO 1 - 12949

From Jude Durrant, a Becke relative via Olive Evelyn Christina Becke (Louis Becke's youngest sister, born in 1861):

*"I remember the sheer incline of the narrow steps at 82 Rowntree St, along with the height of each one. One could only imagine how the poor ladies of the time had to trudge up them with long dresses and small children. Not to mention moving furniture in and out of the building as well as bringing groceries etc. The view was superb from the landing out to the water (glimpses only). In Louis' day, without the buildings across the road now, there would have been a direct view to the water, a clear observation point watching the boats coming into and out of the Balmain foreshore from Sydney Heads. Louis would have been dreaming of being out on the water when he stood there in exactly the same spot 130 years earlier".*



Jude Durrant on the steps at Rowntree Street

Photo credit Allegra Marshall ©



Sydney was a busy and thriving port whilst Louis lived there. Circular Quay was the hub and the surrounds were a hive of activity and life with numerous ships coming and going daily.

Circular Quay 1892



<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/114.1988/>

Some remnants of the convict era were still visible well into the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially at what is now known as “The Rocks”. Lower Fort Street in particular, had many hotels (still in existence today) which provided the resident population and travellers with entertainment but mostly a place to meet and quench their thirst.

2 hotels on Lower Fort Street

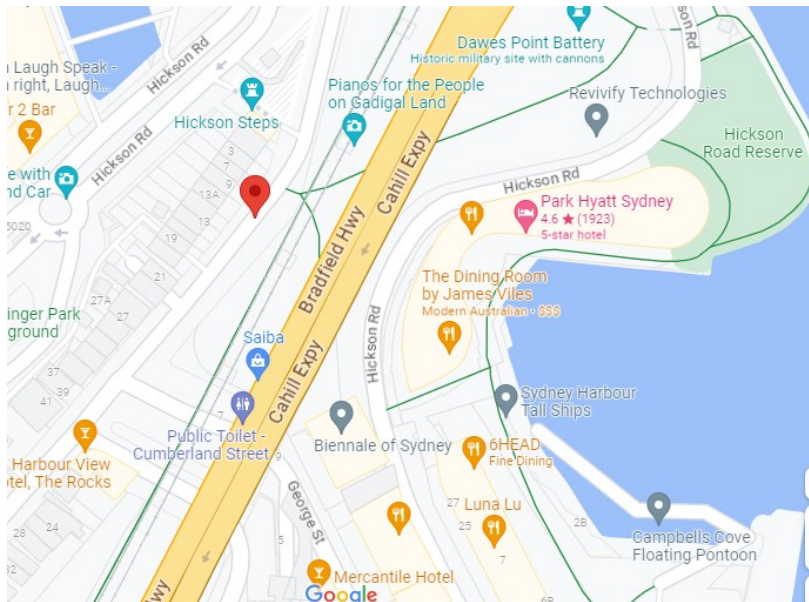


Photo credit Allegra Marshall ©



Photo credit Allegra Marshall ©

Modern day Circular Quay & the surrounds showing where 8 Lower Fort St would have been in 1894.



Google Maps

In 1867, the same year that Henry Lawson was born in Grenfell, NSW, the Becke family moved from Port Macquarie to Sydney. Louis attended the Fort St Model School on Observatory Hill for a short while. Living in Lower Fort Street in 1894 must have reminded him of his time at School, geographically not far from there.

In modern times we have at Circular Quay the “Writer’s Walk” where key authors have been commemorated by a large brass plaque placed at strategic spots on the ground that can be read when walking along the waterfront. I have made some inroads into investigating whether one can be placed for Louis.

From the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the Harbour View Hotel looking towards where 8 Lower Fort Street was and where Louis would have lived in 1894 (most likely behind the trees on the right).



Photo credit Allegra Marshall ©

See back page of this issue for Louis Becke’s Electors Right showing his address as 8 Lower Fort Street. Louis George Becke, miscellaneous, ca. April 1891-ca. August 1911. State Library of NSW Collections.



The houses across from where 8 Lower Fort Street was (demolished as part of the Sydney Harbour Bridge Construction project in the early 1920s).



Photo credit Allegra Marshall ©

Allegra Marshall May 2023

Day, A.G. *Louis Becke*. Melbourne, Victoria: Hill of Content, 1967

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mort%27s\\_Dock](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mort%27s_Dock)

<https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/explore/libraries/community-history/our-history/land-and-suburbs/inner-west-council-suburb-history>

<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/rowntree-thomas-stephenson-4518>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sydney\\_Harbour\\_Bridge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sydney_Harbour_Bridge)

---

## Ernest Favenc - fellow adventurer who launched Louis Becke into the literary world

Louis Becke (1855-1913), buried at Waverley Cemetery is in the company of 3 other colleagues: Henry Lawson (1867-1922), Jules François Archibald (1856-1919) and Ernest Favenc (1845-1908). Whilst they are at rest in vastly different areas of the Cemetery, all have breathtaking views of the Pacific Ocean, Louis' playground, in common. Whilst Lawson and Archibald were well known public figures, Favenc, like Becke is probably a little less known on the literary radar.

Ernest Favenc is credited with introducing Becke to Jules Archibald, editor and co-founder of *The Bulletin*, after meeting him in 1892 at Pfahler's Hotel <sup>†</sup>, around Wynyard, Sydney (at the time both were living in nearby William Street). At this time, Louis was rather demoralised: after having travelled extensively for around 20 years, reality was setting in. In early October 1892 he had applied for a post in the New Hebrides (now modern-day Vanuatu). He had understated his age in the correspondence as 35; when he was actually 37 and married with 2 young children. He realised it would now probably be difficult, albeit impossible to consider a life of independence and travel to wilder shores as he had done in the past.

Favenc, English born of Huguenot descent and educated in Germany and England, and who had arrived in Australia in 1864, had already published two books in Sydney by the time he met Louis in 1892: *The History of Australian*

*Exploration 1788-1888* and *The Great Austral Plain*. He had been an intrepid explorer of pastoral land in remote parts of Australia (QLD, SA, NT & WA) from 1865 until the time he met Louis.



Ernest Favenc, photo L W Appleby, Sydney (from the Bulletin Vol 29 no 1501, 19 Nov 1908)

Indeed, Favenc's adventures in outback Australia were probably on a similar scale to Becke's life in more remote parts of the Pacific (Marshall Islands, Kosrae/Kusaie, Line Island etc). Favenc must have had the impression he was meeting a very similar but slightly younger version of himself when they met that fateful day - no doubt over a few drinks making the conversation even more animated and Louis' tales wilder in their re-telling!

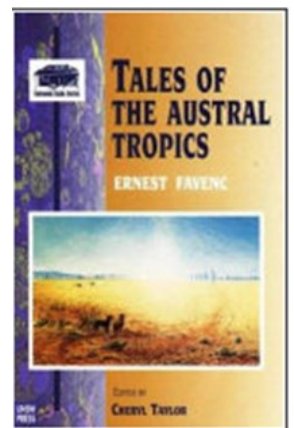
According to A. Grove Day, Louis Becke's biographer, Favenc commented after listening to some of Louis's yarns, commented: "You ought to be a writer". Not long after this fortuitous meeting, Favenc promptly waltzed Becke four blocks away to meet Jules Archibald... \*

Archibald listened to Louis recounting some of his stories and suitably impressed, asked him to contribute immediately. Once again, according to A. Grove Day, Louis asked Archibald naively: "How does a bloke go about it?" to which Archibald replied: "Write just as you are telling me now; they will make dashed good yarns!" Louis, motivated and inspired – and also needing funds

to support his wife and family - wrote *Tis in the Blood*, which was published in the Bulletin on 6 May 1893. This was followed by Becke's first book *By Reef and Palm*, a collection of short stories on the South Seas, published in London in 1894. It was so popular that it was re-printed three times that year. Further stories followed in 1896 and 1897, resulting in the publication of over 35 books by the time Louis passed away in 1913.

Ernest Favenc, graceful writer and intrepid pioneer, set out last Saturday along the well-blazed track that leads to the bourne where ink is not, and exploring is a work of supererogation. The passion to discover the unknown wilds of Australia raged in Favenc during most of the active portion of his 62 years of life. He dreamed that somewhere away Back o' Beyond a fertile, well-watered Eden lies, and many were his efforts to strike the happy land. He failed; but his dream served as an inspiration for scores of charming bush sketches, for novels, geographical treatises, and historical works. He was a born bushman. Englishman though he was, his feats in a multitude of tight places won him the admiration of his native-born companions. He knew the remotenesses of this continent with an intimacy born of a quarter-century's close study. He wrote about those weird expanses with the appreciation of a lover. He was the apotheosis of the Abo-writer. His "History of Australian Exploration" is the most notable of his more ambitious works. Favenc did much good work for THE BULLETIN, and the fact that he once steered a ghost yarn into this paper was a notable performance, for THE BULLETIN has mostly shied off ghosts.

Favenc continued to write more books (mainly novels) and prose. Interestingly, his *Tales of the Austral Tropics* appeared in 1893, the year after he introduced Louis to Jules Archibald: Ernest Favenc died on 14 November 1908, just over four years before Becke. As per Becke, he was a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society – as inscribed on his headstone.



When reading the obituary from the Bulletin below, it's not difficult to see the similarities between Louis and Ernest. There was an immediate bond and friendship based on True Adventure. Who knows what would have happened to our Louis had he not been at Pfahler's Hotel on that fateful day!

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/15024159#>



**ERNEST FAVENC.**  
**EXPLORER-AUTHOR'S DEATH.**  
**A RARE PIONEER.**

On Saturday died at his home at Darlinghurst a rare man amongst pioneers; one who not only fought through the dense bush and immense wilderness of Northern Australia, but was exquisitely, almost poetically, sensitive of the scrub and the plain, and had the power to put them as he had felt them out there in black and white, so that other people might really know them too. That was Ernest Favenc, pioneer, station hand, explorer, poet, novelist.



This article and Waverley Cemetery photos by *Allegra Marshall*, May 2023

+Charles Pfahlert (1830-1884) is also buried at Waverley Cemetery

\*The Bulletin office was just off Pitt Street down near Circular Quay. This area in 2023 is still called "Bulletin Place". The Bulletin headquarters moved to a larger office in George St in 1897. In 1880 when the Bulletin commenced operations, its focus was primarily politics and business with only some literary content. The **weekly** publication at inception was known as the "bushman's bible" as it was publishing primarily Australian and other relatively controversial material. Authors such as Henry Lawson, Norman Lindsay, Miles Franklin & Banjo Patterson also contributed regularly to the Bulletin.

Day, A.G. *Louis Becke*. Melbourne, Victoria: Hill of Content, 1967

<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/favenc-ernest-3506>

[https://books.google.com/books/about/Tales\\_of\\_the\\_Austral\\_Tropics.html?id=TtggAQAAIAAJ](https://books.google.com/books/about/Tales_of_the_Austral_Tropics.html?id=TtggAQAAIAAJ)

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/15024159#>

<https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-660626775/view?sectionId=nla.obj-675484471&partId=nla.obj-660638471#page/n19/mode/1up>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Bulletin\\_\(Australian\\_periodical\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bulletin_(Australian_periodical))

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulletin\\_Place\\_warehouses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulletin_Place_warehouses)

## READING THE LETTERS OF LOUIS BECKE

Dr Chrystopher J Spicer

Although he was a frequent correspondent with friends, family, other writers, and members of Australian and British society during his life, few of those hundreds of letters written by Louis Becke have survived. In fact, only two known substantial caches exist. One of these is the collection of over 300 letters and memos that he wrote to his occasional writing collaborator and friend, Walter Jeffery, between 1896 and 1901, and the other is a much smaller group of letters to his wife written while he was visiting Jamaica, the United States, and Canada for a few months in 1902. Thanks to new remote reading technology being pioneered by the University of Hawai'i Manoa Library, I have been able to spend many hours over the last few months reading copies of these letters recorded on microfilm in the mid-1960s for Professor Grove Day, author of the only existing biography of Becke, and subsequently archived there.

While he was living and writing in Sydney during the early 1890s, Becke formed a friendship with Walter Jeffery, the quiet, unassuming, but remarkably talented editor of a major *Bulletin* competitor, the *Australian Town and Country Journal*, and later of Sydney's *Evening News*. For the rest of the decade, these two men from different backgrounds would collaborate to write some half-dozen historical works together while working on their own projects. Discovering they had much in common, Becke and Jeffery maintained a partnership through frequent correspondence while living on opposite sides of the world at a time when a letter might easily take weeks to travel between them. Once based in London, Becke also acted as Jeffery's literary agent, ensuring that his own stories, articles, and an historical novel achieved publication in England. Inspired by the publication in 1892 and 1893 of the first two volumes of *The Historical Records of New South Wales*, that provided invaluable and previously unavailable source material, Becke and Jeffery wrote a series of historically-based works that included, *A First Fleet Family* (1896), *The Mystery of the Laughlin Islands* (1896), *The Mutineer: A Romance of Pitcairn Island* (1898), *Admiral Phillip: The Founding of New South Wales* (1899), *Naval Pioneers of Australia* (1899), and a collection of short stories and historical articles, *The Tapu of Banderah* (1901). Many of these were, in one way or another, significant publications. *A First Fleet Family* was the first novelization of the amazing open-boat voyage from Port Jackson to Timor of a group of escaping convicts including Mary Bryant and her family, *The Mutineer* was the first novelization of the *Bounty* mutiny and settlement of Pitcairn Island, *Admiral Phillip* was the first biography of that important historical figure, and *Naval Pioneers* was the first comprehensive collection of historical accounts of Australian maritime exploration by Europeans. The letters between Becke and Jeffery tell us much about the men behind their dedicated efforts to produce these volumes, but for now I will focus on Louis Becke.

Every biographer dreams of being able to read letters hand-written by their subject, for they tell us so much that letters written on keyboards do not. So, what do these letters tell us about Louis Becke the person? Most obviously, he was very neat and precise: his handwriting is nearly always legible on a first read, for which researchers like me breathe a deep sigh of relief, and the lines of his writing are remarkably straight, given he customarily uses un-lined paper. His daughters once told Grove Day that Becke would use a folded page of blotting paper as a straight rule, above which he wrote lines. Considering he is writing with a nib pen dipped in ink, too, he rarely makes mistakes, even in letters where you can see he is quickly writing down thoughts he has had during a train journey while at a station rest stop before the journey resumes. There are no lines through sentences or crossed-out words, not even an ink blot. You can't help but think he must have learned to be this precise while writing trading transaction records on board island schooners at sea. The letters are even; the pen strokes deliberate. Whole sentences have formed in his head before he writes. He might have claimed at times to have little schooling and to have spent his time roaming the coast and rivers, but these are not the letters of an Australian Huckleberry Finn: they are the letters of a well-educated, well-read, thoughtful, observant, and literate man.



They are also the letters of an honest and ethical man. Throughout his relationship with Jeffery, Becke was scrupulous about their joint financial arrangements. Always keeping a careful account of their expenses, along with their publishing income, he ensured Jeffery was up-to-date with which articles and stories had been sold, the dealings surrounding publishing contracts, and the outcomes in terms of their shared income. He was aware that Jeffery also had a family to support and a child that was often unwell and needed medical treatment. Becke always gives Jeffery his due credit. Because Becke was the better-known author of the two in England and America, editors would often leave Jeffery's name off a jointly-written piece, yet we see in his letters that Becke is on the look-out for such omissions in the printer's proofs, in which case he demands that Jeffery's name be reinstated. He readily defers to Jeffery's comprehensive knowledge about Australian history, too, assuring him that he is just there to polish the prose a little, not to make radical edits to Jeffery's historical accounts: he always considers their work in a joint sense as 'ours,' rather than 'mine' or 'yours'. Consequently, and perhaps not surprisingly, this was an enduring and successful partnership.

*Photo of the actual bungalow in Greenore, on the Cooley Peninsular in County Louth, Ireland, where Louis and the family were living in 1902 at the time he went to Jamaica (Courtesy Dr C. Spicer)*



<https://lvbmag.wpcostaging.com/2022/12/06/london-northwest-railway-company-bungalows-greenore-golf-club-louth/>

Written during a trip to Jamaica in 1902, Becke's letters to his wife and children back home in Ireland are the only known surviving letters from him to them. These letters, too, reveal him but in ways that the letters to Jeffery do not. Within them are the thoughts and observations of a lonely, loving, family man reluctantly parted from loved ones by necessity, who signs off with his pet name of 'Nunka,' or 'best friend,' the name given him by Islanders. He often refers to his wife as 'my dear wife,' and sometimes as 'Niya,' or 'little one,' a term of endearment that was also his youngest daughter's name.

He took photos of them with him on the journey and would put them within sight wherever he stayed, and he kept track of the time back in Ireland, often timing the writing of a letter with part of the family's daily schedule, such as their mother putting the girls to bed. He describes people he meets on board ship or in Jamaican society, their foibles, fashions, trite conversation, and often appalling manners. He could not, for example, stand the hypocrisy of the English military wives and daughters in Kingston, Jamaica, who put on airs but who drank like fish and groped the young officers.

While in Jamaica, Becke had to contend with unusually hot and oppressive weather, the highest temperatures the island had endured for years, along with a strangely coloured night sky "that was enough to give one the horrors," he wrote on September 18 to his wife, observing that people were scared by it all and wondering if it might be due to 'the volcanic eruption.' Becke was quite right to pose the question because he was referring to the worst volcanic catastrophe of the twentieth century: the May 8 eruption of Mt Pelée on Martinique, about 1780km east across the Caribbean, that devastated the city of St Pierre and killed approximately 26,000 people. In fact, Mt Pelée, that faces Jamaica across the water, continued to erupt while Becke was in Jamaica, so undoubtedly he was experiencing the meteorological effects of that event.

*The Constant Spring Hotel in which Louis was staying in Jamaica (Courtesy Dr C. Spicer)*



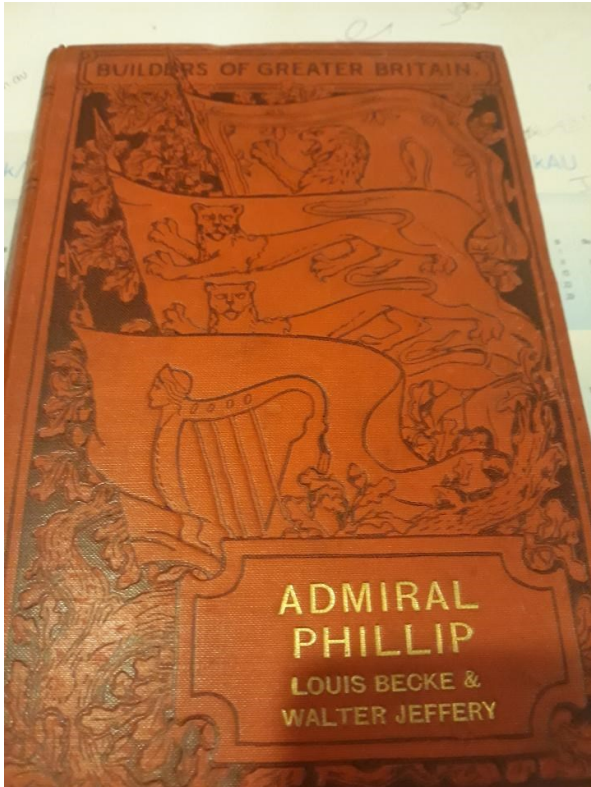
<http://jamaicahotelhistory.com/postcards/constantspring.htm>

Ultimately, the trip nearly killed him. Because of a chronic respiratory condition, Becke had been advised by his doctors for years to give up smoking but never could quite surrender his beloved tobacco. Jamaica's oppressive heat and humidity only aggravated his respiratory problems, and at times he found it difficult to breathe. Then, early on the morning of his departure from Jamaica, Becke climbed onto a table while attempted to close a window shutter that had jammed only to have it slide out from under him. As he fell, he hit the corner of his travelling trunk, fracturing some ribs and straining back muscles. The local doctor insisted he needed rest to recover, but Becke was determined to board ship and be on his way home, so the doctor strapped him up tightly and warned him not to become seasick or his ribs would not heal. Nevertheless, our redoubtable Louis Becke survived his journey to eventually arrive back in Ireland into the embrace of his family.

*Dr Chrystopher Spicer is currently involved in a major research project on the life and work of Louis Becke at James Cook University in Queensland, the outcome of which will hopefully be a new biography of him in time for the 2025 anniversary (if we can only find a publisher). If you have any documents, photos, or information about Louis Becke that you would like to share, he would only be too happy to hear from you: [chrystopher.spicer@jcu.edu.au](mailto:chrystopher.spicer@jcu.edu.au)*

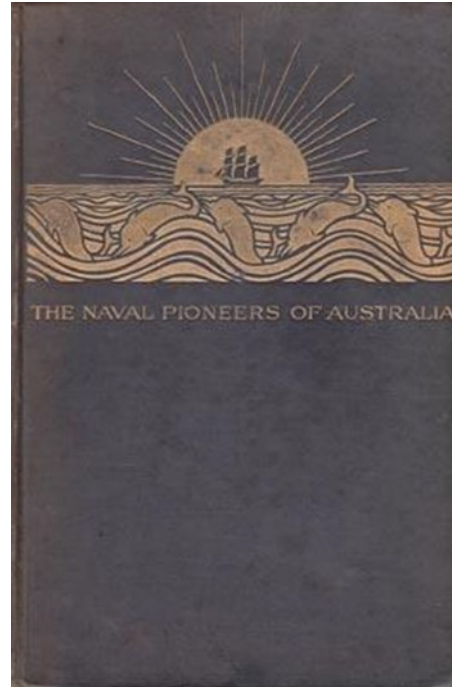


Admiral Philip (Louis Becke & Walter Jeffery)  
 Sept 1899 T. Fisher Unwin (UK); 1899 Longmans (US):

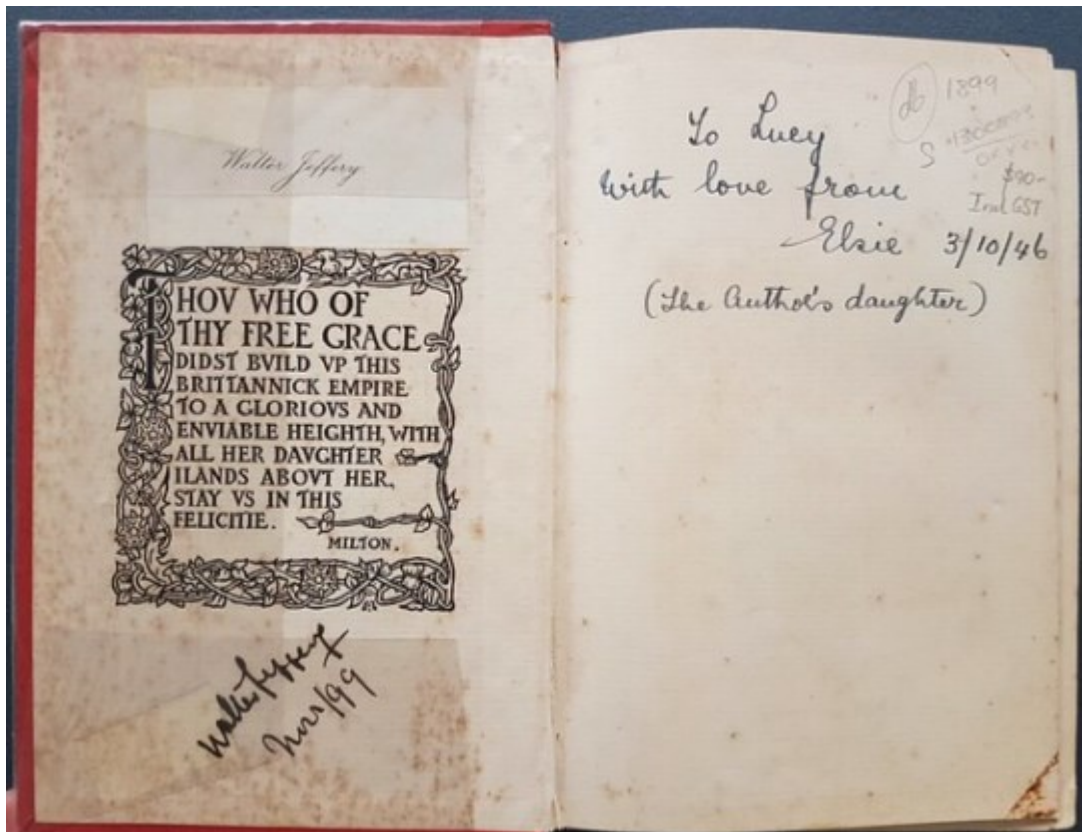


*Book cover courtesy Jude Durrant*

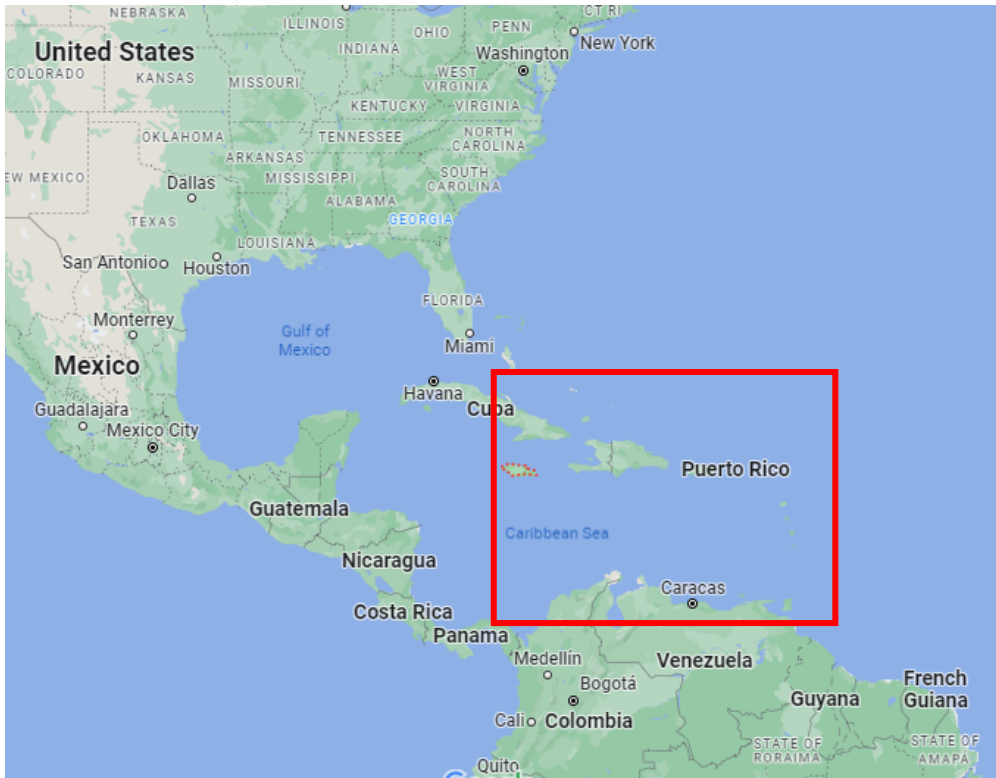
<https://www.abebooks.com/Naval-Pioneers-Australia-BECKE-Louis-Walter/14506130889/bd#&gid=1&pid=1>



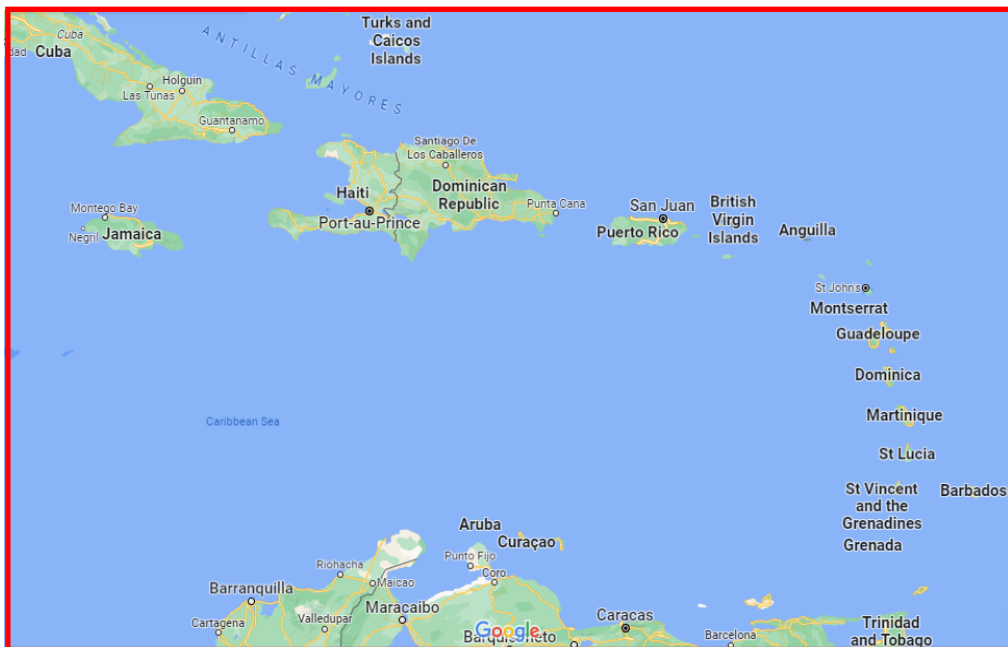
*heritagefutures/33887169344/in/photostream/*



Walter Jeffery's personal copy of Admiral Phillip (courtesy of Dr C. Spicer) :<https://www.flickr.com/photos/>



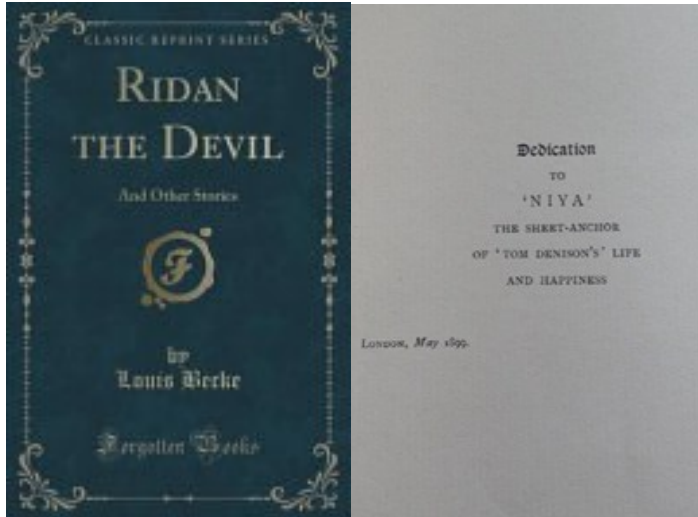
<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Jamaica/@24.9034789,-100.0864778,4z/data=!4m6!3m5!1s0x8eda2a1bc6cf719d:0x59a0d1c0b5120efa!8m2!3d18.109581!4d-77.297508!16zL20vMDNfcjM>



<https://www.google.com/maps/@16.749326,-70.1763721,6z>



The Louis Becke Society members have their respective collections of Louis Becke books. Members are encouraged to write about one that is of interest to them. Glenn has chosen *"Ridan the Devil"* which is set in his home-town of Port Macquarie. Glenn is also an accomplished artist and chose to include some of his paintings to illustrate his critique. Louis Becke (born 1855) was baptised in the St Thomas church. At the time, his father was the Registrar/Clerk of Petty Sessions in Port Macquarie (1855 to 1867).



### **"IN MEMORY OF THE SYSTEM" by Glenn Dick**

Becke's book *"Ridan the Devil"* (published in London, May 1899) and dedicated to his wife Fanny (whose nickname at the time was "Niya"\*) has an interesting 3 chapter story titled: "A MEMORY OF THE SYSTEM" page 19.

*Glenn Dick collection*

**Chapter 1:** He starts describing where he lived from his birth at what is now the town beach location at historic Port Macquarie (Bar Harbour, titled in the story).

The town Becke describes as retaining old, emancipated convicts, leftovers from the brutal penal system that existed from 1821-32 when it was closed down and free settlers began to settle there from 1838 and my own family in 1841. His referenced main character is the Rev. Mr. Sampson who Becke's mother somewhat despised and his older brother "Harry" referred to him as the "flogging parson", (reminiscent of the Rev. Samuel Marsden).



*First worship at St Thomas's Church in Port Macquarie. John Cross was the first Vicar (Heritage Collection 2005 by Glenn Dick).*

A comical sketch of the despised parson ended up with Harry, Sampson being a Magistrate as well who sentenced many a person to a dreadful flogging and supervised the brutal deed.

Becke describes one particular incident whereby the Parson executes flogging of a 60 year old emancipated convict (Callaghan), from which his mother gives the Parson short shrift regarding the deed, banishing him from visiting the family house. The mother states, "and never again shall I or my children enter the church where he preaches, tonight, I suppose he will visit that retched old man the victim of his brutality and administer spiritual admonition".<sup>1</sup>

Early one morning 3 months after the drawing by Lt. Moore, the originator of the cartoon sketch, Becke along with 2 brothers set out on a fishing trip south along with a young man Walter Trenfield, an assigned servant to his father, and an aboriginal named "King Billy", after some distance travelled, they stop near a cone-shaped headland "Little Nobby".<sup>2</sup>



*The northern side of Nobby's Headland - Oil painting 1980 by Glenn Dick*

**Chapter 2:** Trenfield was described as a native of Devon and had been a sailor who was sentenced to 14 years servitude for mutiny on board a ship, along with another, Thomas May, both men "employed" in building a bridge over a river at "Bar Harbour".

Ruth Kenna, a young free female is servant of the family takes a liking to Trenfield. Kenna's father was an emancipated convict, a widower. Kenna, a fisherman, was absent one evening and allowed the Egerton boys and Ruth to use his prized possession, a fishing-net from which they ultimately destroy recklessly. Kenna chastising his daughter "you might have waited till I was back Ruth, he said quietly, "there's as good a net as was ever made gone to ruin".

On alternate evenings Tom May would visit the Egerton's house and go to Trenfield's quarters, the Parson describing them both as dangerous villains.

An incident occurred in the bush where May was accused by a tyrannical overseer, Cross, which eventuated in May receiving 100 lashes, then ultimately escaping into the bushland, then to Kenna's bush hut, afterwards coming across 2 escaped convicts who were planning an escape via the sea using a found whaleboat washed up on a remote section of beach.

Little Nobby was chosen as an escape location, so a plan was conceived, Kenna helping to get all in readiness for the 3 to escape.

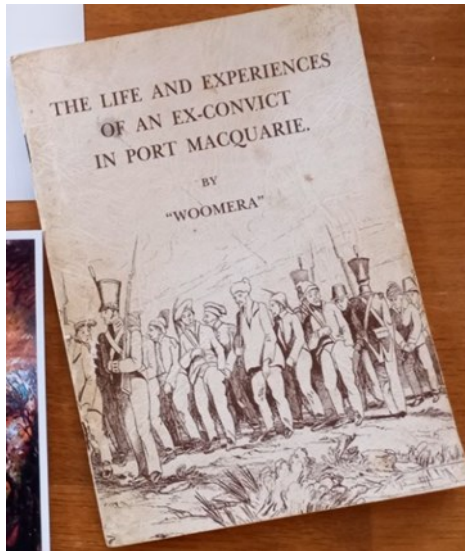
The Parson meanwhile had suspected Trenfield of the cartoon which by now had presented in fine copies all about the town to further enrage his sensibilities. Meanwhile, the boat was soon gone along with all equipment stored as well. Becke now describes the WILLIAM BRYANT episode which his mother often relates.



Ruth was looking forward to the day of her marriage to Trenfield. After 2 long years no letter had been received from Thomas May. Question? Did he make successful his escape.

**Chapter 3:** (Final) Becke in this chapter I feel at his best in completion of the fictionalised story, reminiscent of "A Boy's Own" adventure theme. By the time he was growing up in the "Old Lots O' Time" place as he referred to it the convict system had long ceased, only the remnants remained of a once brutal, hideous regime.

1850's-60's still had old "shell-backs" (ex-convicts) lying about, sunning themselves on the headlands near the Pilot Station and Flagstaff, contemplating their past lives of turmoil and torment.



(Reference: *The Life and Experiences of an Ex-Convict in Port Macquarie, Delaforce*).



<https://printshop.sl.nsw.gov.au/st-thomas-church-port-macquarie-1832-1842/>

The Rev. John Cross was the first Minister to perform the 1<sup>st</sup> Sermon in the old "red-brick Anglican Church" on the hill (28<sup>th</sup> Feb 1828).<sup>3</sup>

The church took 4 years to construct using convict labour and is the only structure that remains in Port Macquarie that is convict built. The painting by Joseph Backler depicts the arrival of Major Archibald Innes in Nov 1826 to become the Commandant of the penal colony at Port Macquarie. Rev. Cross at one stage purporting to be residing with the Becke's and was a dedicated, loved people's Parson.

An interesting incident occurred in the early 1960's when I was a lad at school, I went fishing with my Dad at Nobby's (South Side) claiming I was sick so didn't turn up for school. A couple of days later the teacher inquired of me the reason of my absence and I told him I was sick. He then related the story he had read in the Port News of Mr. Dick and son Glenn witnessing, whilst fishing, a man fall some 30ft on the South side of Nobby's whereby Mr. Dick sought help and alerted Ambulance and Police of the situation. "Ah, sick eh? This'll make ya feel better, get that hand up a bit higher, whack, whack," "in memory of the system"! We were too poor to buy a bloody newspaper.

"King Billy" was the known Elder of the local Birpai Tribe.

Glenn Dick

<sup>1</sup> First worship at St. Thomas's Church in Port Macquarie. John Cross was the first Vicar (Heritage Collection 2005 by Glenn Dick).

<sup>2</sup> Oil painting completed in situ (1980 the Northern side of Nobby's Headland).

<sup>3</sup> St. Thomas's Church, Port Macquarie.

\* Niya was the name they also gave to their actual daughter, born on 27 September 1898 in Eastbourne, UK.

## FROM THE TREASURER

### Memberships

Thank you to everyone who joined again last financial year (June – June). Please encourage others to join by forwarding the membership form to them. *If you are already a member, the form does not need to be returned to me.*

A direct transfer can be made to:

**Louis Becke Society**

**BSB 932-000 (Regional Australia Bank)**

**A/C 500203408**

Membership costs - Adults \$20; Family \$30; Student \$15; Local Business \$100; Corporate \$250. Overseas members are able to transfer funds by **Xoom, a Pay Pal Service**.

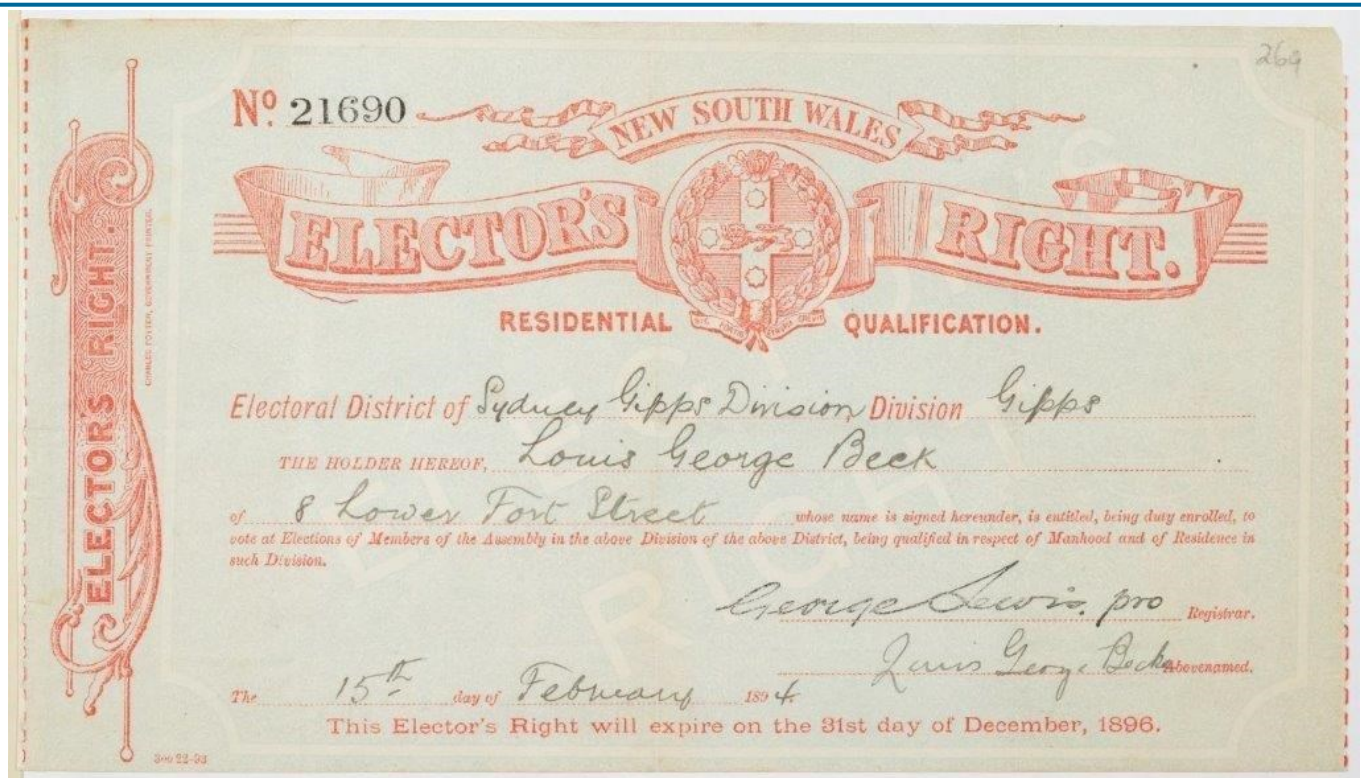
Memberships plus donations have been our main fund raiser. These funds are vital to our ongoing promotion of Louis Becke and his achievements from the 1880's to 1913.

Thank you to all our current members for your ongoing support.

Your contribution is very much appreciated.

David Bawden

Treasurer



<https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/nZNWr76n/6MV6EB5bQxbND>

This Newsletter has been prepared and edited by Anna Underwood, Allegra Marshall and Jude Durrant and kindly typeset by Gregory Ross of the Friends of Waverley Cemeteries.