

PENSHURST RSL TRAVEL CLUB

MYSTERY TRIP

THURSDAY 18 MAY 2023



28 members had booked on this tour, out of a possible 30 permitted for the day. Early threatening clouds only meant one thing – rain, but, fortunately for us, it would remain a perfect day. Malcolm collected us at the appointed time, but we were a few minutes late leaving. Not that this would make a huge difference and we made reasonable progress through peak-hour traffic to our morning tea spot – Wentworth Common at Sydney Olympic Park - arriving 40 minutes later. A great place – sheltered seating areas (with BBQs) amongst the trees and overlooking a huge beautifully grassed park, but it just happened that our arrival coincided with hundreds of junior high kids from various schools descending on the area for what we were told were cross-country races. They were really very well behaved and the only impact on us was accessing the (several) toilets – have never known toilets to be so popular! However, we enjoyed Liz's plentiful morning tea with many of us helping ourselves to seconds (and thirds)! About ¾ hour here and, as we headed away past the Sydney Olympic Park Archery centre and the myriad of high-rise buildings, we were given the opportunity to guess today's mystery venue, but I don't think anyone was correct. However, one smart person did work out where we'd be having lunch, and apologies for not noting who that was!



It took us just a few minutes to reach the mystery location, Newington Armory, which we'd last visited many years ago when seeing much of it on their little heritage train. There are a few to choose from but today was a walking tour, covering the years 1897 – 1921 and our guides for the next 1½ hours were the very friendly and informative Eva and Sandra. There's an extensive history, but very briefly during the 1860s/1870s the public was becoming increasingly concerned about the large amounts of explosives being stored in four locations close to Sydney city. It was recommended that a storage facility be established on the banks of the Parramatta River and, in 1882, land was resumed at Newington, but no construction until 1897, as major modifications were

needed to the natural environment which included reclamation of wetlands and mudflats. The magazine was under military control (CMF later known as the Australian Army) until 1921, when management was transferred to the Royal Australian Navy. In 1961, the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, ordered all high explosives to be removed from Newington and relocated to another depot at Kingswood. By 1983, planning began for a replacement depot in Jervis Bay and, in 1992, the Dept of Defence began immediate arrangements for the closure of both Newington and Kingswood, although the last operation at Newington was not until 1999. The property is now owned by the Sydney Olympic Park Authority and was added to the New South Wales State Heritage Register on 14 January 2011. The full story is on: [https://www.sopa.nsw.gov.au/armory history](https://www.sopa.nsw.gov.au/armory%20history)



Our guides escorted us around the Original Establishment Precinct which contains the earliest military buildings in the NW corner of the site. The tour started with a talk near the wharf area (the two cranes are circa 1973), through the Gatehouse where our group's photo was taken, then various brick buildings (with prominent lightning conductors and facilities for discharging static electricity!), into a magazine store which, in those days, was "lit" by candlelight placed in crevices around the walls. Workers were required to spend hours each day in here in extremely difficult conditions. Another highlight was a walk through a pitch-black and rather claustrophobic single file corridor (more like a tunnel) – we were supplied with

torches, but even so ... The tour ended at the Murama Dance Ground, adjacent to the leisure fields, which provides the indigenous community with a place to hold cultural activities. Walking back to the Gatehouse, we spied a tunnel which led to Building 18, once a WWII explosives store. A large space of 500 sqm, it is now used as a contemporary art gallery and flexible exhibition space.

Time for lunch and around a 15-minute drive to Merrylands RSL Club. When making the booking, staff had mentioned coach parking to Elizabeth, but this was nowhere to be found, with Malcolm having to drive around the block to make sure. Sadly, he had to park many blocks away and, consequently, missed our lunch. The club has obviously undergone renovation/redevelopment since our last visit and is looking fantastic! Lunch was in the same spot though, catering for hundreds of patrons and was packed by the time we arrived, but fortunately we were ushered into a walled-off area in one corner of the enormous room. It was an all-you-can-eat buffet with a huge selection on offer, but, in some instances, we had to fight for it! Anyway, the food was great and we enjoyed a two-hour leisurely lunch, followed by a choice of several desserts and tea/coffee. We departed at 2.30, with Jenny S and June P winning the lucky seat prizes and, dodging the worst of the school traffic, were back in Penshurst by 3.15.

