

*Oatley Heritage Group Projects.*

<i>Month &amp; Year of Topic</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Written &amp; Spoken Presenters</i>
May 2009	<i>The Life of Russell Gibbs</i>	<i>As told to Alec Leach by Norma Gibbs</i>

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*The Life of Russell Gibbs*  
*As told to Alec Leach*  
by  
*Norma Gibbs*

Presented on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2009 at the Quarterly meeting of the Oatley Heritage Group.

Compiled and presented by Alec Leach.

Russell Gibbs was born on the 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1921, in Drummoyne then lived at Enfield until the age of ten when he moved to Oatley, 32 Annette Street, a waterfrontage. His early school days were at Enfield. Russell's secondary education was attained at Arncliffe, this being the best school available for him to pursue his office career.

It wasn't long after moving to Oatley, that he met Norma. She was eleven and Russell thirteen. This was at the Oatley Methodist Church where they both attended Sunday school. Russell and Norma were involved in all of the activities belonging to the Church, in their teenage years. They both taught Sunday school. Norma belonged to the "Comrades" and Russell in the "OKs". Apart from their religious life, their social life revolved around the Church activities. Norma is still friendly with folk who were in attendance in those days.

Throughout these years, he pursued his love of kayaking and athletics. He enjoyed cricket, belonged to Hurstville Athletics and represented Oatley Methodist Church "OKs" at combined competitions at Newington College.

In 1941 at the age of eighteen, Russell joined the AIF. Initially he was assigned to the Bren Gun unit where he was trained in Queensland and then assigned to New Guinea. When he returned, he moved to the 53<sup>rd</sup> Anti Aircraft Regiment, where he spent most of the remaining years of the war at Taracan. He was discharged in December 1945.



In 1943 Norma and Russell were married in the Oatley Methodist Church. On Russell's discharge, he returned to his original employer, PDS, the distributors of Allowrie products. He originally joined the company when he was fifteen and stayed with them until he retired. During that time he progressed to become the Manager of the Allowrie shop.

Housing was difficult to obtain, so initially they lived at Bondi. Norma and Russell moved to Oatley to share a house with Mrs. Judge and spent many pleasant years with her until she passed away. They purchased their first house at the then 124(now 130) Letitia Street, where they brought up their two children, Graham and Warren. In 1973 they moved to 8 Dinjerra Crescent. Their waterfront property provided Russell with the opportunity again to pursue his love of kayaking.

*Russell & Norma. 1946*

When the boys were growing up, Russell kept pace with their interests and activities. When they were at School, he became involved in the P & C, being Secretary and President during his time. Whilst the boys were in the Penhurst RSL Youth Group, so was Russell. In Scouting, 1<sup>st</sup> Oatley Bay Sea Scouts, he joined the Layside Committee and soon became Secretary. The committee still raises finances, maintains the hall and purchases equipment required. This allows the Scouters to focus on teaching Scouting skills.

His interest in the Group didn't wane after the boys moved on. Russell became sports tester for many years, testing Cubs for various sporting badges. (Our two sons for athletics)

From the time Russell was discharged from the Army,, he kept close contact with his old unit. He produced the Newsletter for the 53<sup>rd</sup> Anti Aircraft Regiment and served as their Treasurer. Part of Norma's and Russell's social activities were spent at functions with his old Regiment.

Russell was a dedicated member of the Masonic movement, joining in 1942 as a foundation member of Lodge Ashlar. See Attachments 1 & 2 for Russell's full Masonic history.

When Russell attained the position of Worshipful Master, firstly in Ashlar and later in Lodge Oatley, Norma became involved in the social side. When he was Master, the annual Ladies night was the highlight of their social calendar. When he moved on to become Grand Junior Warden, at times representing the Grand Master, Norma and Russell would have to be the guest of honour at various Balls. Overwhelming at first for Norma, but as time went by they both enjoyed this memorable period of their lives.

Whether it was the fact that Russell was an avid reader that drew him to volunteer mainly at Oatley Library when he retired, remains to be seen. However, whatever his reason for helping the Community of Oatley we are indebted. Apart from spending a day a week repairing damaged library books, he became involved in the wider aspects of Kogarah Council's activities, helping out at the annual Kogarah Bed Race and at Christmas time being an excellent Santa Claus.



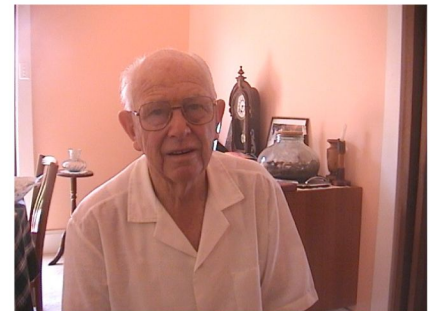
It was during this time with the Library that he realised there was little information on Oatley's history.

After considerable negotiations with Council, meetings with local citizens, writing and requesting information from relevant groups and people he thought would be able to provide him with information, it was realised there was considerable interest by the community in our local history. In November 1995, Russell's dream of obtaining local and living history of Oatley became a reality when the *Oatley heritage group* was formed and Russell was installed as President.

Music had always been another interest of Russell's. He played the Banjo Mandolin, Guitar and in later years gained much pleasure from their small organ. Many parties were held a No8 with local talent participating in the merriment. He enjoyed organising an annual Christmas concert at the Mortdale Masonic Hall. Proceeds from these concerts were donated to charity.

Norma lost her mate of sixty seven years and husband of fifty nine years on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2002. Russell was eighty one years old.

Although in the publication, "Kogarah's Volunteer Heroes", it states that Russell was educated at Hurstville Technical College; his secondary education was completed at Arncliffe.



Attachment 1. Is an excerpt from the publication "Kogarah's Volunteer Heroes", reproduced with the permission of Kogarah Council.

Attachment 2. Oatley Masonic Lodge: History of Russell Gibbs. Initiated by Jack Marks, compiled by Bill Stewart.

Attachment 3. Oatley Masonic Lodge: Members who were/are prominent citizens in the community. Produced in 1998.

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## Russell Gibbs

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*Russell Robert Gibbs*  
 29 May 1921 - 23 June 2002



As a boy, Russell lived in Enfield, then Oatley, and he moved to Dingara Crescent on the Georges River with his wife Norma in 1966. He went to Hurstville Technical College and joined the army, serving during WWII in the Heavy Anti Aircraft Unit of the AIF.

From 16 he worked for the producers of Allowrie products, as a 'traveller', or salesman, and in the Allowrie shop in Haymarket until he retired. Russell joined the Masons in 1946 and had an active career with them, becoming Worshipful Master of Lodge Oatley in 1979. He did backroom work, community work and pastoral care. If anyone had trouble, he would go and visit them. He would arrange concerts to raise money for people in the Lodge who needed help. Russell was a Justice of the Peace, a Secretary of the Oatley Bay Sea Scouts. He was involved with the Oatley Public School P&C and the St George Area Scout Group for which he was timekeeper for the sports and athletics badges.

On his retirement, Russell became interested in the history of Oatley, and started researching and volunteering at Oatley, Kogarah and Hurstville libraries. He realised there were few records of Oatley's early days, and in discussion with the library staff started to collect information for what became the Oatley Local History Project. He approached this task by writing to people and organisations in the area, asking them for their personal accounts and recollections, photos and other historical records of Oatley. The result is a fascinating collection of material, which is available at Kogarah and Oatley libraries.

Out of this project Russell created the Oatley Heritage Group, which held its first meeting in November 1995, with a mission to "gather as much information as is available on all aspects of the suburb of Oatley, and to help maintain the heritage that has been handed down to us". Russell died in 2002 and left things well organised before he fell ill. The group continues to meet four times a year.

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## Peter and Sandra Grove

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*Peter Grove*  
 Born 8 March 1966

*Sandra Grove*  
 Born 10 December 1971

Sandra and Peter Grove have lived in Kogarah since they married in 1995, having met through St John Ambulance at the Royal Easter Show in 1992.

Both started their careers as nurses. Sandra was a Clinical Nurse Specialist in the Paediatric Unit at St George Hospital and now works at the Sutherland Hospital

**ATTACHMENT 2****GIBBS, Russell Robert (644)**

Salesman

RW Bro R R Gibbs PSGW, in addition to having had an active Masonic career, has been actively involved in community affairs. He is currently (1998) a member of the Royal Australian Historical Society, the National Trust of Australia, Kogarah Historical Society, Oatley Flora and Fauna Association as well as many service clubs and organisations. In 1995, he became foundation President of the Oatley Heritage Group,

He is a Justice of the Peace, a past honorary ranger for NSW, a past secretary and president of the Oatley Parents and Citizens Association, a past secretary of the Oatley Bay Sea Scout Group and a past district delegate for the St George Area Scout Group.

Russell Gibbs was initiated in Lodge Penshurst No 352 in 1946 and became a foundation Steward of Lodge Ashlar No 767 in 1948. He was installed as Worshipful Master of Lodge Ashlar in 1955 and was appointed District Grand Inspector of Workings for No 25 District for the term 1960-62.

Although remaining a member of Lodge Ashlar until the consolidation with Lodge Oatley in 1994 (Chapter 19.), he previously affiliated with Lodge Oatley in 1972. RW Bro Gibbs was re-installed as Worshipful Master of Lodge Oatley in 1979 (Chapter 22.). Also see Chapters 23, 24 and 30 as well as Appendices S and T.

## ATTACHMENT 3

Jack,  
 This is all I have, mainly Military and Masonic  
 I don't have dates for the library or Historical Society.  
 Bill

Russell Robert Gibbs  
 Salesman  
 Dob 29 5 1921 d 23 Jun 2002

## MILITARY

AIF 1940-1945  
 Royal Australian Artillery, Australian Coastal Defence  
 New Guinea, Celebes, Borneo  
 1996 Life member, Secretary Anti Aircraft Regimental Association  
 Member Royal Australian Artillery Association  
 Member Royal Australian Artillery Historical Society

## MASONIC

Init L Penshurst No 365 1946 at Hurstville  
 Foundation Steward L Ashlar No 767 1948  
 WM Ashlar 1955  
 DGIW Dist 25 1960-62  
 Affiliate L 381 1972

WM 381 1979  
 Conf rank PJGW 1970, PSGW 1992

Secretary St George Lodge of Instruction 1974 – 1980  
 Preceptor 1985 -1988

UGL Committee Foreign Correspondence from 1982

UGL Official Lecturer From 1983

## COMMUNITY

Volunteer Hurstville Library, Oatley Branch  
 Oatley Historical Society  
 Foundation President