



Norah Head Lighthouse Land Manager Board

P.O. Box 4 Toukley, NSW 2263 Australia

May 2020 Newsletter

Covid 19 Virus and the Norah Head Lighthouse Reserve

Accommodation in the Quarters, Tours of the Tower and Reserve Weddings have all been postponed until further notice. The Board has restricted vehicles from entering the Reserve so that we can control the number of people gathering there. People can still visit the Reserve, but they are required to walk, run or ride their bike from the Bush Street security gate near the Arc Cafe. We still have many people exercising but in a far more controlled manner which makes the Reserve safer for all.

For the Norah Head Lighthouse Reserve Land Manager (NHLRLM) Board, it has taken us into uncharted waters. The income that the Board relies on to maintain the reserve has stopped. If the lock down continues past July 2020 the Board may not be able to meet the fixed cost of employing a Reserve Manager and other fixed costs. As we told you in the April Newsletter, 2019 Grant funding from the NSW Government to fund costly OH&S items was not forthcoming. The day to day running of the Reserve absorbs nearly all this income and as a result the Board has limited funds to invest other items needing maintenance. The good news is the State Government's Maritime Infrastructure Delivery Office has agreed to fund maintenance items in the Lighthouse Tower identified by Mark Sheriff OAM.

Making the most of the closedown



The NHLRLM Board budgets an amount each year for the former Seal Rocks Lighthouse Keeper, Mark Sheriff OAM to maintain our lighthouse in pristine condition. For Mark it is a labour of love. Work on maintaining the Norah Head Lighthouse in a pristine condition is a never-ending battle. The lighthouse set on the headland is exposed to the worst nature can throw at it. UV rays, driving wind and rain, with salt laden sea air spray that eats away at its very fabric.

Mark Sheriff OAM

Mark's Lighthouse Keeper life began working for the Australian Maritime Safety Authority at Sugarloaf Point (Seal Rocks), followed by Booby Island in the Torres Strait as a relief keeper then at various manned light

stations along the eastern seaboard. Working as a relief keeper was a great chance to experience the maritime legacy of lighthouses and be part of its history. A relief keeper often travels far and wide. They must be adaptable, get along with everyone, self-sufficient and be a skilled plumber, carpenter, electrician, cook, painter and fond of working at great heights in a southerly bluster. Mark thought he was living his dream!



Mark later returned to Seal Rocks in 1996 where he was the site's last caretaker until 2006. After leaving his position as caretaker, Mark returned the following day and began work renovating the cottages, which are now used for overnight accommodation.

"I had to reinvent myself," Mark said.

Today, Mark is a fly-in fly-out (or sail-in sail-out) lighthouse keeper, working, preserving and restoring these historic buildings and modern structures around Australia. He currently works as a lighthouse technician for 15 of the Australian Maritime Systems Group and also offers his services to government departments which own the lighthouses – NSW and Tasmania National Parks and Wildlife Services, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and NSW Crown Lands.

Mark Sherriff was rewarded for his services to community history by being awarded the Order of Australia (OAM) Medal in 2019.

The Waterproofing Membrane On The Gallery Level

The waterproofing membrane on the gallery level of the lighthouse had failed allowing water penetration into the tower. Mark Sheriff provided the Board with a quotation for repairs and fortunately the NHLRLM Board was successful in obtaining a Heritage Grant to undertake repair from the Central Coast Council.



Artwork used was drawn by Tony James

The Department Of Industry, as owner gave approval and approval from the Heritage Office was sought and obtained in good time.

All buildings expand and contract with changes in temperature. In buildings made of brick or block where no allowance is made for this, i.e. a contraction/construction joint. With its high level of exposure these cracks would allow the penetration of water into the blockwork thus making the building damp. If exposed to continuous damp the long term the possibility of the blocks softening and eroding and failing structurally.

The Norah Head Lighthouse gallery level has often provided issues of water ingress. The coating breaks down with wear and tear, along with trip hazards for the visiting public. The experience is that there is no product available which can appear to last over ten years, which requires to removing a build-up of the old existing coatings and starting again!

Lantern gallery's like most lantern rooms and built with a compass rose plan; 16 segments , generally stone. Norah Head's gallery is very similar to Point Perpendicular Lighthouse, but Norah has a masonry top coat over the rough-hewn stone. With the tower closed for tours Mark was able to work alone undisturbed.



Mark reported that the bulk of his work on the gallery was on his bum, with regular stretches and chin ups taken. He attempted to keep it simple and uncomplicated, but it still required a fair amount of amount of labour. He wore his general-purpose zoot suit, with full face mask due to dust and other contaminants. His method was to go digging, inspect and plan from there. He removed old coating by chipping hammer, blade scrapper, wire wheel then jet blast.

The picture below shows why. There was quite poor adhesion and his plan involved removing bulk of old coatings, repairing joints and cracks.



Once fully prepped he would diamond cut out the old joints and tuck point new mix in (traditional) The gallery now has had 4 coats 2 pac, been stripped back, old joints cut out and new pointing applied, painted, sanded ,painted. A water proof membrane tape applied over the joints again to insure they will not weep water for many years! There had been moisture penetrating these joints, today Mark guarantees the area is water tight.

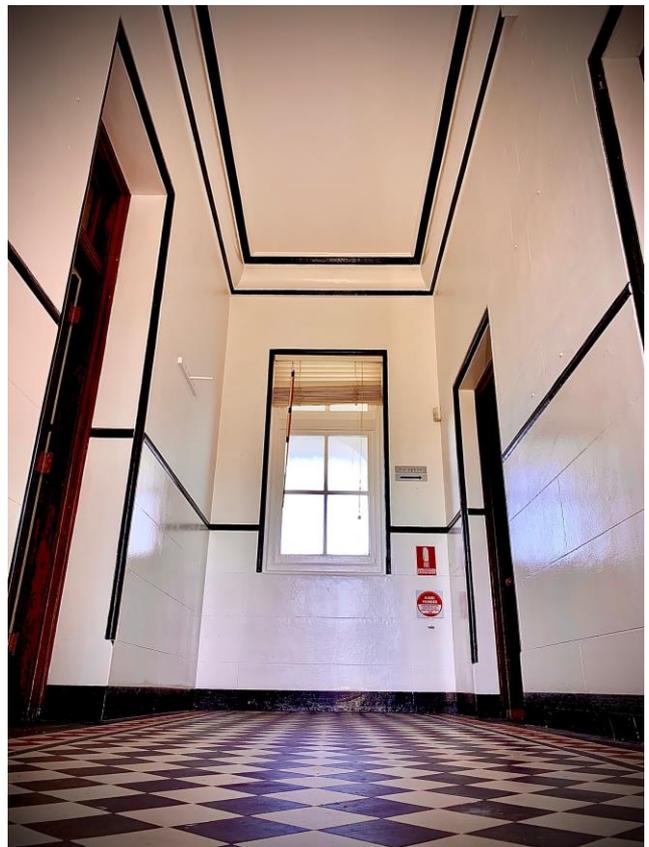
The cracks were filled with a Xypex product, a unique chemical treatment for the waterproofing, protection and repair of concrete. The Dulux 2 pac system topcoat was used for the gallery level waterproofing. Access of public to this area required an additive poured in the paint to provide an anti-slip surface to the finish.



The photo on the left shows the Lantern gallery's 16 segments and diamond cut out the old joints. The photos on the right are of the completed work

Repainting the tower's entry foyer.

I reported in the December 2019 Newsletter that the Department of Industry had repaired the parapet level of the lighthouse and that when the parapet was stripped back to the concrete slab that was laid in 1903, revealing that there were large cracks in the concrete that made it leak like a sieve. Then we had heavy rain while the work was going on and the entry foyer and rooms below were flooded. The water damaged the paintwork and Mark Sheriff took the opportunity of being on site to remove flaking paint and repaint it.



Marks original plan was to do a touch up but have decided to give it his best due to it being the grand entrance it is. Sections had some failing adhesion with moisture underneath so a dehumidifier was run overnight in the space. The work involved using a blade scraper, a wash down, applying an oil-based binder sealer, then enamel applied under dado line and washable interior acrylic above the black line.

Stairs Handrail

Board Secretary and Tour Guide David Irving used the shutdown to remove the paint from the stair's handrail. He has done grand, sterling job on the brass handrail, it's very impressive.



Dome Gutter also needs attention

The photos below show the dome gutter that will be one of the items repaired in the coming months. The dome also shall have a new paint system applied and the wind vane serviced.

