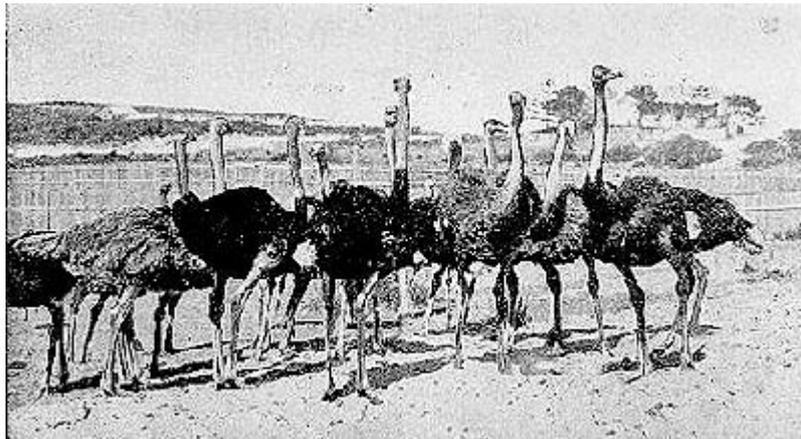


Barracluff's Ostrich Farm



Ostrich flock on Barracluff's Ostrich Farm c. 1900

Joseph Barracluff was born in Grantham, Lincolnshire in 1861 and died at his ostrich farm on 23 November 1918 aged 57 years. He is buried in Waverley Cemetery, section 11, grave 667. On his death he was survived by his wife Jane Barracluff (nee Kibbler) and sons Joseph jnr and William Robert.

In 1884 he and his wife immigrated to Australia, arriving and settling in Sydney. Little is known about Jane Barracluff, however some reports describe her as being South African. He established himself in business, selling feathers in a small shop in Elizabeth Street Sydney opposite the old Devonshire Street Cemetery, now Central Railway Station.

In 1889 Joseph and Jane Barracluff purchased a property at South Head to commence their own feather business, one of the earliest of these businesses in Australia. It is sometimes described as the first, however that honour appears to go to Mr Officer's ostrich farm at Murray Downs, near Swan Hill, Victoria which was established in 1875. Despite this, Barracluff's Ostrich Farm was for many years Australia's show ostrich farm, with a high profile in business circles and in the media.

Some reports claim the Barracluff's ostriches were imported from Port Elizabeth, South Africa and that as the business developed he sent his eldest son, Joseph jnr, to South Africa to select birds to replenish the stock and to select ostrich eggs for hatching locally. Other reports have the birds coming from Morocco and Egypt, being two distinct pure ostrich strains, which were crossed on the farm to make a more vigorous hybrid bird. By 1902 the farm had a flock of approximately 100 ostriches, the largest living species of bird.

Royal visit 1901

The business's high profile meant it attracted a lot of attention and interest, culminating in a visit to the farm in 1901 from His Royal Highness, the Duke of Cornwall and York, (later King George V) and Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Cornwall and York (later Queen Mary). The Duchess was presented with an ostrich feather fan with a gold base, containing feathers 68 cm long and 38 cm wide.

After that visit Barracluff's Ostrich Farm was permitted to use the words 'Under Royal Patronage' and this appears on their stationery from this date. In honour of their visit two of the pride of the flock were renamed 'Duke' and 'Duchess' and photos of these two ostriches appear on the farm's promotional postcards.

Barracluff's Ostrich Farm also carried the insignia of the Commonwealth of Australia and the words 'By Special Appointment to His Excellency the Governor-General and His Excellency the Governor of New South Wales' on its letterhead. The farm's slogan was 'Fine Feathers for Fine Ladies'.

Where was the ostrich farm?

There are a number of theories about the 10-acre ostrich farm's exact location. At Joseph Barracluff's death his home address was listed as 'Ostrich Farm, South Head, Watson's Bay'. A park on the corner of Old South Head Road and Warners Avenue is named in his memory, however, this was not the location of the ostrich farm as is sometimes assumed.

According to a 1926 Water Board map, the farm was bounded by Kimberley Street in the north, County Street in the east and Kobada Street in the south. Other references have the farm located between Elvina Street and Norton Avenue, or between Military Road, Old South Head Road and Ocean View Avenue running down to the cliff edge. Another reference has the entrance to the farm at the south end of Norton Avenue, on the left-hand side of the road.

During its operation locals often referred to the farm's location as 'Barracluff's Hill', however the farm was located in the suburb we now know as Dover Heights.

Ostrich farm products

The farm appears to have been commercially successful, catering to the high demand for extravagant feathers for ladies hats, boas, fans and necklets. A small number of female staff were employed at the farm, under the direction of Jane Barracluff, to create the feather products.

The ostrich eggs, because of their size and beauty, were prized as ornaments and were finely carved in great detail; the most elaborate of these were mounted in silver settings and proudly displayed as household decorative pieces.

The farm was open 7 days per week, including public holidays and it was possible to purchase ostrich feathers directly from them, with some advertisements claiming that patrons could even pluck their own feathers!

Patrons were advised to take a Watson's Bay tram to Barracluff's Ostrich Farm, but if they were unable to visit the farm would post or deliver feathers for free.

The farm advertised that it had 'the most beautiful feathers in the world, at the lowest cost, for sale at the farm only'. An ad for the farm appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* 10 January 1919 'We grow our own feathers, we pluck the plumes, dry, curl, finish them on the farm and trade direct with the public'.

In later years Joseph and Jane Barracluff set up a retail outlet for their feathers on the second floor of the Strand Arcade Sydney. Following Joseph Barracluff's death in 1918 the ostrich farm folded, with the land subdivided and sold in 1925.

Away from the ostrich farm

Joseph Barracluff also had a career in local government, being an Alderman on Waverley Council from 21 October 1909 until his death. He was Mayor of Waverley, 1914-1915. Prior to election to Waverley Council he was an Alderman for Watson's Bay which came under Woollahra Council. He was also the founder and captain of the Waverley Rifle Club.