



## **The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts celebrates stories of the former Sydney General Post Office ahead of the debut of The Fullerton Hotel Sydney**

***Bringing a Sydney icon back to life, Fullerton Stories unlocks tales of Morse Code, talking clocks and gold bars***

**SYDNEY, Australia – 18 October 2019:** Ahead of the impending debut of The Fullerton Hotel Sydney in the former Sydney General Post Office (GPO) building on 18 October 2019, The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts is celebrating the lively stories and heritage of the iconic No. 1 Martin Place with a coffee-table book and video vignettes.

Built on a grand scale, Sydney's General Post Office (GPO) dominated the Sydney streetscape and skyline for decades. Constructed in 1866, the building was regarded as one of Sydney's most well-known landmarks since it opened in 1874, and prior to the arrival of the Harbour Bridge in 1932, the GPO was as synonymous with Sydney as the Eiffel Tower is with Paris.

The new book, *Fullerton Stories* which will be released in 2021, will chronicle the social history and transformation of the building from a former GPO to a hotel, and the building's pivotal role in the development of Sydney and the Martin Place precinct. The historical and pictorial narrative features evocative accounts, anecdotes and memories from personalities who have a connection with the building.

Ahead of the book launch in 2021, poignant stories in the form of video vignettes will also be shared on The Fullerton Hotel Sydney's social media platforms, inviting guests to go on a journey down memory lane with the personalities. Intriguing anecdotes which will be shared in the new book include stories of Morse Code, talking clocks and gold bars (please refer to the attached appendix).

According to Cavaliere Giovanni Viterale, General Manager of The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts, "The GPO building has a rich history which deserves to be celebrated and shared with both Sydneysiders and new hotel guests. We are committed to the conservation of the building for future generations," he stated.

"During its former life, the GPO building was the centre of communication, the gateway to the world. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sydneysiders dressed to the nines and met under the GPO clock as a rendezvous point. In 2019 and beyond, the vision for *The Fullerton Hotel Sydney* is to create a destination where Sydney's stories, culture, arts and culinary excellence can be celebrated and shared with both the local community and a global audience," he concluded.

Former employees of the iconic Sydney GPO have shared their unique stories with Kimberley Webber, leading researcher on the Fullerton Stories project and a specialist in the interpretation of 19th and early 20th century culture.

"It's exciting to be able to celebrate this Sydney icon and bring its historical significance to life for the next generation, through the unique tales of some of the GPO's most colourful personalities, especially at this time of transformation and ahead of the building's re-opening as a luxury heritage hotel," said Kimberley Webber.

"From an underground tunnel that led directly into a pub in Angel Place - where it was customary to go on a sneaky lunch break - to discovering 35cm-long gold bars while sorting the mail, we have



collected personal tales that offer a fascinating insight into what life was like during the bygone era,” said Ms Webber.

Committed to its role as custodians of heritage, The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts brand is renowned for its dedication to preserving buildings and their stories. This tradition will continue with The Fullerton Hotel Sydney, which shares a rich heritage with its sister hotel, The Fullerton Hotel Singapore, also a former GPO.

Since April, The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts commenced remediation and maintenance work on the building’s façade, marking phase one of a broader programme to connect locals with the historic Sydney landmark. The painstaking laborious chemical-free cleaning process which will be completed ahead of the hotel’s opening on 18 October is just the beginning of the Hotel’s transformation, with a broader remediation programme to be implemented in a series of staged phases following the opening.

The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts begins a new chapter in the former GPO building on 18 October, inviting hotel guests, Sydneysiders and global travellers to continue creating new stories and memories in the revitalised space.

*The Fullerton Stories* coffee-table book will be available for purchase in 2021 at The Fullerton Hotel Sydney.

**-Ends-**

**For more information visit:** [fullertonhotels.com/fullerton-hotel-sydney](http://fullertonhotels.com/fullerton-hotel-sydney)

For further information including requests to interview the personalities of the GPO, Kimberley Webber or General Manager of The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts, Cavaliere Giovanni Viterale, please contact:

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#### **About The Fullerton Hotel Sydney**

The Fullerton Hotel Sydney, situated in Martin Place, in the historic former Sydney General Post Office will officially open in October 2019, marking The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts’ first international expansion. The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts currently owns and operates two award-winning hotels in Singapore: [The Fullerton Hotel Singapore](#) (opened in 2001) and [The Fullerton Bay Hotel Singapore](#) (opened in 2010). Both hotels anchor the historic and cultural Fullerton Heritage precinct, located in Marina Bay the heart of Singapore’s city centre. The Fullerton Hotel Sydney will become a sister hotel to The Fullerton Hotel Singapore, which shares a similar rich history as a former GPO. The Fullerton Hotel Sydney will deliver a luxury hotel that can further contribute to Sydney’s growth as an international tourist destination and showcase the beauty and heritage of the original building to a wider audience, both nationally and globally. The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts is affiliated with [Preferred Hotels & Resorts](#), which represents a global portfolio of independent hotels and independent hotel experiences. [www.fullertonhotels.com](http://www.fullertonhotels.com)



**Facebook: @TheFullertonHotelSydney**  
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## **Appendix One: Stories from the GPO Sydney**

### **Leslie Edwards - *Telegram Boy and Telegraphist***

Leslie worked as a telegram boy and telegraphist at the GPO from the mid-1950s. He vividly remembers walking through soundproof doors on his first day and being confronted by the incredible noise from hundreds of Morse Code sounders all tapping away at once. He has fond memories of working in the picturegram room, developing photos which were sent from Reuters or AAP in London, or interstate, for delivery to the local newspaper.

### **Trevor Somerville - *Parcel Sorter (1953-1954)***

Trevor sorted parcels at the GPO as a child in the pre-Christmas rush in the mid-1950s, recalling his first day was absolutely terrifying and the training lasted all of 10 minutes. With homes still without phones, Christmas time was chaotic, as everybody sent cards and with no postcode system in place, mail had to be sorted by recognising the names of suburbs. The most memorable parcel he handled was a 35cm-long gold bar – not the kind of thing you would expect to see casually sorting the mail!

He recalls the GPO as a magical building and a social hub in the city, with people regularly saying, “Meet you on the steps of the GPO”. The highlight of his summer job at the post office was the canteen. After all, he had never eaten in a restaurant or a pub before he started work, hence the experience was very special. Trevor recalls that you could “drive” yourself in the lift, so at the age of 15, he would get to work early to “drive” people up and down to whichever floor they fancied.

### **Gloria Cochrane and Gloria Velleley – *Telephonists***

Gloria worked on the third-floor trunk exchange from a young age and loved every minute of it. “Going to work and meeting lots of people was marvellous. I was quite sociable, and I loved what I was doing - and the fact I was paid for it.”

Gloria also worked on the “talking clock” on the fourth floor, on directory information, and on emergency, connecting callers to police, fire and ambulance. During the late 1950s, she also worked on the international exchange at a time when every international call from Australia was routed through the Sydney exchange. Calls would take several minutes to be connected, with those to the continent particularly exciting - and challenging - as with just one phone in many a town square, a plan would need to be hatched to have the call recipient on stand-by at exactly the right moment.

She also recalls operators chatting to local police and men at sea late at night during the quieter shifts - with some of her colleagues meeting their husbands this way. She describes her time at the GPO as fantastic, saying once home phones were connected the technology just went ahead in leaps and bounds – and the progress was incredible.

Gloria Velleley and fellow telephonist Gloria Cochrane were as thick as thieves, and unusual in socialising together, as when most employees left the office, so did the friendship. Gloria Velleley worked as a telephonist on the interstate and international exchanges during the 1960s, and lived in a boarding house run by nuns in Darling Point.

Some of Gloria Velleley’s fondest recollections include: the American exchange frequently mixing up calls from Australia with Austria; socialising with the radio operators from P&O cruise ships during the summer after work; thrice-daily calls to Antarctica for weather updates; and the excitement of



connecting celebrity calls, such as world championship wrestler Mario Milano, who regularly called his mother in Italy on Sundays.

#### **Ernest Molloy - Clerical Assistant (1957- 1959)**

Ernest went to work for the Post-Master General department after dropping out of university and took on the clerical position in the accounts department on the second floor of the building. He would enter the building via Pitt Street, where a newsagent kiosk was stationed, and would take the lifts to the working quarters. He remembers the mail trucks coming in and out, and the telegram boys working out of the basement.

Ernest describes the GPO as being an “awesome building to go to work in,” and remembers the social atmosphere, with his co-workers coming from all corners of Sydney. He also recalls having “several girlfriends in the office.” Ernest discovered an underground tunnel that went out into Angel Place, and on hot days, it was customary to go down there and wind up at the Angel Hotel for a few beers.

#### **Geraldine and Ian Rae - Clerical Officer (1971-1977) and her husband, Ian, a Telegram Boy**

Geraldine worked as a clerical officer at the GPO during the 1970s and met her husband, Ian when she messed up his pay and he came to complain. She recalls that when she began working at the GPO, her supervisor was the first married woman who had been allowed to return to work after tying the knot. She said other married supervisors kept their marital status hidden, as there was much opposition to married women working in those days, as they could not take away a man’s job.

Ian began his 30-year career at the postal service as a telegram boy when he was 15, cycling around Sydney delivering telegrams to businesses and the ships coming in and out of Sydney Harbour. Ian recalls the American ships were his favourite, as they would feed him if he did a night-time delivery. Ian was proud to wear the mail service uniform, which consisted of a postman’s embroidered cap, grey trousers, and a jacket and tie, with a leather satchel for the telegrams. He remembers it was sometimes dangerous work, with some of the bikes missing brakes and several telegram boys injured or killed by cars while out and about on deliveries.

#### **About Kimberley Webber**

Researcher, Curator and Project Manager, Kimberley has specialised in the interpretation of 19th and early 20th century material culture, and is the leading researcher on The Fullerton Stories project.

Kimberley has a First-Class Honours degree in History, a Diploma of Museum Studies, and a PhD in History from the University of Sydney. Her doctorate, 'Romancing the Machine: The Enchantment of Domestic Technology in the Australian Home, 1850-1914', used evidence of material culture to contest accepted interpretations of the factors that influence technological change. She is currently researching 19th century auction records and the insights they provide into domestic life.