

ROBERT EADIE (1863-1949)

Platypus trainer and conservationist who gained world fame

One of the most interesting people buried at Healesville Cemetery, and one with a very rare occupation, is Robert Eadie, platypus trainer.

Born in Sunbury Victoria, his first career as a mining engineer took him to South Africa in 1896 where his interest in wild life became a large part of his life. He worked with Paul Kruger to establish Kruger National Park and was also instrumental in smuggling Winston Churchill back to British lines during the Boer War.

In 1932 the Eadie family returned to Australia and settled at Healesville where he was later appointed Honorary Curator at Healesville Sanctuary. After obtaining a special permit he kept a young male platypus called "Splash" at his home, gradually training him to come to fetch his dinner of worms.

After a special "platypussary" was built by Robert at the Sanctuary, Splash was placed in residence and became the leading attraction for the four years of his life. Thousands came to see this wonderful animal.

"Splash" and Robert were very close and the animal would perform tricks, playing with a mop, coming whenever Robert whistled and placing his head on Robert's hand to be stroked. He kept copious notes on his behaviour and after "Splash's" death he vowed not to keep another platypus arguing he had learnt all he needed to know from his special pet.

When "Splash" died condolences were sent by naturalists from all over the world.

Healesville Sanctuary opened in 1934 and was a very popular attraction in the town and still is. It is famous for its breeding program of Australian wild life and renown as the place to study platypus. The first platypus ever bred in captivity was born there in 1943 when David Fleay, another famous conservationist, was the manager.

Robert Eadie died at his home, "Glen Eadie" in Healesville aged 88 in 1949.

Compiled with the assistance of the Healesville and District Historical Society.



After his death, Splash the platypus became part of a National Museum of Australia collection. Pictured above is a platypus preserved as part of the collection.

Find out more

Eadie, R. The Life and Habits of the Platypus: with sidelights on Splash, (1935)
Fleay, D. Paradoxical Platypus: hobnobbing with duckbills, (1980)
Symonds, S. Healesville Sanctuary: a future for Australia's wildlife, (1999)



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Jan is a professional historian who has worked across the fields of heritage, education and tourism. She has taught at several universities, including Monash University where she delivered the master of public history course. She is also a former Chair of the Heritage Council of Victoria. Jan was appointed to The Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust in 2010.



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