



ROCKDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

OFFICIAL BULLETIN.

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GRATIS.

NEXT MEETING

PLACE:- Council Chamber, TOWN HALL, ROCKDALE.

DATE:- Friday next, 13th APRIL, 1962 at 8.0 P.M.

We are extremely fortunate to have as our Guest speakers -

MR. MORTON HERMAN B. Arch., A.R.A.I.A., A.R.I.B.A., leading Sydney Architect and Member of the Royal Historical Society who will speak on why old buildings should be preserved and

MISS J. SOUTHAN who suggested and organised the current Sydney Morning Herald's Historic Homes Contest.

Your presence on this occasion is particularly requested and you are invited to bring along any interested friends.

SUCCESSFUL FIRST OUTING

Despite very overcast conditions more than 30 people journeyed to Carss Park recently for the first Historical Expedition organized by our society.

Mr. Harold Coxhead, an old resident of the area read members a paper he had prepared on the area and afternoon tea was taken in the Life-Saving Hall.

When the weather cleared, members inspected the area where the film "Bush Christmas" had been produced, the grave of the Carss family and their 96 year old sandstone home which still stands on the headland overlooking the shark-proof enclosure.

Our next outing will be to Arncliffe where Mr. G. Eardley will be our guide.

Remember the date, Saturday, April 28th assembling at the Rockdale Town Hall at 2.0 p.m.

If you are interested, ring the Secretary, Ald. R. W. Rathbone LW 4813 for details.

Both members and their friends will be most welcome.

ROCKDALE TO ENTER HOMES IN S.M. HERALD COMPETITION.

At the last meeting of the Rockdale Historical Society, it was decided to approach the owners of a number of fine old homes in the Municipality to see if they would allow them to be entered in the above contest which closes in October.

High on our list are James Brodie Sparks, "The Retreat" (Good Samaritan Convent, Arncliffe) which is 135 years old and Hannah Laycock's cottage at Kingsgrove (at least 150 years old).

A special committee set up by the Society has listed possible entries and the Secretary has been busily photographing them ready for cataloguing.

Ald. Rathbone reports that whilst roaming around the back streets of Arncliffe one recent Saturday afternoon looking for likely entries, he discovered an illegal S.P. set-up in full swing.

This is certainly an OLD Australian habit with many HISTORIC associations but it was more than his life was worth to try to photograph it.

PRINCE OF WALES HOTEL, SANDRINGHAM
TO BE DEMOLISHED.

At the suggestion of Mr. Eardley, the Secretary recently wrote to the Rockdale Council to ask if there was any possibility of removing the historic Prince of Wales Hotel at Sandringham to some other position when it is pulled down in a few week's time.

The Council received the suggestion sympathetically and is investigating the cost of such a removal and suitable sites for its re-erection.

If the cost is within the bounds of possibility it is believed that this building could be the basis of Rockdale's first Historical Museum and possibly a permanent home for this Society.

OLD GUN TO BE SAVED.

Only an alert resident with a considerable appreciation of history has saved the old gun from which Gun Point takes its name from being swept away with other nearby structures for the approaches to the new Taren Point Bridge.

When this matter was raised on Rockdale Council recently, one alderman suggested it should be given to this Society.

The Secretary is reported to have changed colour at the prospect of having to store a 15 hundredweight gun with other relics of the Historical Society.

The Council finally decided to re-erect it alongside those already existing at Brighton le Sands.

"FIRES AND FIRE-BRIGADES"

(being a precis of the talk delivered to the last meeting of the Rockdale Historical Society by Mr. Lionel Watt).

Sydney has never had a wholesale conflagration such as those experienced in London, Chicago and San Francisco due, probably, to the foresight of Governor Macquarie who built so many buildings of brick and sandstone.

The first fire mentioned in the Colony was in Governor Phillip's despatch of 7th May, 1788 when he stated that the aborigines had set fire to a number of gum trees and that the Colony was littered with burnt out trees.

Sydney did not have an organised fire brigade until 1822 and even this was badly hampered for the next fifty years because of the completely inadequate water supply.

Sydney's most serious fire was NOT, as is popularly held, that which burned down Anthony Hordern's Store in 1901, though it was certainly Sydney's most spectacular. Most serious from the financial viewpoint was the Moore Street fire of 1890 which gutted the entire business centre of Sydney between Pitt and Castlereagh Streets.

Other notable fires include the burning down of the Sydney Gaol in 1797, the first Church in Richard Johnson Square in 1798, the Royal Victoria Theatre in 1838 and the Royal Hotel in 1840.

Anthony Hordern's fire started in the Toy Department at 8.28 a.m. on Wednesday, 10th July, 1901 causing four deaths and a loss of property estimated at £354,000. What made this fire so spectacular was the death of an employee named Clegg who climbed to the top of the parapet and plunged 116 feet to the pavement in front of thousands of spectators.

In this fire, the Brigades proved to be totally inadequate and dynamite had to be used to stop the spread of the conflagration.

ROCKDALE FIRE BRIGADE.

The precise date of the formation of a Fire Brigade in the Municipality of Rockdale cannot be established from the Board's records but it is known that the St. George Volunteer Fire Company was located at Rockdale in April, 1891, for during that month of that year that Company applied to the Fire Brigades Board for telephone communication, but was refused, such permission however, being granted in February, 1894.

In March, 1895, the provisions of the Fire Brigades Act of 1884 were applied to the Municipality of Rockdale by action taken by the Government of the day. The gazettal of this fact failed to meet with the approval of the Superintendent of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade as he drew particular attention to this fact in his annual report for the year 1895 by the inclusion in that report of the following words:-

"This (the inclusion of Rockdale) is notable as being the first inclusion within the Metropolitan district of Municipalities so distant from the City and it is a matter for anxious consideration how a fair amount of protection is to be extended to them (the citizens of rockdale)."

In 1895 the Rockdale Volunteer Fire Company was situated in Rocky Point Road, now known as Princes Highway, and its complement comprised 16 men, 1 horse, 1 manual fire engine and 800' of hose. The fire station and plant belonged to the Company and the Board subsidised it to the extent of £70 per annum, whilst the Council's contribution to the Board in 1895 was £74; 5: 6.

During its first year in existence as a Brigade under the jurisdiction of the Fire Brigades Board the Company responded to 8 calls of fire of which 3 were false alarms, the actual fires being as shown hereunder:-

Tuesday	23. 4.95	2.35 a.m. a grass fire on property owned by Robert Lattler, James Street. Extinguished by buckets of water.
Sunday	1.7.95	2.5 a.m. a stable in Bay Street owned by W. Ogden slightly damaged by fire. Extinguished by buckets of water.
Monday	29.7.95	1.0 a.m. a cottage of 4 rooms with contents burnt out and fallen down in Farr Street, owned by R. Kerr, Jeweller. Extinguished by two hydrants, the outbreak having been caused by the upsetting of a kerosene lamp.
Saturday	13.4.95	8.15 p.m. Bed & bedding damaged by fire in a bedroom on the 1st floor of a private dwelling owned by Mr. P. Porteous, Watkins Street. Extinguished by buckets of water.
Saturday	9.11.95	9.5 p.m. A private dwelling being the house owned by Mr. George Leider, Herman Street. The dwelling which contained six rooms was, with contents, burnt out and the roof partly off. The side of the stables and portion of fencing was damaged by fire. The outbreak was extinguished by one hydrant and the cause was unknown.

In April, 1896, the Volunteer Company wrote to the Board and asked it for assistance to build a new fire station. The Company had £75 in hand towards the structure and it had already paid £25 for the land. Tenders had been called and it was considered that the whole project could be completed for £150. Strangely enough there was no mention by the Company where it had purchased the new site nor did the Board of the day or the Superintendent visit the area to ascertain where it was situated but nevertheless the Board approved the granting of £75 from its funds to the Rockdale Volunteer Fire Company on the understanding that the Company vest the land and the station in the name of the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board.

The Superintendent asked the Company to forward him a copy of the plans and specifications of the new project when it was found that tenders had been called for a structure without drainage, floors, doors or a stable. In these circumstances the Board refused to proceed further in the matter and the Company was informed accordingly.

The need for new premises, however, was fully realised by all concerned and in June, 1896, the Board visited Rockdale where a Mr. Cooke offered it 30' of land in Rocky Point Road (now Princes Highway) with a depth of 200' to a laneway at the rear at £7 a foot, The Board accepted this offer and a fire station together with quarters was erected thereon and occupied on the 1st June, 1897.

In 1904 the Board purchased the adjoining lot having a frontage of 31'11" in order to overcome the difficulty of an encroachment.

The Rockdale fire station was officially opened on the 4th June, 1897 by the President of the Board, Mr. C. Bown, he being accompanied by Mr. T.M. Tinley and F.I. Jackson, both members of the Board and Superintendent Bear.

Whilst there is no record of the names of the original personnel of the Rockdale Volunteer Fire Company, it is known that Volunteer Fireman Russell was the first occupant of the new quarters of the fire station erected by the Board in 1897. He paid the Board a rental of 10/- per week for that privilege.

On the opening of this station the strength of horses was increased from 1 to 2 and name of one of them was "Warrior".

In 1900 some of the Volunteer Firemen were Bandsmen and a Band known as the Rockdale Fire Brigade Band was formed. This Band is reported to have been one of the premier bands of the State winning the Highland Society's Band Contest on the 2nd January, 1905, and the Forbes Band Contest on the 30th January, of that year. Over the years the Volunteer Firemen resigned from the Band which, however, continued to keep its identity and practice in the billiard room at the rear of the station. An unfortunate incident occurred in 1908 when it is alleged that this Band by "very forceful playing" broke up an important political meeting of the day and the Superintendent of the Metropolitan Fire Brigades issued a direction that the Band was no longer to be called the Rockdale Fire Brigade Band and they were refused permission to practice on the Board's premises.