ST. GEORGE ~~ROCKDALE~~ HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

53 Bruce Street,
BEXLEY.

12th October, 1962.

Dear Friend and Member,

The next monthly meeting of the above Society will be held as follows:-

DATE - FRIDAY EVENING NEXT, 19th October, 1962, at 8 P.M.

PLACE - COUNCIL CHAMBER, Rockdale Town Hall, Princes Highway, ROCKDALE.

GUEST SPEAKER - MR. PHILIP GEEVES, F.R.A.H.S., will speak on
"Rockdale, its Beginnings and Development".

You are cordially invited to attend this meeting and to bring any interested friends.

J. I. SWANN.   R. W. RATHBONE.
President.   Hon. Secretary.

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SWEEPING CHANGES AT SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING.

A most businesslike mood prevailed at the first Annual Meeting of the Rockdale Historical Society and a number of sweeping changes were made which it is hoped will strengthen it and enable it to expand.

First of these was a motion by Messrs. P. Geeves and G. Eardley that it change its name to the "St. George Historical Society" and extend its field of operations outside the Rockdale Municipality.   This motion was hotly debated but finally passed by a substantial majority.

Mr. Geeves also suggested it was time the Society became affiliated with the Royal Australian Historical Society and the National Trust of Australia and the meeting agreed to these.

Mr. Napper said he felt next year's meetings should have papers on the history of Local Organisations, Churches and members' own historical research and this too was agreed to.

It was announced that the Financial Membership of the Society had grown from an initial 16 at the first meeting to 63.

The election of officers resulted:-

PRESIDENT: Mr. J.I. Swann.	COMMITTEE: Messrs. E. Downes.
VICE PRESIDENTS: Ald. T. McCarthy	I. Ryan
Mr. C.W. Napper	G. Eardley
Mr. P. Geeves	A. Christison.
Ald. R. Scott	
HON. SECRETARY: Ald. R.W. Rathbone	
ASST. SECRETARY: Miss E. Payne.	HON. TREASURER: Ald. C. Nairn.

SO YOU WANT TO BE A HISTORIAN?

At the last meeting of the Society, Mr. Geeves gave a few suggestions to members who are keen to do some historical research and are not certain how to go about it.

The principal suggestions for a beginner in local history are as follows:-

(a)   Using the Municipal History as a guide book, interview old residents or descendants of pioneer families.   Make notes of their recollections or, better still, record your entire interview on tape.   Quiz your interviewees about what and whom they remember.   Often they will possess some old photos which may provide some valuable information.

In days gone by family Bibles usually had details of births, deaths and marriages entered in them.   All these details assist in building up knowledge of local history.

(b)   In the Mitchell Library or the General Reference Section of the Public Library, you may read through the files of many newspapers. "The Sydney Morning Herald" printed regular reports of early council meetings and municipal activities from the date of incorporation:- by copying relevant information it is possible to recreate an accurate picture of social and community life for any period that interests you.   The Public Library maintains files of a number of local newspapers dating back to the 1890's; these will supplement information you glean from the "Sydney Morning Herald".

(c)   Using Sands' Directories and copies of the electoral rolls for the same period, it is possible to trace the growth of an area street by street and family by family.   Make a card index of your research.

(d)   List the details of tombstones in old churchyards.   Seek permission to go through the burial, marriage and baptismal registers of the early years with a view to tracing the pattern of development in an area.

(e)   Using a copy of the St. George Parish Map, discover who was the original owner of the particular plot of land that interests you, then trace the subsequent ownership of it through the records of the Land Titles Office.

(f)   List the great figures of Australian History who visited the district and collect all descriptions and data they have left us.

(g)   Using the State Archives in the Mitchell Library, trace the work of Government surveyors in the district - also the records of public works, railway construction etc.

These suggestions can be pursued by any of our members who wish to contribute some original work.   No particular academic qualifications are necessary ...... Just the ability to read and to draw conclusions and intelligent deductions from what you read.

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WHY "SAINT GEORGE"?

(How the St. George District came to get its name).

When New South Wales was first settled its early governors naturally took England as their model in administrative matters. So, the Australian Countryside was divided up into the same tidy parcels that existed in Mother England.

Counties were divided into Hundreds, and Hundreds into Parishes. Our first County was named Cumberland and our first two Parishes were styled St. Phillip's and St. John's - in honour of our first two governors, Arthur Phillip and John Hunter.

The two Parish Churches, in accordance with English custom, received the same names. St. Phillip's was on Church Hill, Sydney, close to the site of its more modern namesake, and the original St. John's - Samuel Marsden's church - still stands in Parramatta.

In 1828 Governor Darling instructed his officers to make a systematic division of "the whole Territory into Counties, Hundreds and Parishes"; each was to be forty miles square, each Hundred to be a hundred square miles and each parish twenty five square miles.

The general area between Cook's River and George's River emerged from this survey as the Parish of St. George and more than twenty years later, when its Parish Church was erected at Gannon's Forest, (Hurstville), it was designated St. George's.

The original church, incidentally, fell victim to white ants!

George's River obviously inspired the choice of "St. George" for this Parish and George's River, of course was named in honour of that dull, stubborn, bigoted monarch, George the Third.

Now by a process of verbal osmosis, the King who lost England's American Colonies has been transformed into a knight in armour doing battle with a dragon.

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SELECTED PIECES FROM THE LOCAL PRESS.

- "Politeness on the part of officials at Carlton Station would be greatly appreciated by travellers - the railways are for the people and not the people for the railways".
                    St. George's Advocate 10th March, 1899.

- "A person might as well try to resurrect a dead mother-in-law as get satisfaction at our local telephone exchange".
                    The Propeller 14th April, 1911.

- "The condition of Durham Street, Hurstville, has damaged Dr. McLeod's motor car."
                    The Propeller 14th April, 1911.

- "Hoodlums and Hobbledehoys interfered with a function at the Hurstville Hall".
                    The Propeller 11th August, 1911.

- "Mr. Koonin, the Russian Exile, will give a lecture on 'How I escaped from Russia' - illustrated with pictures".
                    The Propeller 12th May, 1911.

CAPTAIN COOK'S VOYAGES.

FRIDAY, June 22nd, 1770.   Some of the people were sent to shoot
pigeons, and at their return reported that they had seen an animal as
large as a greyhound, of slender make, a mouse colour, and extremely
swift.

JUNE 23rd.   This day almost everybody had seen the animal which the
pigeon shooters had brought an account of the day before.

JUNE 24th.   As I was walking this morning at a little distance from
the ship, I saw myself one of the animals which had so often been described.
It was of light mouse colour, and in size and shape very much resembled
a greyhound;   it had a long tail also, which it carried like a greyhound;
and I should have taken it for a wild dog if, instead of running, it had not
leapt like a hare or deer.   Its legs were said to be very slender, and
the print of its foot like that of a goat;   but where I saw it the grass was
so high that the legs were concealed, and the ground was too hard to
receive the track.   Mr. Banks also had an imperfect view of this animal,
and was of the opinion that its species was hitherto unknown.

JULY 8th.   In a walk of many miles some of our men saw four animals
which Mr. Banks' greyhound fairly chased.   These animals were observed
not to run upon four legs but to bound or hop forward upon two.

JULY 14th.   Mr. Gore, who went out this day with his gun, had the good
fortune to kill one of these animals.   The head, neck and shoulders are
very small in proportion to the other parts of the body;   the tail is nearly
as long as the body, thick near the body and tapering towards the other
end;   the fore-legs of this individual were only eight inches long, and
the hind legs two-and-twenty.   Its progress is by successive leaps and
hops, of a great length in an erect posture;   the fore-legs are kept bent
close to the breasts, and seemed to be of use only for digging.   The skin
is covered with short fur of dark mouse or grey colour, excepting the head
and ears which bear a slight resemblance to those of a hare.

The animal is called by the natives "Kangaroo".

                                    - description of a Kangaroo from
                                        "Cook's First Voyage".

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CALLING ALL CARS.

    In 1894 the residents of Rockdale and district were entirely devoid
of police protection at certain times.   During big festivities in Sydney
the few district police were withdrawn to reinforce the metropolitan squad.
Rockdale Council was so concerned by this danger that it raised the matter
with the Minister for Justice.

    On Boxing Day 1894 "there was not a policeman between Sans Souci
and the Cook's River".   Alderman Hegerty reported to Council that a
number of larrikins had taken possession of Moorefield Hotel on Boxing
Day.   Alderman Duigan said that a number of scoundrels called at his
hotel that day and threatened that if they were not served with free drinks
they would stone the house.   They had also treated some of the local
shopkeepers in a similar disgraceful manner.

    This occurrence was directly responsible for the erection of the first
lock-ups in the district.

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"THE BIRTH OF A BAND"

by Alexander Belford Christison, M.B.E.

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In the year 1898, Mr. J.C. Walker of Rockdale, who had been a conductor of military and public bands in Sydney and suburbs for some years, decided to form a brass band in Rockdale. He had a few instrumentalists who were willing to join, but not sufficient for a complete band. There were many young men who were willing to learn, but no instruments were available.

Mr. Henry Kinsel of "Kinsel Grove", Bexley, a friend of Mr. Walker's, offered to make a donation and also to lend sufficient money to purchase the necessary instruments.

Captain Berry of the Rockdale Fire Brigade, offered the recreation room of the Fire Station as a practice room for the band.

Mr. Walker taught a number of the young men to play the various instruments and in a short time had a good combination.

At the inaugural meeting, it was decided to take the name of "Rockdale Fire Brigade Band", with Mr. Walker as conductor and chairman and Mr. Gus Ostland as secretary.

In order to meet their financial obligations, it was decided to approach the business people of Rockdale for assistance and in return the band would give its services by playing in the shopping centre on Saturday nights, the shops then closing at 10 p.m. This arrangement proved quite successful as it brought crowds from other suburbs and naturally the business people benefited quite a lot financially.

This arrangement continued for many years until the beginning of World War 11.

The Band's first patron was Mr. Thomas Saywell, who owned practically all of Lady Robinson's Beach (now Brighton-le-Sands) and the President, Mr. Jack Barsby, owned a draper's store at the corner of Rocky Point Road (now Prince's Highway) and Bay Street, Rockdale.

The Band entered its first competition held on the Sydney Cricket Ground, under the auspices of the Highland Society of New South Wales at their annual Highland Gathering, and it was fortunate enough to win first prize. Throughout its lifetime it won a great many prizes.

Although the Band had been carrying on successfully for some time an incident occurred which was to cause a change in its name. The Band as usual was playing in the main street of Rockdale on the Saturday night but in one of the side streets one of this State's politicians was speaking on behalf of a candidate for the coming elections. It is not known whether the Band's music attracted the crowd away from the speaker but he became very annoyed and made some very nasty remarks about the Band and wanted to know what Band it was.

It so happened that the politician was a member of the Fire Brigade Board, to whom he complained, with the result that orders were given that the Band had to vacate its practice room at the Fire Station. Also, it had to drop the name of Fire Brigade.

The business people and supporters of the Band were very annoyed at this turn of events.

It was then suggested that an approach be made to the Rockdale Municipal Council to allow the Band to take the name of the "Rockdale Municipal Band" and although there were one or two objectors the Band then became known under this name.

Naturally it had to try to find a place to practice and after very serious consideration, it was decided to buy a block of ground in Cameron Street, near Bay Street, Rockdale.

Members of the Band personally approached people of the district for financial support and finally sufficient donations were collected to pay for the ground. They were then successful in floating a loan from a businessman in Rockdale which enabled them to build their hall. Costs were kept down by members giving voluntary labour in the building of same.

The hall became very popular for dances, weddings and socials with the result that the debt on the hall was soon paid off and the hall became the property of the Band.

The politician really did the Band a good turn for he resulted in it getting a home of its own.

Alderman William Taylor, M.L.A., Mayor of Rockdale, was patron for a number of years, followed by Mr. Carl Skarratt of Bexley. Both these gentlemen have passed on. Mr. Alan Stirling was President for a good many years.

Besides Mr. Ostland, the following members occupied the position of secretary, Mr. H. Wennholm (original proprietor and editor of the "Propeller" Newspaper) 4 years; Mr. J.P. Farr, 2 years; Mr. A.B. Christison, M.B.E. (who pioneered and organised the St. George Eisteddfod in 1916 for the purpose of assisting the Band's finances) 33 years; and finally Mr. A. Green.

Mr. Charles Walker (son of the Bandmaster) became the champion cornetist of New South Wales.

During the First World War, the Band worked very hard to supply the soldiers with comforts and also assisted other organisations with their efforts. All through the Band's career, it assisted at hundreds of charitable and public functions.

When the Second World War came, all eligible men were taken into the Army and finally the tradesmen still in its ranks were absorbed by the Civil Construction Corps leaving the Band with six players.

As it could not continue under these conditions, it finally disbanded in 1944 after 46 years of faithful service to this district.

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Mr. Alex. Christison married Bandmaster Walker's daughter, Elsie Pearl, and still in Mr. & Mrs. Christison's possession is a large framed photograph of the Band taken outside Saywell's Brighton Hotel in 1902.

Members of the Band featured are: W. Huckstepp, G. Ploghoft, A. Napier, V. Dyer, S. Wennholm, G. Ostland, E. Fransden, W. Watkins, A. Christison, J. Corkery, H. Wennholm, P. Dupain, J. Barsby, Mr. Thomas Saywell (Patron), Mr. J.C. Walker (Bandmaster), Captain Berry (Rockdale Fire Brigade), J. Crogan, W. Huegill, E. Ridgeway, S. Ainsworth, C. Walker, J. Farr, W. Knowles, F. Murray, G. Larkman, L. Dyer and A. Fransden.

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