

ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOL 1. NO. 9.

BI - MONTHLY BULLETIN

GRATIS

FEBRUARY 1964.

53 Bruce Street,
BEXLEY.
21st February, 1964.

Dear Friend and Member,

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

DATE: FRIDAY EVENING NEXT, 28th FEBRUARY, 1964, at 8 p.m.

PLACE: COUNCIL CHAMBER, Town Hall, Princes Highway, ROCKDALE.

SPEAKER: MR. C. W. NAPPER, will speak on the pioneer Rockdale family "The Nappers"

This will be followed by coloured slides on historic buildings in other States of Australia.

All members and any interested friends are cordially invited to attend.

A light supper will be served.

T. J. McCARTHY.
President.

R. W. RATHBONE.
Hon. Secretary.

LW. 4813.

TRIP TO PARRAMATTA PLANNED AT LAST.

Our long planned trip to Parramatta will take place next month come storm, earthquake or tempest. The programme will be as follows:-

Elizabeth Farm House (by kind courtesy of the Misses Swann), The Lancer Barracks and Hambledon Cottage; Lunch in Parramatta Park; Old Government House and Experiment Farm Cottage.

The tour will be conducted by Mrs. V. King, Secretary of the Parramatta Historical Society and because of its length will have to be held on a Sunday.

Arrangements are well advanced and as soon as we know the date and times we will notify all members.

ROSEVALE VILLA DEMOLISHED.

Historic Rosevale Villa, one of the last pioneer homes left in Rockdale is no more and although its stones were marked and every care taken in its demolition it is unlikely that it could ever be rebuilt.

The soft sandstone mouldings which have withstood the ravages of time for almost 100 years crumbled badly as they were being moved and the large stone blocks from which the building was made fared little better.

This is a great disappointment to this Society which fought for its preservation from the time the "FOR SALE - DEVELOPMENT SITE" notice was posted on its front fence.

Also to be demolished in the reasonably near future is the Bray Family home in Market Street, Rockdale, which stands in the way of the large parking area being developed at the rear of the Rockdale Shopping Centre.

Although much older than Rosevale Villa, this cottage does not have the same architectural merit as the first named building and in recent years has been obscured by a number of additions.

THE HISTORIC RIVER.

At the official gathering held at Kurnell on 6th May, 1899, to set apart 251 acres as a public reserve and a National Memorial to Captain James Cook, Mr. Joseph Cook (Minister for Lands) referred to the fact that Cook discovered the river so named after him. The following is an extract from his speech:

"I have in my possession temporarily (thanks to the courtesy of Mr. Huntington) a facsimile of Cook's own chart of Botany Bay, and it shows that he proceeded in his boats up Cook's River as far as the dam."

The earliest reference we have to the name Cook's River is in the year 1800, when Surveyors Grimes and Meeham, in their field books for the years 1799 to 1802 refer to surveys of farms at Cook's River. It is interesting to know that in the early days and for many years, wild flowers grew in great profusion along the shores of the river. It was described as a peaceful and beautiful river, and the banks, especially in the upper reaches, were covered with tall trees.

The river, from the source at Rookwood, near the eastern boundary of Liberty Plains to the dam at Tempe, is $9\frac{1}{4}$ miles long, and from the dam to Botany Bay it is $3\frac{1}{4}$ miles long, making a total length of $12\frac{1}{2}$ miles.

About eleven years ago the river was diverted in an almost straight line from Tempe to Botany Bay.

That portion of the river from Shea's Creek to Botany Bay was filled in so as to enlarge the Mascot Aerodrome.

The first place of interest on the banks of the filled in portion of the river at the entrance to Botany Bay, was to be seen the ruins of the old Macquarie style building with a high chimney. After the river was filled in the chimney of his historic building was removed. This building was used from 1858 to 1888 as a pumping station for the water supply of Sydney. The Botany and Randwick swamps, known officially as the "Lachlan Swamps", were linked up as a chain of ponds. A tunnel was commenced in September 1827, to convey this water to Sydney. This work was under the direction of Mr. James Busby, Mineral Surveyor, and it was completed a few years later. The tunnel was known as the "Busby Bore" or Busby Tunnel.

At the former Cook's River tram terminus, the road bridge crosses the river within about 100 feet of the site of the original bridge, owing to the river altering its course, and the old river-bed forming a dead-end. The dam at this old bridge was constructed by convict labour, under the superintendance of Mr. Colvert, during the year 1835. On the Sydney side of the river stood a little wooden toll bar at the entrance to the bridge. The toll gate was closed at night. All horses and vehicles were charged a small fee to pass through, but foot passengers went through free.

On the Arncliffe side of the river from the bridge was the fine mansion known as "Tempe", built and occupied by Mr. Alexander Brodie Spark.

Further along the river was the old Unwin's Bridge, formerly a wooden structure, built by convicts in 1836, and so named after the Unwin family who resided in a pretty home at Undercliffe known as "Wanstead House", named after their native home in Essex, England. Further along the river on the right hand side was the old home of the Hon. Thomas Holt, known as "Warren House", with its beautiful lawns and gardens. The estate consisted of about 140 acres.

When nearing Canterbury, on the banks of the river, was an old stone building erected by the Australian Sugar Company, and it bears the inscription: A.S. Co., 1841. A dam was built across the river to ensure a supply of fresh water. The first sugar was placed on the market during 1842 and the business was transferred to Sydney in 1855.

FIVE-CORNERS.

There's many an old resident of the St. George district who will probably tell you, with proud memory of his schooldays, that you're not a "dinki-di" Sydneyite until you've polished off a pocket full of five-corners. And, without any prompting, he'll very likely add that "As a 'nation' of five-corner eaters we are slipping". Oddly enough there is a considerable amount of truth in such comments, since, in the days of fifty and more years ago, the name "five-corner" was a household word in many of the suburbs of Sydney, especially around St. George. In the five-corner season of the early summer it was a name that hung on the lips of almost every schoolboy -- yes, and his sister, too. There's many a local schoolroom whose floor has been littered with the well-chewed seeds of these wild berries of the bush. Indeed, it is familiarly known amongst those of the older generation that five-corners once enjoyed such popularity that, in season, they were bought and sold as a regular line in the old Paddy's Markets, Sydney, and in some of the city fruit shops and many a local boy and girl made pocket money by gathering them.

Yet to-day the chances are that nine out of every ten persons you meet haven't even the faintest idea what a five-corner is, or wouldn't even recognise a five-corner bush if they happened to see one. Moreover, amongst the new generation of school kiddies the pioneer custom of gathering and chewing five-corners has been rapidly replaced with the modern habit of ice cream licking and the munching of chewing-gun. In truth, what was once a most distinctively Australian pastime is gradually disappearing into the limbo of forgotten things. The reasons for these changes are, in a way, interesting, and several factors have contributed towards them.

Let some of the old residents of St. George -- all experienced five-corner eaters -- have a word or two about schoolday memories of these native fruits. For instance, there's the well known veteran of Hurstville, Mr. Jack Chappelow, whose father's home, more than fifty years ago, stood amid thick bush down behind Allawah Railway Station, towards Blakehurst. With happy recollections, Mr. Chappelow remembers how, when he was a boy, the five-corner bushes grew thickly around the old homestead. He noticed that they seemed to flourish best along the rocky sandstone slopes, or else down on the sandy flats - but few, if any, would be met with back on the heavier clay country, such as occurs behind Hurstville and around Dumbleton or towards Campsie. In his young days this veteran, with his mates, would make regular "expeditions" through the bush gathering in the spoils of the five-corner crop. They would spend hours filling tins and other containers - much the same as youngsters, and oldsters, do today when the blackberries are ripe. When a sufficiently bulky quantity had been accumulated Mr. Chappelow would give them to the local wood-carters to be taken into Newtown - which was then the nearest shopping centre. There they were sold by the shops to the public. And that's how Jack Chappelow and his youthful mates earned odd shillings as pocket money; which was a novelty then for most children. Mr. Chappelow recalls that he gave many a pocket-full of five-corners to Lochrin Tiddy - the man who, more than fifty years back, was the very first returning officer of Hurstville. Practically everybody, both young and old, chewed the wild fruits of the five-corners in those distant times, and such a custom proved a novel diversion to help break the monotony for those whose daily life was not readily furnished with the common enough sweetmeats of modern 1941. Along with the five-corners the pioneers also gathered from the bush such other wild berries and fruit as ten-corners, top-corners, ground berries, geebung, native grapes (as bitterish as they are), lilli pillies, and the sour native currants.

Persons who have resided for any considerable time around the lower parts of Kogarah and Rockdale, and between Sans Souci and North Brighton along the flats, are the ones who have probably had much more experience with five-corners than anyone else in St. George. This is for the simple reason that the "fivic" bushes once grew the thickest of all in those areas, especially from Sans Souci to Cooks River, where they stood in veritable "jungles" - so dense, in fact, that it was far easier to crawl along under them than to try and brush through. And, in that sandy country, such an adventure was invariably attended by the risk of coming face-to-face with marauding snakes, or else being

tormented and stung by no end of "red joey's". Many a tale about the "fivies" of Brighton will the old hands tell you. At the height of the season some of the "regulars" would spend hours down at the lower ends of Bestic and Bay Streets while they filled empty flour bags with the ripening berries - most of which would be lying on the ground under each bush.

Mr. Kinsela, of Sans Souci, and formerly of Bexley, is another of the "old school" who has many happy recollections about five-corner picking. He recalls the time, when he was a boy, when "fivies" could be bought at the old Paddy's Markets, Sydney, for a penny an egg-cup full. Large quantities of them were traded there; and in later years certain city fruit shops displayed them for sale. Yet now-a-days it's a safe wager that you won't find a single five-corner in the whole of the city. One of their best collecting grounds, says Mr. Kinsela, was the scrub and bush that once spread thickly on either side of Woniora Road, from South Hurstville down towards Tom Ugly's. Many a tin and basketfull he and his school mates gathered down that way, after spending whole afternoons amongst the bushes. Today you could walk for miles around that locality - and Brighton too, for that matter - and not see one five-corner bush. There are, however, odd ones still growing here and there in isolated patches, particularly in a spot like Oatley Park, or way out around Lugarno. On the Sutherland side of George's River, and in wide bushland areas such as the National Park, lots of five-corners may yet be found in favourable situations.

Because of the overwhelming spread of suburban settlement within the last three decades most of the localities in St. George, and other parts of coastal Sydney, where "fivies" once flourished, have been entirely swept clean of their natural scrub and bush. In similar fashion to the more lordly gum-tree, the humble five-corner bush and his mates is fast disappearing beneath the crush of sardine-packed suburbs. No doubt that is one of the primary reasons why the pioneer tradition - handed down from the aborigines and the first white settlers - of five-corner gathering and eating is dying off. Another factor also in this historic change is that youngsters of the present generation are much more privileged with pocket money than their grandfathers were. Moreover, there are greater inducements today in the way of buying ready-made pleasures and pastimes. Youngsters, as a consequence, are more readily attracted to the civilised "fruits" of the sweet shops and the milk bars; and that goes too for the grown-ups.

And now, finally, a word or two about the five-corner bush itself - what the botanists will tell you. In the first place the five-corners -- of which there are eleven different kinds or species -- are true native plants of Australia, and found no where else in the entire world. Not only do they grow principally in New South Wales, but they are confined almost solely to the coast and eastward slopes of the Blue Mountains. One or two types of five-corners, in fact, will be found nowhere else but on the sandstone zone of which Sydney is the centre. Thus it can be said that five-corners are unknown to the majority of Australians.

These wild plants are classed as members of the Australian heath family -- of which they are said to be the largest and most beautifully coloured. Their botanical name is *Styphelia*; which was taken from the Greek word "styphelos", meaning rough; which describes the stiff, compact and harsh nature of the shrub and its foliage. As mature fruit-bearing shrubs they may be found in heights of anything from two feet to eight feet and even taller, depending on the situation in which they are growing. Their leaves are on the small side - for example, smaller than those of the Christmas bush - and are of plain shape, but have sharp pointed tips. In the different kinds of five-corners the flowers vary in colour from pink and red to yellow, green, and white. They are tube-shaped, with long stamens poking out through the opening. Honey-eaters and insects are fond of the flowers, as they hold sweet drops of nectar. It is in the late winter and early spring months that the five-corners come into bloom, and the ripening berries will be found from then on into the summer. Odd ones, of course, will be seen in fruit out of season. Now, it is an interesting point that the popular name of the shrub - five-corner - is really descriptive of its fruit, each of which is "wrapped-up", so to speak, in five small leaves, which first held the flower. This produces the characteristic of five points or corners; which is an outstanding guide to the identity of this shrub. Each berry is described by botanists as being in the shape of a drupe, meaning that it has the appearance and structure, generally, of an olive, but on a much smaller scale. Oddly enough there is nothing

startling about its flavour, and not much flesh covers the one central seed. It is, however, on the sweetish side when fully ripened, and has a distinctive taste, though only mild, which is not quite like any other wild berry. It is certainly the very opposite of the native currants! The succulent fruit of the five-corner, by the way, is properly ripe when it has fallen to the ground beneath the bush; although many "fivie" enthusiasts prefer to pick and eat those that are still amongst the green foliage.

ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

OUTING TO PARRAMATTA

53 Bruce Street,
BEXLEY.

20th March, 1964.

Dear Friend and Member,

The long postponed trip to Parramatta has now been arranged.

Details are listed below.

As all arrangements depend on transport I must know no later than April 4 who is going.

Please complete the attached form as soon as possible and return it to me.

Yours sincerely,

R. W. RATHBONE

Hon. Secretary.
LW4813.

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DATE:- SUNDAY, 12TH APRIL, 1964.

TIME:- Leaving Rockdale Town Hall at 9.45 a.m.
Rendezvous, The Gatehouse, Parramatta Park, 10.30 a.m.

BRING:- 1. Your morning and afternoon tea.
2. Your lunch. (To be taken in Parramatta Park)
3. Your camera.
4. Your raincoat.

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The Secretary,
St. George Historical Society,
53 Bruce Street,
BEXLEY.

Dear Sir,

1. I wish to reserve seats for the outing to Parramatta.
2. I have my own transport.
3. I will have vacant seats in my car and would be willing to take other members of the Society who have no transport.
4. I have no transport.

Yours sincerely,

HISTORIC BUILDINGS OF PARRAMATTA

1. EXPERIMENT FARM COTTAGE.

Built in 1798 by John Harris an obstreperous Irish Surgeon with the N.S.W. Corps, Experiment Farm Cottage stands on the site of James Ruse's Experiment Farm which was granted to him in 1790 after the expiration of his 7 year sentence.

On these 30 acres Ruse grew Australia's first successful wheat crop but sold the farm to Harris in 1793 and moved further west.

Harris, who later held the positions of Magistrate at Parramatta, Judge-Advocate and Superintendent of Police had already been granted 110 acres at nearby "Harris Park".

The house is a perfect example of Australian Colonial Architecture with a low pitched roof overhanging the verandah, charming Georgian doorway, panelled door flanked by sidelights and french windows opening from the front rooms.

2. THE GOVERNOR'S BATH HOUSE.

This curious many sided structure was once part of the orchard of Old Government House. Not important historically, it is interesting to see how Governor Brisbane who built it and succeeding Governors took steps to meet the newly experienced heat of an Australian summer.

3. LENNOX BRIDGE.

Completed in 1839 after the previous wooden one had been swept away by floods, this bridge has been widened and altered and now bears little resemblance to the original creation although it is incorporated in the present bridge.

4. ST. JOHN'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND

The twin spires of St. John's belonged to what was the second oldest church in Australia. In the year 1796 a church was built of wooden slabs but was replaced in 1803 by a more substantial edifice. The towers are supposed to have been inspired by Mrs. Macarthur. The old church survived until 1852 when all but the towers was demolished, the present church being completed in 1855.

5. ELIZABETH FARM HOUSE

Elizabeth Farm House is the oldest structure in Australia and was erected in the year 1793 for Captain John Macarthur, Military Commandant of the Parramatta District and his wife Elizabeth.

It was here that Macarthur initiated his experiments in the cross-breeding of sheep which ultimately led to the production of the merinos which formed the foundation of Australia's great flocks of today.

A simple charming single storied brick building, it was rescued from demolition in 1904 by Mr. William Swann whose family still lives there.

6. HAMBLEDON COTTAGE.

Built in 1824 by John Macarthur, it was for many years the residence of the governess to the Macarthur children, Miss Penelope Lucas. It has recently been acquired and restored by the Parramatta City Council.

7. ROSENEATH COTTAGE

Roseneath Cottage, 1837, has an exceptionally fine facade although the interior of the building has been greatly altered. It was built for Mrs. Janet Templeton the widow of a Glasgow banker who arrived in Australia with her 8 sons and daughters in 1830.

8. THE LANCER BARRACKS

Designed by Lieut. John Watts, Aide de Camp to Governor Macquarie, this fine group of buildings was completed in 1820. Two of the original three buildings remain.

The two storied one has had a verandah added but the single storied one remains in its original condition.

The Lancer Barracks are the oldest continuously used military establishment in Australia.

9. OLD GOVERNMENT HOUSE

This fine colonial building, beautifully placed overlooking the City of Parramatta was built in 1799 and remodelled in 1815-16. It replaced a much smaller structure which collapsed.

The protico is attributed to Francis Greenway.

It was frequently used by Governor Macquarie and succeeding governors but fell into disuse after 1845 and by 1880 was in need of extensive repair.

Leased by the Kings School in 1910, it has been tastefully restored as a boarding house for junior boys.