

ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOL 1. NO.10.

BI-MONTHLY BULLETIN

GRATIS.

APRIL 1964.

53 Bruce Street,

BEXLEY

10th April, 1964.

Dear Friend and Member,

Our sincere apologies for the very short notice of this meeting but owing to the Postal Strike, arrangements have been delayed.

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

DATE: This coming FRIDAY EVENING, 17th April, 1964, at 8 p.m.

PLACE: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Rockdale.

SPEAKER: We are very privileged to have as our guest speaker

MR. D. A. CARR of the National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.)
who at very short notice and considerable personal inconvenience
will speak to us on -

"The Aboriginal Tribes of Botany Bay, Cook's River, St. George,
Georges River, and Sutherland."

which he will illustrate with slides.

This is a unique opportunity to learn something of our district
before the advent of the Whiteman, and we hope you will make every effort to
be present.

A light supper will be served.

T. J. McCARTHY
President.

R. W. RATHBONE
Hon. Secretary.
LW-4813.

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SOCIETY TRIES TO SAVE BRAY'S COTTAGE

At the last meeting of the St. George Historical Society it was
decided to make representations to the Rockdale Council for the preservation
of Bray's Cottage in Market Street, Rockdale.

Bray's Cottage, erected in 1856, is one of the oldest pioneer homes
still standing in Rockdale, but is marked down for demolition when the parking
area at the rear of the shopping centre is extended this year.

It is hoped that the building could be preserved either on an island
site or adjacent to the existing Church of Christ.

SUCCESSFUL OUTING TO PARRAMATTA.

There was an excellent roll up for our long planned trip to Parramatta
last Sunday. Fifty members of the Society and their friends travelled in fourteen
cars to the gates of Parramatta Park, where we were met by the President of the
Parramatta Historical Society, Mr. Wallace, and the Secretary, Mrs. King.

Among the places of interest visited were Old Government House,
"Brislington", The Lancer Barracks, "Hambleton Cottage", "Elizabeth Farm" and
"Experiment Farm Cottage".

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At Old Government House - which is still being used by the King's School, we saw the Governor's Bath House and the site of the first observatory in Australia.

Lunch was taken in Hambledon Park under the shade of three enormous oak trees planted to celebrate the victory at the Battle of Waterloo, but the highlight of the day was the visit to Experiment Farm Cottage, one of the three oldest houses in Australia, which has recently been completely renovated and restored by the National Trust.

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MEMORIES OF OTHER DAYS.

ST. GEORGE EIGHTY YEARS AGO.

by the Late A.H. Wennholm.

When the old Rockdale Town Hall was being erected in 1888-9, at the corner of Rocky Point Road (now known as Princes Highway) and Bryant Street, there was also being built a little stone church at the top of Bryant Street. The site selected for this church was a rocky one, consequently the stone for the building was mostly quarried on the site. Strange to relate the minister of this new church did most of the work himself. He cut out the stone blocks and then laid them in position. He built well, and afterwards preached within its four walls. When the church was opened for public worship in April, 1889, it was known as the United Wesleyan Church, as distinct from the other Wesleyan Churches. After being so conducted for some years the Plymouth Brethren took over the property. They conducted services there for some years, but eventually the building became untenanted, and remained so for some time. However, in 1904, another religious organisation took charge, carried on for some years as the Gospel Hall, until the place again became untenanted.

At about the same time as the Town Hall and the little church were being built the Rockdale Public School was opened on the rocky ramparts of Rockdale at the rear of the church. In those days the school and the church were surrounded by huge gum trees, shrubs, vines, ferns and various kinds of native flowers. Goats by the hundred lived and thrived in the rocky caves surrounding the school and church. As a pupil of the school at that time the writer well remembers how the children loved to ramble among the trees and rocks and flowers - at the same time tormenting the goats, which on more than one occasion became inquisitive and ventured into the porches and class-rooms, purloining hats and children's lunch packets.

After the little church building had remained there for 38 years, with not a crack in its well-built walls, its days of usefulness as a church came to an end. It was purchased by Constable F. Berger, a native of the district, who was better known as Sergeant Berger, of the Hurstville Police. Sergeant Berger's parents settled at Kogarah about one hundred years ago, and commenced market gardening pursuits in the vicinity of the present Moorefield Racecourse. Sergeant Berger purchased the church building in 1927, had it demolished, and built his home on the site, which was then surrounded by comfortable homes - not a gum tree or a sign of the primeval bush remaining to remind one of days gone by. When the building was pulled down a bottle containing newspapers of the day, was found under the foundation stone. One of these newspapers was the local news-sheet of that time - the "St. George's Advocate," dated Saturday, April 20, 1889. From this paper, which was in a fairly good state of preservation - the quality of paper being better than that of modern newspapers - the writer gained some interesting information which is incorporated in this story of St. George as it was eighty or more years ago.

The "St. George Advocate" was established in 1888, and was printed and published by Mr. Edward H. Myerson at the Phoenix Printing Works, Railway Parade, Kogarah. It comprised four pages, and was sold at twopence per copy. It was published on Saturdays, shops at that time being open until about 11 o'clock on Saturday night. However, as can be expected at that period, the circulation was not very large on account of the sparse population. In the early nineties the business was purchased by Mr. G.L.A. Davies, and transferred to Rockdale, where the paper was printed in premises opposite the Rockdale Methodist Church in Bay Street, then known as the Masonic Hall. The writer of this article served his apprenticeship in the "Advocate" Office, the commencing wages being 2/6d per week, concluding a five-year term in 1903. The late Mr. Davies was a fearless critic, and many an alderman or public man wilted under his exposure and sarcasm, but in all his writings he never deviated from his opinions if he believed he was right. His whole life had been devoted to journalism, but on account of advancing years he eventually ceased publishing the "Advocate" and sold the plant, but not before the late Mr. James Watson had established the "Citizen" in opposition to the "Advocate", making two newspapers for the St. George district. Mr. Watson began printing the "Citizen" at Arncliffe, later transferring to premises opposite the Royal Hotel, Rockdale.

In the late eighties the Parliamentary electoral district was known as Canterbury, being represented by four members of Parliament. Of course, there were no Federal members, as the federation of the States of the Commonwealth had

not then been accomplished. In 1889 the four members of Parliament for this district were Messrs. J.H. Carruthers, John Wheeler, A. Hutchinson and T.J. Wilshire. Mr. Carruthers, who lived at Kogarah Bay, later became Sir Joseph Carruthers, Premier of New South Wales.

Local Government in the area was controlled by three municipal councils, viz. Rockdale (previously known as West Botany), Kogarah and Hurstville. Bexley at that time was part of Hurstville Municipality, as was also part of Sutherland Shire, the area on the southern bank of George's River from Como to beyond Lugarno. In later years this area was seceded to Sutherland Shire and Bexley Ward of Hurstville Municipality became the Municipality of Bexley. Each council was comprised of nine aldermen, instead of twelve as at present. In 1889 Rockdale Council comprised Aldermen W.G. Judd (Mayor), S. Geeves, A.G. Carruthers, A.E. Green, H. Cooke, P.J. Smythe, E. Godfrey, T.S. Huntley and T. Price. (Messrs. Judd and Price later represented the district in Parliament). Mr. Thomas Leeder was the council clerk and Messrs. S. Tattler and M. Tuckwell, overseers. In the same year Kogarah Council was composed of Aldermen G. Read (Mayor), P. Hermann, J. South, D.J. Treacy, T.B. Eldridge, P. English, J. Carroll, J. Hatfield, and W. Chappelow. Mr. E.T. Sayers was council clerk and Mr. George Jones the overseer. In 1889 Hurstville Council comprised Aldermen Hugh Patrick (Mayor), Chas. Bull, C.H. Halstead, Myles McRae, John Sproule, C. Fripp, W. Humphrey and Osgood. Mr. G.W.K. Leeder was the council clerk and Mr. W.J. Thompson the engineer. Government roads throughout St. George were under the control of Mr. E. Dyson. Government roads were main roads passing through the various municipalities.

There were only three public parks in the St. George district eighty-three years ago. They comprised mostly virgin land, and very little improvement was made to them on account of the usual shortage of funds. However, the old pioneers did well to preserve these areas for posterity, and it is a great pity that no more areas were dedicated to the people while land was available for such purposes. These parks were controlled by local trustees, and at the time of which I write they were:- Scarborough Park: Messrs. W. Neil, J. Cooke, J. Bowmer, A. Henry, E.J. Wehlow and A. Black. Cook Park: Messrs. W. Neil, S. Cook, J. Bowmer, W.G. Judd, E.H. Wehlow and J. Henry. Peakhurst Park: Messrs. J.H. Carruthers, A. Milsop, Myles McRae, H. Patrick, Dr. J. MacLeod and J.H. Want. These old pioneers are now in their last resting places, and the parks, considerably improved, are controlled by Rockdale and Hurstville Councils, who, with Kogarah and Bexley, have since added many other parks and playing fields to their areas.

Over eighty years ago seven constables patrolled the area, mostly on horseback. They were Constables M. McCole, Kogarah, who was in charge; G. Alexander, Hurstville; J. Curry, Rockdale; G. Gess, Peakhurst; A. McKenzie, Cook's River; - Russell, Kogarah, and - Tugwell, Arncliffe. Sergeant McCole afterwards lived in retirement at Kogarah, and was a well known local identity until he died. The Court of Petty Sessions for the district was at Newtown.

Ten Justices of the Peace sufficed for the whole of St. George half a century ago. To-day many hundreds have that honour. In 1889 the local Justices were Messrs. A. Barden, Arncliffe; J. Sproule, Hurstville; J. Bowmer, Rockdale; S.A. Fullford, Hurstville; E. Hogben, Kogarah; D.J. Lamrock, Kogarah; H. Kinsela, Bexley; Dr. Read, Kogarah; F.J. Gibbins, Arncliffe; and W.G. Judd, Arncliffe. The registrars of births, marriages and deaths were: - Mr. H. Cambridge, Kogarah; Mr. Hardwick, Rockdale; while Mr. George Leeder, of Hurstville, looked after the interests of Hurstville, Bexley, Kingsgrove, Peakhurst and Sutherland.

Old residents will remember that Shea's Creek and Muddy Creek, tributaries of Cook's River, were narrow rivulets surrounded by a huge swamp area, overgrown by mangrove trees, swamp oaks etc. The area extended from Skidmore's bridge, Rockdale to Bay Street, on to Bestic Street, where it widened out to Cook's River. It was a favourite spot for quail and duck shooting. Part of the area, at Arncliffe, was used for a sewerage farm for some years, until the advent of the sewerage system. The present recreation grounds at North Brighton were also part of the swamp area. Reclaimed land at Shea's Creek is now covered with factories, etc. Muddy Creek is now a tidal watercourse, near its outlet, and a stormwater concrete channel near its source. All this improvement work has cost many thousands of pounds during the last eighty years.

In the St. George district today are some of the most modern business premises to be found anywhere, many of them comparing more than favourably with Sydney stores. Their artistic modern window displays and huge stocks have attracted thousands of people to shop locally rather than going to the city to make their purchases. Eighty years ago the principal shopping centre for the St. George district was Newtown, but things have changed considerably since then.

However, the district was catered for fairly well in those distant times by local stores, but their stocks were not very large. However, food and household articles could be purchased locally much cheaper than it is possible today. For instance, bread was delivered at 2d. or 1½d. per loaf as against about 1/3d. today. The best imported sugar could be purchased at 2½d. per lb., and tea at 1/- per lb. Mention of a few of the businesses in operation in St. George over eighty years ago may be of interest. Bricks for building purposes were supplied by a number of small brickyards, the bricks being mostly handmade. However, the principal brickmakers were the Hurstville Steam Brick Works at Mort's Hill, now known as Mortdale, managed by the Messrs. Edwards and Gardner, who were both well-known residents of Hurstville until they passed away some years ago. The principal drapery store in Rockdale over eighty years ago was that controlled by the late Mr. C. Barsby, at the corner of Bay Street and the now Princes Highway. In the nineties he opened another store at Kogarah, his brother Jack, eventually taking over the Rockdale business. Charlie Barsby was a keen advertiser, and many old residents will remember a tree facing the main road between Rockdale and Kogarah on which was attached a sign for many years, reading, "Woodman, spare this tree, for Charlie Barsby." At any rate, this was the last old gum tree facing the highway to be cut down. His brother Jack, was also a humorist. In those days local store-keepers displayed most of their goods on the footpaths outside their premises, in addition to hanging them on the exterior walls. This served better than window displays, as intending purchasers could sample the goods outside, without going inside the stores. Boots, clothing, dress-material etc., were all hung on the walls outside, and taken down at night. In those days "shop-lifting" and petty thieving was practically unknown - the residents respecting the belongings of others more so than they do today, notwithstanding modern social services, higher education, and more churches. As a youth the writer knew the Barsbys very well, and one incident concerning Jack and his Rockdale store is well remembered. In those days, Rocky Point Road - now Princes Highway - and Bay Street, were very dusty thoroughfares, a modern concrete or tarred road was then unknown. When the winds did blow, the dust nuisance was intense, much to the annoyance of the storekeepers, with their goods hanging on the walls outside. On such occasions Rockdale Council did its best by sending out water carts to spray the streets in order to minimise the dust nuisance in the business centre. One dusty day the water cart failed to arrive. Jack Barsby became annoyed, but would not be beaten. He sent a messenger down to Bay Street for a couple of Chinese market-gardeners to bring up to his shop some watering cans, which they used for watering their gardens. Barsby then set them to work. With poles across their shoulders, and a watering can at each end of the stick they marched up and down in front of his shop watering the street. The dust was eventually turned into mud and the draper was delighted. After that incident Rockdale Council's staff was more prompt in sending out the watering cart on a windy day.

Very few people know that Rockdale had a steam mineral water works and cordial factory as far back as 1889. It was established by Mr. T.P. Swindale, who was a well-known chemist at Rockdale in those days. Cordials and various drinks were delivered free to any part of the district daily. Messrs. F. and A. Moir were the local timber merchants, but later on came the timber yards of Francis and Wardle, and also that of Mr. S.A. Burns. Mr. T.B. Eldridge conducted a timber yard at Kogarah. One of the oldest general stores at Kogarah was that conducted by South Bros. This business was established in 1866. Not only were they bakers, grocers and drapers, but also dealt in ironmongery and hardware. South's Bakery at Kogarah, was a household word in the St. George district for much over half a century.

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FOOTNOTE: The above article appeared in the Propeller Newspaper thirty years ago under the heading of "St. George 50 Years Ago". It has been reprinted, adding the change in time as an item of interest for the members.

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