



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Bi-Monthly Bulletin

53 Bruce Street,
Bexley.
11th June, 1965.

Dear Friend and Member.

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

Date: Friday Evening Next, 18th June, 1965, at 8 p.m.

Place: Council Chamber, Rockdale Town Hall.

Guest Speaker: Mr. Gifford Eardley will present a paper on the Upper Reaches of the Wolli Creek Valley which he will illustrate with an exhibition of sketches.

A light supper will be served. All members and any interested friends will be most welcome.

P. Greeves,
President.

R.W. Rathbone,
Hon. Secretary.
LW. 4813.

NEXT OUTING.

Miss Freda Palmer of the Nepean District Historical Society has invited us to accompany her Society on an outing on Sunday, 27th June.

This will cover the area between Penrith and Richmond and should prove to be of considerable interest to those people who accompanied Miss Palmer to Mulgoa.

Details will be available at the meeting or by ringing the Secretary at LW.4813.

This anonymous letter was written to Mr. GEORGE HAWK (known popularly as "The Bird") when he was seeking aldermanic honours in 1900. Mr. Hawk was a well-known temperance worker - hence the heavy-handed humour.

Sewerside Brewery,
October 18, 1900.

- Bird Esq.,

Dear Sir,

As we understand it is your intention to give the ratepayers of Penshurst Ward a 'blow out' on Saturday next, we shall be glad to be favoured with a share of your patronage. We think you will find the subjoined price list replete in every detail, and somewhere in keeping with your cramped ideas of liberality.

Wishing you success in the Aldermanic contest; and trusting to receive your further esteemed orders when you contest the electorate of St. George

Yours very discriminately,

Swiller & Coy.

per S. Oaker.
Manager.

Real beer	..	..	9d. per gallon
Tanglefoot	..	..	8d. "
Poison (our special election brew)	..	..	6½d. "
Aerated waters			
(with any of the above)	..	..	Gratis

NB. The usual terms to Aldermen. CASH BEFORE DELIVERY

One of the best-known licencees of Saywell's New Brighton Hotel, Lady Robinson's Beach, was Mr. Harry Figg. Harry Figg gravitated to Brighton-le-Sands after being Minehost of the Harvest Home Hotel, Hobart, but prior to his arrival in Australia he had seen very stirring times in South Africa. During the Zulu wars Mr. Figg had a unique opportunity of seeing the great Zulu warrior-leader, Cetewayo, at close quarters and witnessed his final capitulation to the British after the Zulu defeats at Rorke's Drift and Ulundi.

In the article that follows (reprinted from the local press of March 1902) Mr. Figg recalled some of his memories. He had helped to bury the 806 Europeans who were slaughtered, almost to a man, by the Zulus at Isandhlwana on 22nd January, 1879. On the following day began the epic defence of the mission station at Rorke's Drift, which has gone down in history as the place where the greatest number of Victoria Crosses were awarded for a single action. This episode inspired the splendid film "Zulu", shown in Sydney last year.

AN AFRICAN VETERAN AND HERO

Although still young in years, we can see few better specimens of the veteran, and of those who have helped to build up the Empire during the last thirty years, than our old friend, Mr. Harry Figg, of Lady Robinson's Beach. The demonstration of Saturday last goes to stir up the martial and patriotic spirit of the bygone days in those who have served their country faithfully and well; and to bring before our notice deeds and services to our country, which otherwise would be buried in oblivion. The more so as those who bear the brunt of battle

column. He took part in the engagements at Umbalaze, Ulundi, and was with the first column through Isandallwana after the massacre of the 24th Regiment. A chat with Mr. Figg on his personal experiences while under canvas in Zululand and South Africa generally is of special interest at this juncture, and the tender affection displayed by the wearer for his medals must be seen to be appreciated. Needless to say, Mr. Figg and his medals were in strong evidence today, when the welcome news of the relief of Ladysmith was so enthusiastically discussed.

Extract from Hobart Mercury, March 3, 1900 :-

Many old soldiers put on their medals in honour of "Ladysmith Day". Our representative noticed Mr. Harry Figg, of the Harvest Home, wearing two, which, on inquiry, proved to be the South African 1878-9 bar, Ekowe, and clasp, Ulundi, and the Ashantee, 1873-4. In cheering the men so gallantly going to the front now, let us not forget the veterans, whose toil and blood in years gone by paved the way for the Empire of today.

THOMAS AND EADITH WALKER

EXTRACT FROM "SOME HOUSES AND PEOPLE IN N.S.W."

BY G. NESTA GRIFFITHS.

Thomas Walker was born at Leith, in Scotland, on the 3rd May, 1804, and came to Australia in 1822, where he entered his Uncle's firm. His mother was Anne Walker, of Perth, sister to William Walker, who built "Redleaf" in Double Bay.

The young Thomas within eight years was in charge of the business, and became well known as a merchant, pastoralist and shipowner. During 1836 and 1837 there had been a bad drought in New South Wales, and Mr. Walker and a party of friends decided to investigate the new country being opened up around Port Phillip. A record of this was published in London in 1838, "A Month in the Bush of Australia; Journal of one of a Party of Gentlemen who recently travelled from Sydney to Port Phillip". It is the diary of Thomas Walker, and reveals a most observant nature.

There is a small wonder that Mr. Walker made a fortune - his great gifts of observation and practical knowledge of the land guided his purchases, and before long he became one of the richest men in Australia. In 1840 he bought the mortgage on the Yaralla property at Concord. This had been a grant to Isaac Nichols from Governor Hunter, dated 20th December, 1797, and it was increased in 1806 by a further 50 acres. On the estate, which was situated on the southern shore of the Parramatta River, was a small cottage which Mr. Walker used as a camp and holiday resort, while he laid out the gardens he planned for the house he hoped to build. This cottage was completely reconstructed by his daughter and still stands as one of the earliest buildings in Australia. He had a great gift for landscape gardening, and the famous garden of Yaralla owed much to his original design.

He married late in life Miss Ann Hart, and they had only one child, a daughter named Eadith. Mrs. Walker was very delicate, and died in 1870, when her little girl was only a few years old, and Mr. Walker then sent for his sister, Joanna, to come from Scotland to help him.

For a time they lived at "Durham Cottage" on Miller's Point, as, in the way of Australian fortunes, Mr. Walker had sustained heavy losses and the building of his home was temporarily postponed. They took up their residence at Yaralla in 1870, and Miss Joanna, who considered an only child would be too lonely, adopted a little friend, Anne Masefield, and the two girls were brought up together like sisters. In 1893 Miss Masefield married Mr. John Sulman, the architect, who was knighted in 1924, and it is to Lady Sulman that I am indebted for much of the information about Yaralla in the 'seventies.

The stone for the building of the house was quarried from what later became the swimming pool, and the main rooms were set around a courtyard. About 1897 Mr. Sulman made extensive alterations for Miss Walker, and a big dining room, panelled in Australian woods, was built over this courtyard and the hall enlarged.

When they first moved in, the roads to Concord were so rough that they usually came to Sydney by ferry. At that time they had no jetty, and a very skilled Norwegian boatman, Nils, would row them out into the stream, and as the paddle steamer slowed down would slip the boat alongside and the passengers were helped on board. Here in wet weather the only shelter would be behind the paddles, and they would sit with their feet up on the opposite bench, so as to keep dry. Most of their teachers came to them, such as the French and music mistresses, but for dancing they attended Mr. Needs academy, where the Oriental Bank stood in O'Connell Street. Miss Joanna had strong Scottish ideas about children being seen and not heard, and it was a strict upbringing. She also had a great fear that some fortune hunter might try to marry her niece for her money.

By 1881, Mr. Walker was known as one of the leading pastoralists, and a merchant prince, trading all over Australia and Great Britain, and also with many foreign countries. He acted on John Wesley's famous rule, "Make all you can; save all you can; give all you can". He kept an agent to advise him of cases of distress, which he helped with his never-failing kindness. Before he went abroad in 1882 he placed £10,000 in the care of his friends, Mr. Thomas Buckland and Mr. Shepherd Smith, to be distributed among various benevolent institutions. On this trip they travelled via U.S.A., and so on to Scotland, but on each occasion Norway was always an objective, to visit their Archer cousins at Larvik.

Mr. Walker died in 1886, aged 82, and his sister only four years later, and Miss Walker inherited not only the fortune but the great responsibilities. I doubt if the actual possession of money ever gave her pleasure, except for the manner in which she was able to help the poor and needy, and entertain her many friends. She had such a stern sense of duty that it was always her great endeavour to use her wealth for the greatest benefit of her country. No Australian could have been more patriotic, and her work during the war of 1914-18 earned her the honour of Dame of the British Empire. Her sympathies were always with the soldiers, which her large legacies to the R.S.S. & A.I.L.A. show in the most generous practical manner.

On Sunday afternoons Mr. Walker used to take the two girls for a walk to the Point, and all the time his active mind was planning the hospital, which, begun in his lifetime, was finished by his daughter, and is known as the Thomas Walker Memorial Convalescent Hospital. Yaralla House itself is now used as a convalescent home for patients from the R.P.A.H., and the big Government Hospital, near the Ryde Bridge, known by its number, 113th, during the late war, is often spoken of as the Yaralla Hospital.

The late Miss Walker is remembered as "Dame Eadith" and her friends were many all over the world. She never married, and travelled extensively. On one occasion she brought back from Norway a little Norwegian house, which was re-erected in the garden, and I remember staying at Yaralla in 1917, when it was used as a workroom for convalescent soldiers who were tubercular and were sleeping in tents in the garden. Her entertainments were lavish, and guests were nearly always transported either by ferry or train till the days of motor cars made it unnecessary. Sometimes, for a ball, she would hire a hall in Sydney, and there was one party when the walls were lined with flowers, so that the guests danced literally in a bower of daffodils. Her children's parties were unique, and a great event in our lives, and the favours for the Cotillions were treasured for years after.

In spring the white walls of Yaralla were draped with mauve wistaria, and the rose garden, sheltered by tall hedges, was a dream of beauty. There were native trees together with English ones to form long vistas. The rocks around the swimming pool grew ferns and maiden hair, and the mangrove swamps of the Parramatta River fringed the shore with a curious pattern of roots, a lovely effect at the end of the walk bordered by cinerarias.

The house itself I can only describe after the alterations, when the marble hall, with its arched colonnade gave such an impression of coolness and space. To light part of the hall a doorway from the drawing room was fitted with glass shelves and glass fronts, forming a perfect setting for porcelains, and the big windows opening on to the verandah from the drawing room led the visitor, as always in this outdoor country, through the room to the view outside. The dining room was panelled in Australian woods, and the furniture specially made to go with the room, over the mantelpiece being the old Scottish motto, "East West, Hame's Best". The main bedrooms opened on to a gallery; here was beauty, charm, and comfort, all the attributes of a house that is loved.

Dame Eadith visited India for the Durbar in 1903, and built a special room for her Oriental collection. She loved children, and her kindness to all in trouble was unending. Her employees adored her. There is only one way to describe her - she had the humility of the truly great.
