



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

Vol. 2. No. 10

Bi-Monthly Bulletin

August 1965.

53 Bruce Street,
Bexley.
13th August, 1965.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING.

Dear Friend and Member.

The Annual Meeting of the above Society will be held as follows:-

Place: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Rockdale.

Date: Friday Evening Next, 20th August, 1965, at 8 p.m.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the National Trust film

"This is Our Heritage"

will be screened.

As we will be entertaining Mrs. Pillars, founder of the Randwick Historical Society and a number of members of that Society, a full roll up of St. George members would be appreciated.

A light supper will be served.

P. Geeves.
President.

R. W. Rathbone.
Hon. Secretary.

NEXT OUTING.

Our next outing will take place on Saturday, 21st August, to the Nepean District - the day after the Annual Meeting - conducted by Miss Freda Palmer and will take the place of the outing that was cancelled last month.

Full details at the Meeting.

** **

December, 1931.

THE UPPER REACHES OF THE WOLLI CREEK VALLEY (continued)

by Gifford & Eileen Eardley.

Retracing our steps along Arncliffe Road, we reach the ford across Wolli Creek which marks the end of tidal influence. Gazing up stream along the windings of the creek we note thickets of swamp oak trees which line the western bank. Several of these trees stand on extremely small islets with just enough room for their trunks and a swathe of oak needles around their roots which form a cosy retreat for the numerous water-hens frequenting the secluded spot. The eastern bank is lined with many fine willows and immediately adjacent to the ford is a withy (or basket willow), an uncommon tree in the St. George District. In mid-winter, when the willows have long shed their leaves, they are made conspicuous by hundreds of small pied cormorants roosting in their swaying branches, showing off to full advantage their white shirt-fronts and black coat-tails.

On the placid surface of the water beneath the tree branches the reflections are at times broken by flotillas of Black Duck, which, according to local report, are based on the Centennial Park lakes and come to this haven to breed. In early autumn and also in spring the sight of mother duck, accompanied by a round dozen of tiny ducklings, is fascinating. The ducks generally congregate in small groups and paddle along on their lawful occasions with a quack here and a quack there, poking prying bills into the waterside edges seeking edible titbits which are unfortunate enough to come their way.

Occasionally the night herons can be espied, resting in solitary state by day, digesting their nocturnal diet of frogs and other toothsome delicacies. In the daytime also can be seen beautiful white egrets and blue herons (or cranes) hunting with stealthy tread in the shallows where little escapes their keen vision. Kingfishers, glorious midgets of azure blue and orange, can also be espied on the lower branches keeping an active eye on the waters beneath. Other feathered visitors to these swamp lands are black and white ibis, spur-winged plover, white necked and black bodied cranes (most majestic of birds) and the tiny dotteral, all of which frequent the flat grass lands bordering the creek.

The reedbeds attract many migratory birds amongst which are the reed-warblers who betray their presence with outburst of trilling song of great beauty and clarity. Also is heard the plaintive two-note call of the more shy grass bird which symbolises the spirit and quietude of the Wolli Creek marsh land. Unfortunately, the Southern European element in our midst has little respect for our fascinating Australian bird life and, although the Wolli Creek Valley is a declared wild-life sanctuary, the sound of rifles and shot-guns being discharged is often heard in the early morning hours, Sundays included. Nothing comes amiss to these so-called hunters, wrens, wagtails, kookaburras, doves, sparrows, starlings and everything else that flies goes into the communal cooking pot, a custom which could well be left in Europe.

Crossing the ford we follow the course of Arncliffe Street along the pine-tree flanked enclosure of the Bucknell property for a short distance until the intersection of Hannam Street is reached, the junction being marked by a fine cedar tree standing within the boundary fence of "Valencia". This fine stone homestead, built for the manager of the adjacent tannery, was later owned by the Griggs family and its rear premises and separate kitchen were ranged along two sides of a stone paved courtyard, shaded by peppercorn trees. The old house was demolished by the Railway Department when the property was resumed to make way for the construction of the Tempe-East Hills Railway which opened as far as Kingsgrove on December 21st, 1931.

The present day Turrella Railway Station occupies a position immediately east of the former location of "Valencia" and it is interesting to note that the name Turrella is derived from an aboriginal word denoting a place of reeds or a swamp.

Proceeding along Hannam Street in a southerly direction we reach the odoriferous collection of down at heel nondescript sheds which once formed the tannery and later housed the boiling-down establishment owned by Mr. McNamara. This undertaking adjoined the "Valencia" property and was devoted to the purposes of rendering sheep, horses and cattle for their tallow content. It has been stated that during drought periods, Mr. McNamara was able to purchase sheep at a nominal rate of four shillings each and no less than eight butchers were employed for the skinning and tallow-making processes. The carcasses were thrown into large cauldrons and covered with water, the whole being heated by wood fires. The resulting "soup" was run into long galvanised half-round troughs where it was allowed to cool and settle, the fats rising to the surface. The waste liquid was

removed by means of a bottom plug hole then the residual fat was cut into rough sections. After being cleaned of its impurities, this "tallow" was reheated and, in a molten state, poured into sundry tins and barrels. The meat residues were in great demand by local pig farmers whilst the hoofs, horns and bones were handled by a neighbouring firm of glue makers named Brierley.

The disposal of the "soup" waste, after its fat content had been extracted, set many problems to Mr. McNamara. At first the evil smelling mess was permitted to flow into Wolli Creek where it polluted the downstream tidal flats making life unbearable to the Bucknell family and other residents living near the waterway. The floating scum was not favourably regarded by the boating fraternity radiating out from the boat sheds near Tempe Railway Station. The trouble was eventually taken to the courts where an injunction was obtained prohibiting the dumping of obnoxious trade waste into the creek. The foul material was now placed in large barrels and taken by horse dray to a secluded spot upstream in the vicinity of Sunset Avenue and dumped over the grassy sward along the banks of Bardwell Creek.

However, another problem arose for Mr. McNamara when the awful stench which came from the new site wafted by the westerly winds to the residents sited along the Wollongong and Forest Roads; Mr. Gibbons, of "Dapetto" (now the Salvation Army Girls Home named "The Nest"), together with other influential neighbours, were not amused by this uncalled for amenity that had blown in upon them. They sought municipal assistance to alleviate the unmitigated nuisance and sought to have the boiling down industry removed from their midst. An acrimonious state of affairs ensued but operations continued until, it is said, about 1914-15 when the rickety sheds, digestors and sundry tanks and components were abandoned.

Opposite the Grigg's property in Hannam Street was the somewhat stony grazing paddock belonging to the Chappelow family. Portion of this estate was subdivided about 1885 into a number of "desirable home-sites" fronting the then newly formed Cook, King (later Willington) and Short (later Reede) Streets. Short Street, which branches off Cook Street was, as its name implies, a short dead-end giving access to four allotments ranged against its western alignment. With the opening of the Turrella Railway Station and the re-arrangement of nearby streets, Short Street was extended to link with the diversion of Arncliffe Street (now known as Loftus Street) and renamed Reede Street.

Due to the surfeit of housing subdivisions in the St. George area at large, consequent with the opening, in 1884, of the Illawarra Railway, the somewhat outlandish and rocky allotments of this particular West Arncliffe area were at a premium and many years elapsed before any great degree of settlement became apparent.

Vacant paddocks lined both sides of Hannam Street to and beyond Amy and Cook Streets, then came, on the western side, a small cottage built after the end-gabled Scottish style which, at one period, was occupied by the Demon family. In comparatively recent years this residence was removed and the site, which was located immediately north and adjacent to Mr. Soper's Butcher Shop, (No. 23) subdivided into two allotments on which modern homes have been erected. There is a possibility that the original house was occupied, around the turn of the century, by Mr. F.W. Hughes, Manager of the Sydney Wool Scouring Company.

Facing Hannam Street and against the northern corner of King Street was the general store (No. 18) owned, since about 1900, by Mr. Peter Brown. This gentleman served at the Boxer Rebellion in China before founding the Hannam Street business and became one of West Arncliffe's colourful personalities. He delivered green-groceries and other commodities in a two-wheeled spring-cart and was always to be seen sitting astride the shafts. He died in the late nineteen-thirties.

Beyond the King Street intersection and on the eastern side of Hannam Street are two stonebuilt houses erected by Mr. Samuel Jeeves. The first, No. 28, consisted of a single room with a back extension, evidently destined to form portion of a larger residence which did not eventuate. This small abode was occupied by Mr. Fred Hannam, a grandson of Reuben Hannam, the original owner of the land grant. The second cottage, No. 30, and once named "Norwood", was occupied for a long period by the Hayle's family. Opposite this stone built residence the narrow-width of Hannam Street makes a right-angled turn westwards, skirting the northern boundary of what was formerly the Curtis Estate, later known as Johnson's Paddock, a stony grassland dotted with rather scraggy gumtrees. It was subdivided into allotments served by Stanley Street (now Dowling Street) and Mawson Street and housing commenced about 1912 when a Mr. Hogg built the first house which can be identified today as No. 62 Dowling Street.

The steep hill rising immediately at the south-east of Hannam Street was included in portion of the Hilltop Estate and has eluded the writer's attempts to establish its name. There was a prominent sandstone pinnacle on its northern escarpment, known locally as Pulpit Rock, owing to its peculiar lofty outline. It was located almost opposite the intersection of Denison and Realm Streets, but unfortunately the monolith has been razed to road level and its site is now covered by several stone-built cottages which face Denison Street.

Returning to the westerly course of Hannam Street, the first house to be met was that of a quarryman named Craven, reputed to be a short moon-faced man with a small "red-cherry" nose. He was always ready to fight anyone at the "drop of a hat" and was well known in puglistic circles. We will contact him further as we proceed along Wolli Creek Road. His house still stands (No. 31) on the northern side of Hannam Street but "face-lifting" modifications have been made which greatly changed its frontal appearance.

Continuing along Hannam Street and after crossing the intersection of Wilkins Street, we reach the large stone built house "Forsyth". This old home has a high-pitched roof which served to cover an upper storey, the two rooms of which had their windows let into the side gables tucked beneath the overhanging eaves. These first floor rooms were unusual as each had a large portion of its floor space taken up by a centrally placed stone chimney flue. The hall on the ground floor is also worthy of mention as its floor was laid with huge rectangular blocks of stone flagging. "Forsyth" was built by Mr. Samuel Jeeves, a gentleman who was engaged in the wool-scouring establishment on the flats bordering Wolli Creek, at the rear of his property.

In connection with the wool-scouring industry there were several brick-lined pits used for soaking purposes and the writer has seen the remains of a large flat-bottomed punt lying derelict on the sward which could have formed part of the old time fleece washing process in the waters of the creek. The wool, after its treatment, was laid out on the grass to dry in the sun. The business was transferred to Botany when the old Sydney Water supply dams were thrown open to industrial purposes of this nature. Samuel Jeeves later became interested in dairy-farming, stone-quarrying and house building in and around the Arncliffe district.

At the rear of "Forsyth" there once stood a small cottage which faced onto the now abandoned Martin Street. The place has long been dismantled but its forlorn front steps still protrude through a wilderness of blackberry canes and other wild growth.

Reverting to the northern side of Hannam Street we find two cement faced brick cottages, now number 63, 65 and 67, which, according to local report, formerly housed employees of the Woolwash. The second of these houses, No. 67, was in use as a "DAME" school at one period and many old time scholars received the tuition under the shelter of the front verandah.

Crossing the bridge over the willow-fringed Bardwell Creek, earlier named Stony Creek, the westerly terminus of Hannam Street is reached. Beyond lies the private drive leading to "Hillside", a very old cottage surrounded by trees and shrubs and which could well have been built in the eighteen-forties or even earlier insofar as its design is concerned. The cottage, we find, was occupied in 1848 by William and Eleanor Favell, who may be regarded as being amongst the pioneers of West Arncliffe. This family cultivated their land on either side of Bardwell Creek and it has been stated that religious services were regularly held in their house, the church people arriving in small boats pulled along the lower course of Wolli Creek. The organ used in those far off times still survives and is now in the possession of the Salvation Army. Members of the Favell family still reside in the Arncliffe area, and one son of William and Eleanor, Jago by name, built a house on the old garden property at the south-western corner of the junction of Hannam Street and John Street, then known as Wolli Street. Hastings Favell, another member of the same family, operated a horse omnibus service plying between Tempe Bridge and the City. South of and immediately adjacent to "Hillside" are the remains of an old cottage with the fabric completely covered with creepers, the origin of this place baffles all investigation and remains unsolved.

Between John Street and Mawson Street on the southern side of Hannam Street there stood the lengthy weatherboard cottage, No. 34, which for many years was occupied by the kindly "Granny" Davis. Her father, Mr. John Harding Davis, came to live at West Arncliffe in the eighteen-eighties and first settled with his family in a small slab-sided hut which fronted Hannam Street near the corner of John Street, and almost opposite to the aforementioned "Forsyth" homestead. In the early nineties Mr. Davis built the large weatherboard home, of "snug dutch" style, and named "Braeside" which stands as No. 14 John Street. The old slab hut

was abandoned and eventually gutted by fire.

To continue our journey along the Wolli Creek valley, it is now necessary to leave Hannam Street and traverse John Street in a southerly direction. On our eastern side is Johnson's Paddock which was vacant apart from the aforementioned slab hut until such time as "Braeside" was built. On the western side the first house, No. 19, belonged to Mr. Reginald Favell, whilst next door, No. 21, was a small double fronted weatherboard cottage erected against the footpath alignment and owned by members of the old established Curtis family. Thomas and Mary Ann Curtis were listed as gardeners in 1850 whilst Robert and Ann Curtis followed the occupation of shell-gatherers in 1857, presumably for the lime-burning kilns along the banks of the Cooks River estuary. The semi-detached stone "MILL COTTAGE", Nos. 29 and 31, in John Street, were under the ownership at one period of Mr. John Curtis who farmed the area between John Street and Bardwell Creek. It is presumed Mill Cottage obtained its name from the proximity of an iron built American type windmill, used for pumping water, that stood in the grounds. Then came the residence of Henry and Margaret Blackwell who were listed in 1860-61 as gardeners. The old house, which has long since disappeared, faced towards John Street, and their orchard property extended along the frontages of Arncliffe Road (now known as Bardwell Road) and Darley Road, the site today is a grass paddock which is understood to be in the possession of the Rockdale Municipal Council.

Opposite Blackwell's home rose the precipitous slopes of Wilcox Hill which, since about 1920, has been developed as a quarry under different ownerships, the site eventually being taken over and utilised by the Rockdale Municipal Council. It is understood that the area was once marked as the site of a spectacular developmental scheme. A rock cutting against John Street, near the intersection of Wentworth Street, formed the background of the long famous mural depicting Joseph Blackwell in action as a boxer. This rather primitive likeness was pick-axed in the stone face of the cliff but has been blasted out of existence in the quest for rock spawls. The carving is also credited as representing Mr. Paddy Slavin who was also a local boxer of some renown.

At Blackwell's corner, we turn westward into Arncliffe Road, skirting that family's orchard on the northern frontage, and a somewhat sandy pasture land, all little hills and hollows, forming part of a dairying property, and which had its boundary fence along the southern side of the road. It can be surmised that in the early days the crossing of Stoney (or Bardwell) Creek was by means of a shallow ford or water splash. The existing "dog's hind leg" bend in Bardwell Road (as Arncliffe Road is nowadays named) makes it apparent that the bridge at this point was a much later addition. The spans of the first bridge were formed by logs which supported a sawn timber decking, the whole resting on sandstone abutments. This structure was replaced by a concrete bridge about 1930. In times of flood the creek covers the marshy surround of its banks for upwards of one hundred feet.

Beyond the bridge the road climbs steeply before turning northwards as Darley Road to avoid the steep eastern escarpment of Lambert's Hill. The latter imminence, incidentally, was also known as Jubilee Hill or Mount Bardwell. There is a brick house built by Mr. J. Palmer on the southern side of the junction which dates before the turn of the century. The building is flanked at its rear by a magnificent tree growth including some splendid specimens of *pinus insignis*. At the north-western corner of Arncliffe and Darley Roads stood a weatherboard cottage almost hidden by a luxuriant hedge of blackberries. The grounds were at one time utilised as a poultry farm. The cottage lay derelict for a short period prior to its demolition.

Our way now follows the erratic course of Darley Road as it winds round the lower contours of the eastern and northern scrub covered and once snake infested Lambert Hill. The first section of the road, which at the time of review, was little more than a single width bush track skirting the western boundary of the Blackwell property, the fence line being marked by a number of stringy bark gums, survivals of the old time forest. The residence of Walter Favell lies directly ahead whilst Darley Road turns sharply westwards, passing the site, near the corner of May Street where, until recently, stood a majestic gum-tree, the last remaining specimen of the Wolli Creek valley.

Crossing the intersection of May Street, which is a short laneway leading northwards to give access to Wolli Creek, we reach the site of the former pig farm owned in recent years by Mr. Otto Smith. The Darley Road frontage of this once extensive property (which reached westward to Water Street and northwards to the banks of Wolli Creek) was overshadowed by a magnificent avenue of lofty pine trees which lent a rural air of charm to the ancient track. The home of Mr. Otto Smith was set well back from the road, and surrounded by a veritable maze of pig pens

and poultry enclosures. There were also numerous nondescript structures utilised as sheds and stables, etc. The whole of this clutter of odd buildings was embowered by groves of leafy coral trees which gave luxuriant shade to the multifarious farm inhabitants in summer and became a vision of scarlet splendour in winter. In the mid-twenties a new house was constructed by Mr. Smith in May Street overlooking, at times, the placid waters of Wolli Creek which flowed along the northern boundary of the property. Eventually pig-farming was relinquished as the old home, together with its heterogeneous collection of outbuildings, styes, fowl runs, etc., was demolished. In keeping with Australian tradition, the fine row of pine trees were razed, likewise the majority of the lovely coral trees. The scorched earth that remained was later subdivided into housing allotments along the May Street and Darley Road frontages, whilst the inner portion, near the present East Hills Railway, was excavated to supply loam for foundry purposes. The extensive pits so dug were later filled with household rubbish and the site levelled for use as a playing field.

Water Street, at the western end of the former Smith property, as its name implies, gave public access to Wolli Creek, a convenience most necessary in the early days. Here Darley Road turns sharply to the south-west and, beyond the intersection of Slade Road, climbs the steep ridge leading to "Lambert Heights", the old home of John Lambert, better known to his associates as "Cocky" Lambert. For many years the house was very isolated with no near neighbours, and Mr. Lambert's postal address, in 1884, was Darley Road, Botany West. The separate kitchen at the rear of the premises may have formed the original residence and was a most picturesque structure until such time as it was adapted for a garage. Both the house and its separate kitchen have been demolished (in 1965) by the Education Department.

Retracing our steps to the intersection of Slade Road we turn into this latter thoroughfare to continue our journey westwards along the Wolli Creek Valley. The stream in this vicinity was, and is to this day, lined with a dense growth of willow trees of the weeping variety. In this scene of great beauty was located Messrs. Curtin Brothers' boiling down establishment, which did little to augment the amenities of the valley. An old photograph shows a small hut of pimitive design, chiefly distinguished by a large external chimney, located against the intersection of Slade and Darley Roads. Beyond this building and in an eastwards direction stretched a dense forest which occupied at least a portion of the aforesaid Otto Smith's property. On the block occupied by Curtin Brothers, according to local knowledge, was sited the poultry farm owned latterly by Mr. Griggs. There is a possibility that this farm was formerly owned by a Mr. Charles Hayland but the name has escaped local residents. The farmhouse was a low weatherboard structure with its tiny front verandah facing towards Slade Road. There was the usual conglomeration of sheds and poultry fixtures, in splendid disarray, ranged round the immediate vicinity of the house, but the greater portion of the enclosed land was adapted for grazing purposes, in the midst of which was a deep uncovered well, a positive menace to stock and trespassing children. A single plant footbridge across Wolli Creek gave a precarious crossing to the Earlwood area and was without benefit of handrails. One young girl, on her way to a dance, had the misfortune to tumble off the rickety structure and join the underwater frolics of the carp and the eels, to her discomfort. However she was safely rescued by her lovelorn swain little worse for her misadventure.

On the southern side of Slade Road, opposite the Grigg's homestead, was a shallow gully, surrounded at its upper rocky levels by numerous gumtree saplings, intermixed with somewhat stumpy grotesque banksia-trees. The marshy floor of this gully was a mass of assorted colour in the early spring. There were clumps of crimson flowered bottlebrush, banks of the pink Black-eyed Susan, the white and red bell-shaped clusters of Native Fuchsia, Woody Pears in their delicate green leaves, Nodding Green-hoods, and, even as late as 1930, Christmas Bells. A remnant of this bushland glory still survives on the northern side of Wolli Creek, contained within the natural beauties of Girrawheen Park at Earlwood.

Continuing along Slade Road, in a westerly direction, we arrive at the picturesque stone house located on the property formerly occupied by Hilsdon's Nursery, on Bardwell's grant. The house, numbered 112, is still occupied and, nowadays, is surrounded by modern type dwellings. Once it was out in the never-never, in the midst of grazing paddocks and bush-clad hillsides. Trains on the East Hills Railway now rumble past its back door, where once a journey by train necessitated a two mile trip to Arncliffe Railway Station.

In retrospect it is most interesting to recall the various pursuits followed by the pioneering families when they settled in the fertile valley of Wolli Creek. There is small evidence today of this virile community gaining its daily bread from its orchards, dairy herds, vegetable gardens, the washing of wool fleeces, pig raising, and poultry farms, and, last but not least, its unsavoury tanneries and boiling-down works. At any point along the crest of the surrounding hillsides one can envisage the primeval condition of this once heavily forested valley. The northern hillside bordering the winding course of the stream still retains, in part, its tree-covered aspect, for which we have to thank the wise provisions of the "Green-belt" policy. The southern and eastern hillsides, together with a large proportion of the valley floor, have been given over to a good class suburban housing and, without exception, the one time rural industry has disappeared from human ken.

In conclusion we are indebted to Messrs. Frederick Allen, Arthur Ellis, and Frederick Wailes, and, posthumously, to the late Thomas Booth and the late John Carter, for supplying information necessary for the compilation of this short history dealing with the old-time affairs of the beautiful valley ranged along the banks of the willow-fringed Wolli Creek.

** ** *