



# ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

53 Bruce Street,  
BEXLEY.  
15th April, 1966.

Dear Friend and Member,

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

DATE: Friday evening next, 22nd April, 1966, at 8 p.m.

PLACE: Council Chambers, Rockdale Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale.

GUEST SPEAKER: The Secrêtary, Alderman R.W. Rathboen will present a paper entitled "Rogues, Renegades and Reprobates" being a short history of our Parliamentary Representatives between 1843 and 1893.

New members and friends most welcome.

Would lady members please bring a plate.

Yours faithfully,

R.W. RATHBONE.

Gifford Eardley,  
PRESIDENT.

HON. SECRETARY. 58-4813.

## SOCIETY BADGES NOW ON SALE.

A most attractive badge designed by the President is now available to members of the St. George Historical Society. Price 60c.(6/-). If you would like one, ring the Treasurer, Mr. Don Sinclair, 58-4555, and this will be arranged.

## SUCCESSFUL OUTING TO CAMPBELLTOWN.

Although we thought we might have to cancel it because of rain, our outing to Campbelltown was a very pleasant experience indeed. Lovely weather, an excellent guide and some very pleasant company, all combined to make it a most enjoyable day.

## INTERESTING MARCH MEETING.

Thanks to the great generosity of Mr. Peter Orlovich, who filled in at very short notice in March, to replace Dr. Kunz of the Mitchell Library, members were treated to an excellent talk on what facilities are available and how to go about doing historical research.

Mr. Orlovich is a research scholar in the Mitchell Library and also one of our members.

## HAVE YOU A COPY OF YOUR CHURCH HISTORY.

The St. George Historical Society is making a collection of the histories of the Churches in the St. George District. Have you a copy of the history of your Church which we might have, buy or borrow?

A SYNOPSIS OF ARNCLIFFE, N. S. W.Gifford and Eileen Eardley.

Gazing upon the Arncliffe scene, in this year of grace, southwards from Cooks River bridge at Tempe, it is difficult to envisage the general appearance of the area prior to the advent of settlement. The river was fringed with a dense growth of mangroves and the marshy tracts bordering the stream were covered with sombre hued she-oaks, or casuarina trees. In the background rose forested hill country with a steep-sided rocky escarpment encircling each of the numerous ridges, on which flourished age-old angophora trees, each with its own grotesque form of trunk sculpture. Kangaroos and wallabies abounded throughout this sylvan wilderness and, even today, something of the former variety of birdlife is to be seen amongst the reeds and bushland surrounding untouched margins of the nearby Wolli Creek.

Aboriginal tribes banqueted on the rich supply of cockles, mussels, oysters, and other shell-fish, obtained by the womenfolk from the salt mudflats. Traces of long abandoned "kitchen middens", as their camp refuse heaps are named, can be discerned at the foot of "Nanny Goat" hill, immediately west of Turrella Railway Station, and also at the high northern end of Hill Street, Arncliffe, there is an old feasting ground at a spot ostensibly used as a "lookout" against possible raiding parties. From the native point of view this certainly was a land of plenty, insofar as food supplies were concerned, and numerous caves in the sandstone terrain adequately provided for their shelter.

The vast area contained between Cooks and Georges rivers, and extending westward to Salt Pan Creek was, according to a map of the 1815 period, named Botany Bay. At this time civilised settlement was indeed sparse and amongst the very first settlers, to what is now known as Arncliffe, came Reuben Hannam who gained a grant of 100 acres ranged along the southern bank of Wolli Creek. On this property a small two-roomed stone cottage was erected, which survived until about 1928 when it was demolished to make way for the construction of the East Hills Railway. It is possible that this tiny residence could have been the first homestead immediately south of Cooks River insofar as Arncliffe is concerned. Reuben Hannam was overseer at the Government brickworks located on Brickfield Hill, the site of which, according to tradition, being now occupied by the firm of Anthony Hordern and Sons.

About 1828 Mr. Alexander Spark, a Sydney business man, established his country residence, named "Tempe", on the south bank of Cooks River where the stream narrowed to pass between two opposing sandstone hillocks, before entering the wide expanse of estuarine mangrove covered mudflats, through which the tidal channels, in great meanders, flowed slowly to Botany Bay. Mr. Spark's property, owing to its pleasant surroundings and good husbandry, became one of the show-places of Sydney-town, but eventually evil times beset its owner and the extensive grounds had to be subdivided into small allotments and farm sites, clustered together under the place name of Tempe. The house survived this vicissitude and has been for many years in the keeping of the good sisters associated with St. Magdalen's Training Centre.

Another early settler was David Hannam, son of the aforementioned Reuben Hannam, who was successful in obtaining a 60 acre grant immediately south of the Spark's property, the land spreading over the northern slopes of what is now called Arncliffe Hill. David Hannam built his homestead, which eventually became known

as "Arncliffe" (after a place-name in Yorkshire) at the eastern side of Eden Street, just south of the intersection of Burrows Street. Incidentally Eden Street was formerly named Old Rocky Point Road, being portion of the original highway to Sans Souci, via Rockdale and old-time Kogarah township.

It will be noted that the area now known as Arncliffe was divided into a series of extensive allotments when the original land grants were made, and it was not until these properties were subdivided, and connecting streets formed, that the village began to develop. A number of the inhabitants were self-contained and grew their own vegetables and fruit trees and, of course, kept fowls, ducks, and sometimes a pig. Many of the homes were made of brick, with slate roofing, and their gardens were protected from roaming cattle, and goats, by wooden paling fences. The majority of these houses are still occupied and most are kept in excellent order. They were somewhat plain in their design and generally decorated by means of castiron fringing, of oftimes elaborate pattern, affixed beneath the lower edge of the front verandah support beams. This fringing, was picked out in all manner of colours which gave a gay effect, one would like to see a renewal of this old-time custom.

The first main road, little more than a track wending its way through bushland, became known as the Rocky Point Road, and passed over the low salt swamp, adjacent to Cooks River, by means of an embankment, and a short log bridge, before curving southwestwards to climb the northern slopes of Arncliffe Hill, following, as aforementioned, the alignment of the present Eden Street. Reaching the lowest point of the ridge, located where Firth Street joins Forest Road, the original highway curved eastward and then southward in its descent to the Spring Creek Valley, running against and on the western side of the Princes Highway until Spring Street was reached, where both the old and the new main roads united to follow the same alignment southwards to Rockdale and beyond. The steep down grade south of the Forest Road intersection became known locally as Cobblers Pinch and proved a terror to the drivers of horse drawn vehicles, so much so that in 1864, this portion of the old road was abandoned when the present main road, now called Princes Highway, was constructed.

A second main road was constructed in the mid eighteen-forties, which left Rocky Point Road in the vicinity of Allen Street and, in a series of shallow curves that avoided the marsh foreshores, passed westward to join with the present Wollongong Road in the vicinity of Almond Street. Here the road swerved to avoid a rocky knoll and reached Barden's Public House at the north-western corner of Kelsey Street. The road then curved slightly westward to pass near a freshwater creek, obviously for watering purposes, after which it wound its way along the lower western side of Arncliffe Hill to reach the intersection of the later constructed Forest Road, continuing along the top level of the watershed until it reached Peakhurst. Here it descended to the punt crossing at Lugarno.

The third main road of consequence was the Muddy Creek Road, later termed West Botany Street, which gave an easier approach to the farmers and settlers in the West Botany District, east of Rockdale. This was a region of vegetable gardens, poultry farms, and pig raising pens, which were scattered amidst the drier parts of Patmores Swamp.

One of the principal industries of the early days was limeburning, the basic material being dredged from the huge deposits of shells found in the bed of Cooks

River. Special kilns were built along the river shore in which the shells were placed in layers, resting on alternate beds of wood fuel. The resultant quick-lime was in great demand for the making of mortar used in the laying of stones and bricks for the building trade. The burning of mangrove tree trunks was also carried out to gain supplies of soda-ash used in the making of soap and also glass. The vast forests afforded plentiful supplies of firewood, which was taken in horse-drawn vehicles of all descriptions, to the metropolis, where it was used for the purpose of heating and cooking. Once the land became cleared of its trees and undergrowth it was utilised for grazing of cattle, horses, and goats, while the more fertile bottoms, after draining, were converted into vegetable gardens and orchards. A certain amount of dairying was also carried out, whilst boiling-down works and tanneries in the district gave immediate neighbours much cause for complaint.

In the early days places of worship were few and far between. In the eighties St. Davids Church of England, now classified as Old St. Davids, was built in Hirst Street. This small historic edifice was erected largely through the efforts of Mrs. David Hannam in memory of her husband, hence the name St. Davids. Additions to the old church were made in later years and the fabric is maintained in excellent condition and Sunday services are still held therein. The Congregationalists met in the house, named Hillside, belonging to Mr. Favell, situated at the junction of Wolli and Bardwell Creeks, the latter being then known as Stoney Creek. It has been said that people came to "Hillside" for the service by rowing boat along the reed fringed Wolli Creek. Then there was a Primitive Methodist meeting house, a small brick building built, according to local information, by a Mr. Nelson who resided in Arncliffe Street, immediately opposite his church. With the Union of the Wesleyan and other Methodist Churches throughout the State, an important event which took place just after the turn of the century, this tiny church was vacated insofar as worship was concerned and it was not long before Chinese tenants moved in and the place became the living quarters of the Celestials engaged in market gardening. About 1960 this then dilapidated building was demolished to make way for factory premises.

The oldest public school in the St. George District was founded at Arncliffe during November, 1861, when Mr. George Turner became responsible for the education of some thirty pupils. The school house, so it is stated, was a slab-sided building that had been provided with four forms for seating purposes, but little else in the way of teaching equipment. It is unfortunate that the exact location of this school appears to have escaped historians and further research is necessary in this direction. The original school closed in January 1863, and it was not until about the middle of the year 1868 that Mr. John Mills opened a second school, which, according to Mr. Phillip Geeves, "was held in a room which had three walls of stone and one of slab. For furniture church seats were used". Through lack of attendance this school closed in 1873. Again the exact site does not appear to be known. The original building of the present Arncliffe School, formerly known as West Botany, came into use during July 1880, under the control of Mr. W. T. B. Bateson, who had an initial enrolment of twenty-seven pupils. Since this small beginning the Arncliffe School has grown into a fine institution, replete with many educational facilities which are housed in well designed buildings at the crest of Arncliffe Hill.

The opening of the first section of the Illawarra Railway, between Sydney and Hurstville, took place on October 15th, 1884, and was responsible for a spate

of housing allotment subdivisions. Streets were formed in all directions, many of very narrow width, and Arncliffe quickly lost its rural atmosphere and became a populous suburb. Small shopping centres became scattered here and there along the highways, and also at the railway station precincts, whilst the "Corner Shop", well stocked with essential commodities, flourished throughout the area. These latter emporiums, the bug-bear of enthusiastic but unrealistic town planners, are also well stocked with local gossip and the happenings in detail of the nearby community.

Another epoch in the history of Arncliffe was the opening, on October 13th, 1909, of a steam tramway to Bexley. This system, in its planning stage, was to have formed portion of a grandiose scheme of cross-country lines linking both the Sydney Tramways and the Kogarah to Sans Souci Tramway. However, this extensive plan was shelved by reason of its cost. The Bexley service proved unremunerative, largely, so it has been claimed, to the outmoded accounting procedure adopted by the Tramway Department. Uncontrolled bus competition forced its closure on December 31st, 1926.

It is only in comparatively recent years that the industrial development on the Arncliffe flat lands commenced. Practically all of the once fertile vegetable gardens have been devastated to provide factory sites. However, the suburb is fortunate in preserving its southern precincts as a residential area, in which there are many fine homes of historic interest.



## NEWSPAPER NOTES AND COMMENTS. 1899. PERIOD.

In browsing through old newspaper files, seeking information as to the affairs of the district of St. George, one occasionally finds interesting snippets of news relative to the everyday life of the community. As a child I was warned by my mother against drinking direct from the tap. "Always use a cup, or at least drink from your hands" was the oft repeated admonition. Of course, child-like, I knew better than my maternal parent and, when not observed, wilfully followed my drinking habits in the customary manner. Recently I came across the following paragraph, culled from the "St. George Observer" of Saturday March 18th, 1899, which gave food for thought and proved that mumma knew best, as always.

### THE FISH IN THE TAP.

#### Is the idea exploded.

"A Hurstville gentleman was good enough to draw our attention the other day to an eel about five inches long. We had never seen a baby eel, and was rather interested in the specimen, until he told us that it came out of the water tap. Ugh. This is the Sydney Water Supply that the Water and Sewerage Board talk as being the finest in Christendom, and charge so much per one thousand gallons for. And this is the water that some of the Sydney dailies talk of in the same strain. One daily said the other day that the idea of leeches and eels coming out of watertaps was an exploded idea. The idea might be exploded as far as that particular daily is concerned but the eels are not and when the writer of the exploded par takes a hurried drink from a tap and finds an eel or a leech in his mouth, he will probably - if he does not explode himself - use explosive and expressing expletives. It is a fact, however, that the Sydney water supply is not what it is cracked up to be, and our advice is to dilute it with a little - a little - er - well - dilute it or let it boil. The harder it boils the better."

Another paragraph in the same newspaper file reads as follows.

### ILLEGAL BURIAL

On Wednesday last, January 4th, 1899, the postponed case. The Hurstville Council versus Samuel Wilks, of Chatswood, for having an interment made in the Church of England Cemetery, Forest Road, Hurstville, contrary to the by-laws of the Municipality, was heard at Newtown Police Court. A fine of £5 and costs was imposed, recoverable by levy or distress".

This sorry state of affairs was brought about by the closure of all local cemeteries in the St. George district, and the requirement that burials from this area should take place at Rookwood, or other burial places which still remained open for public use. Evidently there were conditions under which local interments were permitted as the writer recalls a graveyard service at St. Pauls Church of England, Kogarah, about the year 1908.

The funeral train journey, from the Illawarra Suburbs to Rookwood, was long and arduous, necessitating mourners changing at Sydney Station and walking the streets to the Regent Street Mortuary Railway Station to join the Funeral Train, which ran twice daily to the Rookwood, or Haslem's Creek Cemetery. Meanwhile, at Sydney Station the small four-wheeled coffin-carriage, or hearse wagon, had

to be shunted from the Illawarra train for attachment to the train bound for Rookwood.

The carriages on the Rookwood Funeral Special, according to one irate newspaper correspondent, left a lot to be desired. He wrote "The meanest and dingiest carriages are set aside for the funeral trains, but hitherto I have not been compelled to ride in one of these open cars, which are little better than cattle-trucks. On Saturday last, a bitterly cold afternoon, with cutting south-west wind and driving sleety rain, a party of friends had occasion to take the train from Newtown to Haslem's Creek. The train was a short one and, as door after door was opened, it was found crammed with mourners from Sydney and we had to find accommodation in the two third class cattle-trucks and got completely wet through."

There were numerous other complaints raised from time to time about "the loutish element being boisterous whilst travelling on the funeral trains".

Undoubtedly there were more reasons than that of transport, unpleasant as that apparently was, which brought about the need for clandestine burials. It is understandable that relatives may have desired the burial to be made in their family plot at the local cemetery, even at the expense of breaking the law. Undertakers would not be prepared to flout regulations governing the interment, neither would clergymen be expected to officiate at the grave-side. It is known that such burials have taken place, to avoid detection, during the hours of darkness.

Public dissatisfaction with the whole sorry business resulted, at length, in having a burial ground set aside at Woronora, near Sutherland, to serve the needs of the Illawarra suburban area at large.

---

In a lighter vein it is interesting to scan, in these old newspapers, the various advertisements calling attention to the merits of this and that local hotel, and also that Mr. George Bird was prepared to teach the use of brass band and other instruments. The blatant assurance offered, by vendors of patent medicines, cure-all pills, and tonics etc., for a guaranteed cure of any type of illness, was regularly published. Long letters from grateful persons who had benefitted from the taking of some potent brew, giving full details of their harrowing experiences before being advised by a friend to try a course of - etc. etc. make entertaining reading and confirms one's view, in the light of present day television "Commercials", that there is nothing new under the sun.

### AN EVENING WITH THOMAS SAYWELL.

Thomas Saywell exercised such an enormous influence on the early development of Rockdale Municipality that it is surprising we know so little about him ... but Mr. Saywell was never one to encourage personal publicity. Reprinted below is a description of a civic function tendered to Thomas Saywell at Rockdale in April 1893, when he was about to leave for a visit to North America. This press account was unearthed by Mr. Phillip Geeves during his research and is reproduced here for the first time.

The principal purpose for Mr. Saywell's tour was to visit the great Columbian Exposition in Chicago - the splendid exhibition which the United States staged to mark the 400th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America. Later the same year Mr. Saywell returned from his visit, in company with Mr. Edmund Barton, who was destined to become the first Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia. When Mr. Saywell returned he brought with him a great novelty - an electric tram system which he installed on his private tramline between Rockdale Station and Lady Robinson's Beach. Now read on ...

### AN EVENING WITH MR. SAYWELL

On Friday evening a number of gentlemen entertained Mr. Thomas Saywell, at the Town Hall, Rockdale. The hall was very tastefully decorated with flags, ferns, and evergreens, and at the head of the table a cushion of white flowers was placed with the words, "Bon Voyage" done in red berries by Messrs. Milner and Smith. The catering was carried out in a very recherche style and the table decorations were displayed in a most artistic manner by Mr. C. Lincke, host of the Grand Hotel, Rockdale. The company numbering somewhere about one hundred and fifty of the most influential gentlemen of the district. An elaborate and artistic address executed by L.C. Cunningham, of Law Court-place, Melbourne, of the album design, and on the left corner was a cluster of flannel flowers and a spray of the Australian wild fuschia, Scot's College, Lady Robinson's Beach, on the cliffs at Bulli, on the right corner Christmas bells and flannel flowers, and a scene of Botany Bay looking towards the Heads, was given to Mr. Saywell.

The Mayor presented the address in a very neat and appropriate speech and stated that Mr. Saywell had done much to advance the district. He had caused a tramway to be constructed and run through the streets, had built the beautiful Scots College and a terrace of palatial residences at Lady Robinson's Beach. He (the Mayor) hoped that Mr. Saywell would be spared to the district for a long time to come.

The following address was handed to the recipient amidst loud and prolonged cheering - "Rockdale, New South Wales, "14th April, 1893.

"To Thomas Saywell, Esq.,  
Rockdale.

"Dear Sir - On the occasion of your visit to America and Europe, we residents of this District cannot allow you to leave our shores without tendering to you an expression of our esteem. It is with pleasure we have observed your business integrity and the generosity and benevolence of your character and your genial social qualities have secured you very many warm friends. We



also cordially acknowledge the fact that to your energy and spirited enterprise is due in large measure the development of this important district. Wishing you a pleasant holiday and a safe and speedy return."

"Signed on behalf of the residents.

"William Taylor,

"Mayor of Rockdale."

Mr. Saywell said that he would treasure the address and would hand it down to his family who would also highly appreciate the gift. He would not say much more as his health was to be proposed later in the evening and then he would have to reply. Mr. J.H. Carruthers said that he was certain that the toast would be drank with enthusiasm. When we have going from our midst one who has done so much we cannot allow him to leave without doing honour to him.

Mr. Saywell came to this district about the time when the railways came here. He was a man of energy, and its men of that description that we want. He came to this country, not as it were with the proverbial sixpence. This gentleman has developed our coalmines which benefited the country. Some years ago he (Mr. J.H. Carruthers) came to Lady Robinson's Beach on foot, and sorry he was that he had not followed the example of the late Governor and his good lady, after whom the beach was named, for they came on horse-back. Now the poor can go to the beach by rail and tram. One of my first maiden speeches was to pass a bill in connection with Mr. Saywell. If a man hath a kind heart he will do much to benefit his fellow-creatures. He gained praise for himself by his actions, and it can be well said of Mr. Saywell, "Well done thou good and faithful servant." Much good will be derived at all times to come by the large investments Mr. Saywell has made in the district, and there were none here but wished him a safe return.

Mr. Saywell on rising was received in an enthusiastic manner, he said that it was more than he expected to see so many friends around him tonight. He was fiftysix years of age, and had been in the colony a number of years. He had been to England once. He was now going to America, and would be some time away. He was going to study the tobacco trade; he would visit Canada before coming back. He went to Botany Bay now Lady Robinson's Beach some years ago and was pleased with the view and resolved to buy land about the place. Mr. Saywell said he has cut up several estates and sold them. Has helped people to build. He has spent in Rockdale £160,000, but he has not regretted what has been done because he has received back £70,000. He (Mr. Saywell) said he would come back and spend his days at the beach. He was glad Mr. J.H. Carruthers had said so much because he saved from speaking at a great length and would conclude by thanking them for the warm manner in which they had drank his health.

Mr. R. Watson, on behalf of the employees, also presented an illuminated address to Mr. Saywell in a brief and concise speech, and wished him bon voyage, and hoped that he might be spared to have a safe return.

Mr. Saywell returned thanks and said this was far beyond his expectations, and that Mrs. Saywell and family would be pleased with the presentation.

The company all enjoyed themselves up to a late hour. Several songs were rendered by Messrs. A. Edwards, Bennett, W. Clancy, and others.

The accompaniments were played by Mr. E.J. Quail. The success of the evening was due to the exertions of the committee - Messrs. C. Bull, sen., Patridge, Kenwood, and the Rev. A.A. Aspinall, and the two indefatigable secretaries, Messrs. C.H. Barsby and A.E. Green.

---