



# ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

53 Bruce Street,  
Bexley.  
10th June, 1966.

Dear Friend and Member,

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

Date: Friday Evening Next, 17th June, 1966, at 8 p.m.

Place: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Rockdale.

Guest Speaker: Miss Eulah Guthrie will speak on some aspects of the History of Education in N.S.W.

New members and friends are particularly invited.  
Lady members are asked to please bring a plate.

Gifford Eardley.  
President.

R. W. Rathbone,  
Hon. Secretary.  
58.4813.

## NEXT OUTING TO PARRAMATTA.

Our President, Mr. Eardley, has arranged a quite unusual outing for our Society on Sunday afternoon 19th June. This is a journey to Parramatta for a ride on the old steam tram which once journeyed between Kogarah and Sans Souci. For the nominal charge of 10 cents it will be possible to relive the journey from Kogarah to Sans Souci which was so enjoyed by thousands of holiday makers between 1889 and 1937.

We will be meeting just inside the main gate of Parramatta Park to the left of the gatehouse at 2.30 sharp. WE WILL NOT BE MEETING AT ROCKDALE but at the Park.

If time permits we will also make an inspection of the recently restored Hambleton Cottage or Experiment Farm Cottage whichever members would prefer.

### INTERESTING MAY MEETING.

Despite a bitterly cold night, 29 members braved the elements to hear Ex-Alderman Vincent Saunders deliver a most interesting paper on the tower of St. Francis Xavier's Catholic Church at Arncliffe and its association with Irish mythology.

A decision was also made to publish a booklet on "The Wolli Creek Valley" to be retailed at 50 cents a copy.

Following the Speaker, a film produced by Rockdale Council "Who Pays the Piper" was shown, not without some difficulties, which included some of the historic buildings of the St. George District.

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## HISTORY OF ROCKDALE (A Brief Sketch) . . by C.W. Napper.

Rockdale is a residential and commercial suburb situated about six miles south of Sydney adjoining the western shores of Botany Bay. The original municipal area was known as West Botany which consisted of the area west of Botany Bay, bounded on the north by Cooks River, on the south by Georges River and extending westward to a line following what is now the Tempe East Hills railway line.

The small settlement of Rockdale was in the very early days known by various rather silly names such as Muddy Creek, Frog Hollow, Gum Tree Flat and some other names too bad to write down.

A Mrs. Geeves who kept a small shop in the settlement was asked by the Postal Department to give the place a name. She mentioned Rock-Vale but this was rejected because there were many other places with a name ending in vale, which the Department said might cause confusion. Mrs. Geeves then suggested Rockdale, which was accepted as suitable owing to the large hill of rock on the eastern side. The present public school being a prominent landmark on this site.

For quite a long time after the settlement of Sydney was established there were very few people living this side of Cooks River, owing to there being no road for vehicle traffic across the river.

Later however, owing to a water shortage in Sydney (which trouble still exists) the Government of the day decided to build a dam across the river at Tempe, which was to separate the fresh water which came down from the hilly country around what is now Canterbury and Earlwood, and also the water from Wolli Creek. Unfortunately this scheme was not a success as a water supply. Owing to a seepage in the wall of the dam some of the salt water still came through and the fresh water proved brackish and unsuitable for drinking but the early settlers made good use of the crest of the dam using it as a road to the southern parts of the colony.

This road was quickly used, and soon a goodly number of settlers took up land as vegetable gardens, orchards, dairymen and etc. Rockdale district for many years was known as the vegetable bowl of Sydney. Also Gannons Forrest, now Hurstville, provided timber for most of early homes around Sydney.

In 1884 the railway line was opened from Redfern to Hurstville. This proved a great benefit to the district, and soon many people came out this way to live, and much more land was taken up both for homes as well as gardening. Many fine homes were built on the higher parts of Arncliffe, Bexley, and Brighton le Sands.

Rockdale is now a thriving community and a first class suburb of Sydney

The Municipal area has a population of approximately 80,000. This includes Arncliffe, Bexley, Brighton le Sands, Ramsgate and Sans Souci and covers an area of eleven square miles.

Rockdale has a very fine Town Hall and administrative offices. It has five Baby Health Centres, a nursing service, a meals on wheels service, four Senior Citizens organisations, a Municipal Orchestra & Opera Company, a St. George Eisteddfod, a large Municipal Library, an Historical Society and several other cultural activities, all ably supported by the Municipal Council.

All these things go to make Rockdale a progressive suburb and a very desirable place to live.

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### THE ROUND TOWER ON ARNCLIFFE HILL.

Standing on one of the more dominant sites on the Forest Road ridge is St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church at Arncliffe.

The Church and particularly its Round Tower may be observed, in all their splendour, at almost any vantage point within and even well beyond the immediate District.

In making their observation how many people realise that the Arncliffe Church was one of the first two places of worship to be constructed in Australia incorporating in its structure the architectural form of the Round Towers of Ireland -- edifices long famous in the popular imagination in their association with the predatory raids of the Vikings in the days of yore.

St. Francis Xavier Church was opened for worship in 1931 during the sojourn of the late Mons. J.P. Rafferty whose inspiration it was that led to an intensive study being made by his architect (Mr. C. Glancey) of the more famous of the Irish Round Towers at Waterford, Antrim, Cork, Lough Erne, Kilkenny, Tipperary and Glendalough.

It stands to this day as Sydney's only church combining in its structure a Round Tower and one of the few extant in Australia with this unusual feature.

### Unique Monuments in the West.

Although not so well known in this country as in Continental Europe, the Round Towers of Ireland have long been famous and supplied a theme for discussion to Antiquarians regarding their origin and uses to almost as great a degree as have the Pyramids of Egypt.

With the exception of a few Round Towers in Scotland, these unusual stone edifices are to be found in no other part of Western civilisation than Ireland. About 120 of these towers are known to have existed there, 90 still remain in varying stages of decay with about 20 of them more or less perfect to the very coping stone of the roof.

They are located in various parts of the Emerald Isle, some existing in isolation whilst others are associated but detached from churches or other ecclesiastical erections.

The Round Towers are hollow stone cylinders, narrowing as they approach the summit, and are from 40 to 60 feet in circumference at the base, from 50 to 150 feet in height and divided internally into six or more stories.

The top storey has from three to six apertures whilst the others are each lit by a single aperture with the exception of the lowest storey, above which there is a door elevated from 8 to 30 feet above ground level (the high elevation of the doors led some to believe that this indicated the towers were designed for security purposes).

The Round Towers were used in Christian times (from the 5th century) as places of security where the church valuables could be deposited and where the monks could find refuge in times of peril or alarm.

On critical occasions also their higher apartments were probably lit up as beacons to guide the movements of friends or were used as Watch-towers to observe the tribes in the neighbourhood.

### The Viking Raids.

The finest hour of the Round Towers in Christian times came with their use during the predatory expeditions of the Vikings (who terrorized the inhabitants also of Scotland, England and France and sailed the seas in vessels, for the era, of considerable size) or Ireland from the year 749 A.D. until they settled there about the year 850.

Before sufficient force could be collected to resist the raids of the Vikings great havoc was inflicted on monastic establishments, the pirates taking whatever booty was at hand when they hurriedly returned to their ships.

Whilst the Round Towers were utilised as places of security during the troublesome times in the early Christian era, it is not so evident that such was their original destination.

Those who maintain that they are remnants of a civilisation of the pre-Christian era (probably built by the Tuatha De Danaan, a Greek race which settled in Ireland about the 9th century B.C. -- a hypothesis supported by much recent archeological evidence) can support their views with plausible if not conclusive arguments.

It is alleged by those who contend for their Christian origin, that they were all at one period associated with churches or other ecclesiastical erections and established mainly as places of security and as Watch-towers.

### Origin of Round Towers.

The famous 19th century Irish poet, Thomas Moore, representing the majority view of Antiquarians on the pre-Christian origin of the Round Towers, wrote in the "History of Ireland" that their inspiration found its way to Ireland from Persian sources, a few towers bearing an exact resemblance to the Irish towers having been found at Baghdad (Persia) and Bhaugulpore (India) and that these were thought, in India, to have belonged to a form of worship not extinct and even forgotten. (The Round Towers have not been found in any other part of Christendom).

It is also contended that the Towers had probably been fire-temples in which a sacred fire was kindled in connection with certain rites known to be practised by the Magi (Zoroastrianism) in an elevated position (accounting for the high elevation of the doors); and that the top storey (with its numerous apertures) was designed for astronomical observations -- for determining the equinoctial and solstitial times.

Yet another hypotheses exists respecting the origin and purposes of these structures. By some the uses to which they were destined have been thought similar to that of the turrets in the neighbourhood of Turkish mosques, and from their summits, it is supposed, proclamation was made of new moons and approaching religious festivities. A kind of trumpet, which has been dug up in the

neighbourhood of some of these towers, having a large mouth-hole in the side, is conjectured to have been used to assist the voice in these announcements to the people.

Archeological researches since Thomas Moore wrote his views in the "History of Ireland" (about 1840) seems to have confirmed the pre-Christian origin of the Round Towers. An inscription was dug up at Karatepe in 1947 indicating that the Tuatha De Danaan (previously mentioned) had occupied this area for some centuries (prior to migrating to Ireland).

Karatepe (Cilicia) was only a short distance away from Hierapolis (North Syria) where Lucian, an early Roman historian in his travel-book, The Syrian Goddess, tells us, was the site of a famous pre-Christian temple, which was the principal source of the city's wealth. 'For much money comes to them from Arabia and from the Phoenicians, and the Babylonians; the Cilicians too -- nowhere else among mankind are there so many festivities and sacred assemblies'

Lucian further tells us that at the main entrance of the main temple there stood two pillars, 180 feet high, on top of one of which a man spends an entire week twice every year (he climbed to the top of the pillar by means of a chain and offered prayers for those who brought him gold and silver). Lucian calls them "the phalli which Dionysus erected".

The twin entrance pillars found in the temples of so many early cults, including Solomon's temple itself, doubtless had some phallic significance and obviously the religious customs of the restricted area of the pre-Christian Mediterranean world were absorbed by the De Danaans and imported to Ireland.

The phallic pillar was, in due course, taken over by the Persian followers of Zoroaster (about the 4th century B.C.) and the Round Towers found at Baghdad (Persia) and Bhagulpore (India) previously mentioned, incorporating the place of the 'sacred fire' and the astronomical observatory, appears to have had, as religious monuments, a short-lived popularity only as very few of this type have been discovered in the East and none in Western Christendom (with the exception of Ireland).

Nevertheless their inspiration found its way to Ireland (apparently through the intercourse which the De Danaans had with the East and their homeland) and these unusual edifices came into existence all over the Emerald Isle as manifestations of a now obscure form of worship of which the Round Towers remain the solitary and enduring monuments.

Whatever the origin of the Round Towers they played a part in the spread of Christianity in Ireland and, besides being used as Keeps and Watch-towers in times of peril or alarm, many of them were used, in more settled times as Bell-towers whence the monastic bell summoned the populace to the house of God.

Meanwhile on the local scene the Round Tower on Arncliffe Hill will serve to remind us and be a source of local pride as a rare representation of a unique style of ecclesiastical architecture in Australia and also regarding the fascinating historical associations of the Round Towers of Ireland whose history has been lost in the night of time.

(Signed). Vincent M. Saunders.



MUSINGS ON STEAM TRAM-MOTOR, No. 103A.

... Gifford Eardley.

Seeing that a visit has been arranged to Parramatta Park on Sunday, June 19th, 1966, to permit the members and friends of the St. George Historical Society to enjoy, amongst other delights, a ride on the last remaining Sydney steam-tram motor and its two carriages, it is thought fitting to append the following short screed. This has been written to give an inkling of the historical background of the engine concerned and the difficulties experienced in its reconstruction for operational purposes.

As the Steam-tram Preservation Society has a number of heavy financial commitments a charge of 10 cents is made for each adult riding in the carriages, children travel at half price. For those, like myself, who seek the privilege of a ride on the engine, if such accommodation can be arranged, there is a charge of 15 cents.

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A child's love for a steam locomotive passeth all understanding, and it is surprising how this initial interest survives throughout so many men's later life. The interest may be latent, but it often comes to the fore when the stimulating sight of a mighty engine comes into vision. Locomotive designs belong to all sorts and conditions of types, each with its particular charm. Some steam engines are downright ugly, whilst others possess an elegance and grace which cause some of us to come completely under their spell, they all have a distinct character of their own. I quote - "Where there is steam and smoke, a smell of warm oil, and the sound of a sharp exhaust, there is life". Can this be said of any other form of machine?

The admirers of the steam locomotive are legion and include intelligent men from all walks of life, including certain kings, governors, judges, personalities like Walt Disney and the late Henry Ford, members of the legal and medical professions, to say nothing of clergymen, to whom the subject appears to exert a peculiar fascination. Reverting to George Stephenson and his famous "ROCKET" we read that on one occasion the famous and beauteous actress Fanny Kemble had the honour of a ride along with George. She was enthralled and later remarked "It was a snorting little animal which I felt inclined to pat". And patted they have been accordingly by generations of men and the sons of men.

The particular engine in question, tram-motor No. 103A., was imported in 1891 from the Baldwin Locomotive Company of Philadelphia, USA., to assist with the operation of the Sydney street tramway system. With the electrification of these lines this steam motor, amongst others of its ilk, was relegated to the various suburban services, and spent much time working the Arncliffe-Bexley, Kogarah-Sans Souci, and the Sutherland-Cronulla steam tramway systems. With the closure of the Kogarah-Sans Souci line in 1937 motor No. 103A. was stored at Randwick Workshops for a period before being sold to Sydney Ferries Limited for use on their Parramatta-Redbank Wharf tramway. During April 1943 the motor was sold to the Colonial Sugar Company for shunting duties at their "Canite" factory at Rhodes, where, so it is understood, it disgraced itself by running off the end of the company's jetty into the murky waters of Homebush Bay. After being recovered from the briny in a somewhat dilapidated condition it saw little if any further service at Rhodes, and, in 1950, went to the Commonwealth Engineering Company at Clyde on a spare parts basis. Here again its services and components met with little demand.

A friend of the writer, Mr. Bruce McDonald, happened to be nosing around the Clyde works yard and came upon the now discarded relic and was most surprised when the company officials, seeing his interest in the old time engine, gave it to him on condition that he arranged for its removal. A whip-around amongst certain of his friends assisted to cover transport costs, consequently the good and observant wives of Homebush had the shock of their lives to see this seemingly huge monster being taken through the tree-fringed streets of their select suburb. Arriving at the McDonald home it was unloaded in the front garden and left to its fate. Well known business firms kindly loaned lifting tackle and the motor was inched, little by little, between the brick walls of two residences, with only inches to spare. The dividing fence between the properties was taken down preparatory to the movement.

After much exertion, coupled with many anxious moments, motor No. 103A. was jockeyed around to a temporary resting place slightly clear of Mrs. McDonald's clothes line, much to that long suffering lady's gratification. Work began in earnest on the reconditioning of the engine, as in the course of its journeyings, to say nothing of its immersion in Homebush Bay, the body work of the cab, in particular, was in sad need of renewal. Many of the other components, essential to its well-being were missing and proved most difficult to replace.

One of the leading shop-fitting concerns of Sydney took over the reconstruction of the cab, more or less as a matter of interest in the project. The ash-pan was missing from beneath the fire-box and inquiries made to replace this adjunct elicited the fact that a couple of long discarded ash-pans had been thrown into the Parramatta River at Redbank by the employees of the Sydney Ferries Ltd. Dredging operations, of the rope and hook variety, resulted in a suitable ash-pan being retrieved. Then came fire-bars which proved a problem to replace. Spares of any kind were not available, neither was the ready cash to have new ones cast at an iron-foundry. The haunts of other and long scrapped steam motors were thoroughly searched and finally it was learned that a lot of bits and pieces had been thrown into a hole at Bombo, near Kiama. A search party delved into this blackberry covered excavation and at last were successful in bringing to light several of the sadly needed fire-bars. The front apron plate was numbered amongst the missing features, and Mr. Edwards, a machinery merchant of Sydenham, generously donated one that had been lying on his scrap-metal dump. This plate had belonged to motor No. 5A. but unfortunately a souvenir hunter had cut out a large jagged-edged portion of the sheet steel away in order to have the road number 5A. added to his "scalp" list. Luckily the culprit was traced and the missing piece welded back into its parent metal. And so the work of restoration went on. A clergyman friend of the organisation, known to his plebian associates as the "Bishop of Tasmania", although he has not as yet aspired to episcopal rank, assisted in applying the priming coat of red-lead paint, standing well back from the brush to avoid drips and uttering blessings as sundry paint splashes annointed his clothing.

Eventually No. 103A. was restored to its pristine beauty and personal comforts, thereby gaining the heartfelt thanks of Mrs. McDonald. The engine was again led carefully through the narrow space between the walls of the two houses, outward bound for Parramatta Park and ready once again to take the tracks as of yore. The steam motor has now been ceded to the New South Wales Steam Tram and Railway Preservation Society. The members of this group, working on a voluntary basis, have been responsible for the tramway system laid in Parramatta Park. They are to be commended in making such a wonderful contribution to the transport history of this State in preserving a living and steaming replica of what



was regarded as perhaps the largest steam tramway system in the world.

Our St. George Historical Society is indebted to Lieutenant-Commander Moag, of Sans Souci, the President of the Preservation Society, for the privilege of inspecting and once again riding behind No. 103A., a fascinating locomotive which once played an important part in the transport needs of the residents of St. George.