



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

53 Bruce Street,
BEXLEY.

16th July, 1966.

Dear Friend and Member,

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

Date: Friday Evening Next, 22nd July, 1966, at 8 p.m.

Place: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Rockdale.

Guest Speaker: Mr. Noel Thorp of the Metropolitan Water Board will give an illustrated address entitled

"Arncliffe's Travail"

- the story of the Arncliffe Sewerage Farm which gave so much character and atmosphere to Arncliffe and Rockdale in the early days.

Lady members are please asked to bring a plate.

Gifford Eardley.
President.

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

Society arranging outing to Hunters Hill.

It is hoped that early in August we will be journeying to Hunters Hill to inspect that historic and most attractive area.

Further details as soon as a firm date is set.

INTERESTING MAY MEETING.

A most delightful paper, capably prepared and delivered in a most interesting manner by Miss Eulah Guthrie was the highlight of our May meeting.

"The Early History of Education in N.S.W." was traced from the time of its first settlement up to relatively modern times.

The Society agreed to approach the State Government for a subsidy to assist in research into local history and publication of material collected.

It was also decided to ask Kogarah Council if the Society can have the hitching post near the intersection of Kensington Street and Belgrave Street, Kogarah - the last one, we believe, in the St. George District.

THE WRECK OF THE DUNBAR.

On the 20th August, 1857, the sailing ship "Dunbar", a crack passenger vessel of the day, with 122 people aboard was wrecked against the cliffs of South Head during a gale.

The sole survivor of this tragic event, a seaman by the name of John Johnson, was a cousin of my grandfather, James McCaffery, and father often related to us the story of that tragic event.

My father told us that John Johnson told them that he was asleep when the tragedy occurred, and he awoke to find himself on a rocky ledge, where he had to remain for 36 hours before he was rescued and taken to hospital.

When he recovered, he remained at my grandfather's home at Alexandria until he regained his health, and had fully recovered from his dreadful ordeal.

He then entered the lighthouse service, and served as Assistant Keeper, and later as Keeper at Nobbys, Newcastle, and one can readily realise his devotion to his task in his efforts to safeguard other mariners.

The story of the wrecking of the Dunbar and the ultimate rescue of Johnson has frequently been told, but perhaps many do not know of the gallant part he was to play later on in the tragedy of the "Cawarra".

On the morning of July 12th, 1866, about nine years after Johnson's miraculous escape, the paddle wheeler ship "Cawarra", with a complement of 61 persons was caught in a terrific gale, probably one of the worst on record, for "Old Salts" declare that nothing would have been worse!

Battling to enter Newcastle harbour, huge seas swept over her smashing her engine-room hatches and dousing the fires of her boilers. The Seamen rigged a jury-sail and made frantic attempts to reach the harbour, but the ship was overwhelmed and swept on to Oyster bank, to become a total wreck, with what seemed to be the loss of all aboard.

As the sea abated slightly, the lighthouse-keeper of Nobby's Light, Jesse Hannel, believed he saw a man still clinging to some wreckage. Quickly the lighthouse boat was launched with the assistant keeper, John Johnson, and the son of the headkeeper, at the oars.

With unerring skill, Johnson took the boat through the rough waters until they finally reached the seaman, a man named Hedges, and brought him to safety, he was the only survivor of that tragic event.

Having suffered the terror of shipwreck and having been forced for 36 hours with the sea covered with the wreckage of his ship, and all the horrors of that event, and not knowing if he would die or be rescued, one may perhaps have forgiven Johnson had he "gone to the bush" or taken a shore job after his rescue. But he dedicated himself to the saving of others by his faithful attention to his daily task, risking all when the need arose to go forward to save someone else. Years later, when he retired, it is said that Johnson could often be seen in Sydney's principal street, George Street, and with the

ease of approaching people in his friendly way and making conversation with them, he would tell of his own rescue, rather than the part he played in rescuing the sole survivor of the ill-fated "Cawarra". John Johnson was undoubtedly "saved to save".

Each year on the Sunday of the week following the anniversary of the wreck of the "Dunbar", a Service is held at St. Johns Church of England at Darlinghurst, to commemorate the tragedy, and the "Dunbar's " Bell and Bible, are used on that day. They were recovered from the wreck and are still in a very good state of preservation.

There is a 53 years old controversy dating back to July 1910, when the memorial anchor of the Dunbar was raised in July 1910 and placed in a cairn in the public reserve at South Head reserve.

Letters flooded the columns of the Sydney Morning Herald, one group of writers, led by the Assistant Signal Master at South Head at the time of the Dunbar tragedy, Henry Parker, was adamant that the anchor was from "some other wreck".

The opposing group which included members of the Dunn family, who first located the anchor were equally certain it was from the Dunbar. The skindiver, Mr. Jacobs, who had been spare-time diving to the Dunbar wreck for 2 years, said he first became doubtful when he noticed 2 anchors bigger than the one recovered laying on top of one another in the underwater wreckage, and a third only slightly smaller, 50 yards away. "I did not think a ship like the Dunbar would carry any more than two main anchors", said Mr. Jacobs.

However, amateur shipping historian, Mr. Rod Glassford, of the P. & O. - Orient Company in Sydney, said the Dunbar would have carried two main anchors slung from the fo'c's'le and a spare bolted to a forward bulkhead as well as a number of smaller kedge and stream anchors.

In any case, the early reports of the recovery of that anchor say it was found 200 yards south of the old Jacobs Ladder, and 60 feet out.

Where the two big anchors are still lying underwater is only 100 yards south of the old Jacobs Ladder.

As there were many wrecks from North Head to Bondi in the year 1857, it seems as though the dispute may never be definitely settled.

May Hook.

The Annual "Dunbar" Commemoration Service will be held in St. Stephens' Church of England Cemetery, Newtown, at 3 o'clock, August 20th, 1966, in the presence of the Lt. Governor, Sir Kenneth Street.

A ST. GEORGE DOG TRAINING SCHOOL.

Gifford Eardley.

Facilities do not appear to have been provided in the St. George District for the popular sport of greyhound racing which came into prominence during the depression years of the early nineteen-thirties. At the time there were many adherents of the game in our midst who found it necessary to keep their dogs in good condition to take them on walks for miles along the grass verges of the highways and byways to keep them fit and, so I believe, alleviate certain digestive troubles common to the breed. The dogs were taken to regular racing meetings held at various courses in and around the metropolitan area and also to country meetings held at such places as Lithgow, Dapto, and Gosford. Together with their owners the dogs travelled in specially appointed railway carriages with accommodation so arranged, down to the last post, thus enabling man and beast to keep an eye on each other.

Accompanied by a friend, who shares my interest in bird-watching, we went for a stroll one Sunday morning in mid-winter, to the former sewerage farm area at Kyeemagh and the adjacent polo ground which was operating at that period. Numerous water-birds frequented the salt-marsh and river flats ranged around the mangrove fringed shores of Muddy Creek. Pacific-gulls were legion, attracted by the household rubbish dumps at nearby Barton Park. There were many other varieties of birds in evidence, such as stilts, ibis, egrets, spur-winged plover, sand-pipers, and an occasional Bar-tailed God-wit, a wary bird which prefers the icy wastes of northern Asia for breeding purposes. Lying snugly in the grass tuffets, adapted to form our hide, we had excellent opportunity to watch all of these birds feeding, preening their feathers, sun-baking, and indulging in a little display of courtship. Bird-watching is full of interest to those addicted to this intriguing form of nature worship.

Our interest was further aroused by a medley of human voices intermingled with the yelping and baying of numerous dogs. These sounds came from a clump of low bushes and scrub on the eastern side of Muddy Creek and we decided to investigate the reasons for same. Carefully negotiating the wiremesh barriers, by means of which the Water & Sewerage Board, ineffectually, sought to prevent pedestrians using their main sewerage carrier to cross the turbid waters of Muddy Creek, we reached the scene of the clamour.

In a long narrow grassy hollow we found about one hundred people, of both sexes, and possibly as many greyhounds, all in a state of high-pitched excitement. We had unwittingly discovered a greyhound racing school, where, for a florin, the animals had the privilege of chasing a pseudo hare over a measured distance, their speed being recorded by a loud-voiced gentleman per medium of a stop-watch.

The course fixtures were most interesting, and their design so make-shift that they would have appealed to that famous English engineering cartoonist, the late Heath Robinson. Fitted to a somewhat crazily constructed wooden platform, or dias, was a vertically mounted bicycle wheel, capable of being turned on its axis by a cranked handle. To the concave steel rim of the wheel was fixed a fine but strong length of fishing line. This line ran outwards from the wheel for the length of the course, where it passed around a similar bicycle wheel, horizontally placed, which acted as a pulley for the return of the thin cord to the vicinity of the operating wheel at the dias. Two earthenware drain pipes, laid along the ground in the

direction of the course held the supposed hare at the starting point, said hare form consisting of a decadent rabbit skin draped over and affixed to a runner made of cane retrieved, no doubt, from somebody's discarded canechair. The outer end of the cord was tied to this make-believe hare, the contrivance being concealed in the pipes by means of a loose piece of cardboard which gave a measure of protection from canine investigation.

After the payment of the necessary "two-bob" the "Course Operator" mounted the dias, spat on his hands, looked grim, and held the crank handle at the ready. The dog-owner, looking equally grim, held his particular hound by a slip-leash, whilst a series of false starts were made with the hare to awaken said hound's interest in the forthcoming procedure. "The Starting Gentleman", now all agog, gave a yell, round and round went the winding wheel, out shot the "hare" from drain-pipes, and away went the hound. Every dog not in the event raised its voice in protest at not being permitted to join whole-heartedly in the chase.

It was astonishing to see the speed of these animals and the sharp-eyed skill necessary on the part of the "Course Operator" to keep the "hare" just in advance of the foaming jaws of the faithful hound doing its level best to catch the make-believe skin and cane object ahead. At the end of the run the "Finish" gentleman grabbed the "hare" and held it on high out of the reach of the snapping panting jaws of the now highly excited dog, who was inclined to bite at anything, human or otherwise. By this time the owner, sadly out of breath, had arrived and called the beast endearing or un-endearing names, chosen by virtue of the stop-watch timing listed against the run. The dog, fixed on a leash, was then trotted back to the place from whence it came.

Trial after trial followed in orderly and monotonous regularity and many florins exchanged hands, likewise a few on the side between interested spectators, both male and female, who took more than a passing interest in the happenings.

On one occasion things got completely out of hand when a dog caught the "hare" and commenced to tear it apart, much to the chagrin of the "Starting Gentleman", who expressed his feelings about the wanton damage to his property in no uncertain terms. A number of hounds broke clear of their fastenings and raced forward to participate in the orgy of destruction, followed by their equally agitated owners, and a great melee ensued. Some person kicked some other person's dog in the ribs, a circumstance which looked like ending in a bout of fisticuffs. Another gentleman dog-owner, the proud possessor of half a dozen hounds, each on a separate lead, the outer ends of which were attached to a common wrist strap, shouted above the din to a short dumpy man to hold these - (shall we say dogs although I had no idea that so many dogs had been born out of wedlock) while I go and break up the scrum, or words to that effect.

The short dumpy man already had half a dozen or so of his own dogs fastened by individual leashes to one of his wrists and, with the addition of the extra six, was surrounded by a baying helping mass of four-legged brutes all of whom were anxious to do something violent insofar as the chase was concerned. Finally the course was cleared of its obstructive tangle of men and man-kind's best friends, the "hare" straightened out as well as possible (but still looking very much the worse for the tear and wear) and returned to the comparative safety afforded by the drain-pipes. Things became normal once again and everything was ready for the running of the next event.

"Go" shouted the "Starting Gentleman" and away went the wheel, the cord, the "hare", and the following hound. Also, at the same time went the dozen hounds attached by their leashes to the wrists of the short and dumpyman. The speed was terrific, too much for the latter's little legs to accomplish, and over he went, flat on his face, being pulled by his wrists over the grass and discarded jam-tins by the straining steeds in front. The language barrage was frightful in its intensity. Both the lady and gentleman owners of the dogs raced forward to retrieve their recalcitrant hounds, some people tripped over the cord and their falling and subsequent remarks added to the general confusion. Other dogs again caught the "hare" whilst the short dumpyman had his painful progress brought to a sudden halt by a skinny lanky man throwing himself bodily on to his prostrate form, the extra weight and sudden stoppage just about broke the necks of the dozen steeds ahead, and loud were their cries of anguish, likewise those emanating from their respective owners.

The pandemonium was complete and exhaustive. A most fearful calamity had arisen. Everybody, including the hounds, was chastened. My friend and I were not game to laugh, outwardly at least, under such harrowing circumstances.

The racing school folded up for the day. Everybody had had it. We watched them depart. Some on foot, some in old battered sedan cars, some in utilities, and others carried their dogs in special boxes fitted to the side-car chassis of motor-bikes. No farewells were given or received. It was the end of a sad and unrewarding day. For our part we returned to the mud-flats to watch the Bar-tailed God-wits and were pleased to note the presence of a pair of tiny dotterals ambling the tidal margin, a circumstance which rounded off an eventful morning insofar as our sporting activities in the delightful northern district of St. George was concerned.

A PEEP INTO THE PAST.

From the Centennial Copy of the History of N.S.W., 1888, the following interesting information has been gleaned, relating to early St. George Municipal Councils' beginnings and biographies of some of the early citizens whose names are still carried on by their descendants today.

"JAMES BEEHAG is a native of Essex, England, and was born in South Minster in 1817, arriving in this colony in 1837. He first settled in George Street, Sydney, on the site which is at present occupied by David Jones (now opposite the G.P.O.). After two years later went as the first resident to Marrickville. He resided then in Canterbury where he purchased 30 acres of land, and conducted a farm for 11 years. In 1852 he sold this and settled on his two grants of 79 and 54 acres at Rockdale, where until 1883 he successfully carried on the business of a market gardener. Retiring from active life, he settled in West Botany Street, Rockdale. He was elected a member of the West Botany Council, and in the second and third years filled the position of Mayor. the fourth year he resigned but in the fifth was again placed in the Mayoral chair, which he held for two years. Mr. Beehag is married and is the father of 11 children - eight sons and three daughters.

"JOHN BOWMER, J. P. and Alderman, was born in Lincolnshire, England, in 1827 and emigrated to the colony in 1853. He passed two years on the gold fields, seven years at Ashfield, and settled at Botany in 1862. He took an

active part in the formation of the West Botany Municipal District, and in having Muddy Creek Road proclaimed and dedicated. He was first elected an alderman in 1875, and he has continued to hold the seat. In 1877 he was chosen Mayor, held that position for seven consecutive years, and has always been prominent in deputations to the Government. He is chairman and treasurer of the Works Committee of the district, and was gazetted a magistrate in 1885. He is a leader in the Wesleyan Church and a local preacher of many years' standing. His family comprises of 10 children and 17 grandchildren. Mr. Bowmer took a leading part in the dedication of Scarborough, and is a trustee of Cook Park.

"JOHN ILIFFE was born in London in 1842, but came to Sydney 10 years later and followed his pursuits for some years. In 1863 he moved to Rockdale and purchased 10 acres of land on which he established "Rosevale Nursery", having also 40 acres of a nursery at Hurstville. He has carried on this business up to the present time and five years ago erected his residence known as "Rosevale Villa" (This house is still to be seen on the Highway, past the Town Hall at Rockdale on the way to Banksia.) Mr. Iliffe devotes his attention particularly to the cultivation of roses, of which he has one of the largest selections of different kinds in the colony, having over 80,000 plants in pots alone. He supplied a great number of ferns for the Centennial Exhibition, and the public are at all times given permission to inspect his fernery and nurseries. "

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