



# ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

53 Bruce Street,  
Bexley.  
12th August, 1966.

Dear Friend and Member,

## NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

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

DATE: Friday evening next, 19th August, 1966, at 8 p.m.

PLACE: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Rockdale.

BUSINESS: Election of Officers for 1966/67.

GUEST SPEAKER: Mr. Arthur Ellis will present a paper entitled  
"Oswald Scholes - Pioneer"

Would lady members please bring a plate.

Gifford Eardley.  
President.

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

## JULY MEETING.

In spite of many apologies through illness there was a good attendance at our July meeting to hear a most amusing and informative talk by Mr. Noel Thorpe, on the Arncliffe Sewerage Farm. This talk was illustrated by a number of interesting black and white and coloured slides.

## PRESIDENT CONGRATULATED ON PUBLICATION.

The deep appreciation of all members was expressed to the Society's President, Mr. Gifford Eardley, on the publication of the St. George Historical Society's first booklet. Written and illustrated by Mr. Eardley. Details and an order form are attached for those members who were not fortunate enough to obtain one at the meeting.

## MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS NOW DUE.

A membership renewal form is also attached to enable all members to renew their subscriptions for 1966/67.

## NEWSPAPER EDITORS PLEASE NOTE.

All local Newspapers are welcome to reproduce any article which appears in this Society's Bulletin. We would, however, ask that as a matter of simple courtesy to the Society and to those people who have spent countless hours researching the material to write them, the source of each article and its author should be acknowledged.

THE PROPOSED GEORGE'S RIVER WATER SUPPLY SCHEME OF 1869

Gifford Eardley.

Sydneytown has always suffered chronic water shortages and many different schemes have been brought forward over the years to alleviate this unfortunate position. In the mid-eighteen-sixties, when fresh water supplies were indeed running low, a proposition was made by Mr. Thomas Holt to construct a dam across George's River between Rocky Point and Taren Point. There was some merit in the scheme which led to a thorough investigation of the proposal by departmental officers under the direction of a Royal Commission appointed by the New South Wales Governor.

We cannot do better than quote Mr. Holt's letter, dated 30th March, 1869, which reads:- "A survey was made in the eighteen-sixties of the country between Salt Pan and Wollli Creek (branches of the George's River and the Cook's River) as part of a scheme by which the City of Sydney and its suburbs might be supplied with an abundance of pure water. My attention has been drawn to another plan which could be combined with that of a water supply. There is almost a continuous line of creeks or swamps between George's and Cook's Rivers, and there is a creek, known as Shea's, from Cook's River to not far from the railway, near Redfern, which could easily be converted into a navigable canal.

If George's River were dammed at Sans Souci, and Cook's River at or near the Waterworks, a few floods would wash out all the salt water therefrom, and a canal cut through the swamps and creeks, would convey this vast body of water close to the suburbs of Sydney without the expense of a shilling for iron pipes. A dam near the waterworks at Botany would tend to secure the present limited supply in the Botany Swamps, and the waters of the united rivers (George's and Cook's), when sweet, could be pumped by the same engines that now supply Sydney.

If the question were merely the water supply of Sydney and its suburbs, it would be immaterial where George's and Cook's rivers were dammed. A dam at Tom Ugly's Point, or at Kangaroo Point, would be somewhat shorter than a dam at Sans Souci, but the river is much shallower at Sans Souci, and therefore I do not think there would be much difference in cost. The cost of damming Cook's River at the waterworks would be greater than constructing a dam at Unwin's Bridge (near Tempe), besides a dam at the waterworks would be worth every shilling it cost, as a road to Seven Mile Beach.

There is something grand in the idea of having a canal of fresh water close to Sydney, and something equally grand, although not so useful, in having a navigable canal to some of the most beautiful scenery in the world. I saw no beach in Europe so beautiful as Seven Mile Beach, although only about half a dozen miles from Sydney, probably not more than ten dozen of the citizens have ever been on it. Indeed, the approaches to it, until very recently, were almost inaccessible, and at present they are exceedingly difficult. George's River would make as beautiful a lake as any to be found in Europe, if we except the high mountains with which some are surrounded.

If the citizens could start from the centre of the city for our "new river" and proceed thence by steamer either to the waterworks or to the Seven Mile Beach, or to Sans Souci, or to the numerous bays or branches of George's River (or rather lake) to Liverpool - the people of almost every other city might then envy Sydney as the "Queen of Cities."

For considerably less than £200,000, I doubt not, George's and Cook's Rivers could be dammed, and the natural creeks and swamps between these rivers made into a navigable canal, and the fresh water brought, without the expense of a single main, to near Redfern."

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Thomas Holt sent a further letter relative to the above scheme, which was written at his residence, "The Warren", (located on the hillside immediately west of Tempe Railway Station) on May, 4th, 1869. I again take the liberty of quoting his letter in full.

"I have had some conversation with a person who has had considerable experience in damming, embanking etc. He told me that there could not be better materials for a dam than sand and gravel, provided there was abundance of them, so that the dam could be made sufficiently wide, with a slope similar to a sea beach. His idea of making a dam across George's River was, first to make it of stone, just as it comes out of the quarry, in order to lay thereon a railroad for the sand and gravel, which could be shot out of the trucks at the sides. He said he had constructed a dam in Tasmania of sand and gravel, and that there was a flood immediately after he had finished it, when the water rose 25 feet above the dam, without injuring it in the slightest degree.

I told him that there was a high mountain of sand three miles long, about four miles from Cummin's Point (now Taren Point), where the trucks could be filled with very little labour from the top of the mountain, by means of a chute, and that the land from the mountain to Cummin's Point was on a slight decline, also that there was an abundance of stone close at hand. He said - You have all the materials required for the dam, and with such natural advantages, it could be constructed at comparatively little expense.

Between Cummin's Point and Rocky Point (Sans Souci) the River is very shallow, and there is little if any mud. One third of the River is dry at low tides. But as you had told me that there is a great depth of mud at Tom Ugly's Point, I thought I would ask my practical informant how he would get rid of it? "Get rid of it" he answered, "why the weight of the stones and sand would effectually squeeze it out." Do not your very footsteps, on muddy roads, demonstrate to you that this is practicable I asked him if he thought there was any fear of the sea-water oozing through the dam and making the water above it brackish. He answered "Never". Be sure, he said, to make your dam wide enough - it cannot be too wide - with the natural slope, and it will become as durable and as impervious as the sea beach.

What more could nature do than she has done to assist the citizens of Sydney in providing for themselves an inexhaustible supply of pure water. There is a watershed which could not be surpassed, there are numerous reservoirs (George's, Cook's and Woronora Rivers, besides some creeks as large as rivers), and there are swamps almost the entire distance from George's River to the Sydney suburbs.

A ship canal through the swamps, from George's River to the railway near Redfern, would not cost a large amount, but a watercourse or canal capable of supplying hundreds of thousands of persons would be very inexpensive. For instance, instead of the canal being made to the George's River, it need not go further than the head of Kogarah Bay (or Townsend's Bay), a branch of George's River, and within 200 or 300 yards of Pat Moore's Swamp. There is a low place about a mile on this side of Sans Souci which would require very little cutting. A canal through the swamps, say 12-feet wide at the top and 9-feet wide at the bottom, would not cost (I think) more than £2 a rod, or £640 a mile. At a rough estimate I think, Sydney might be supplied with as much water as it is ever likely to require, for less than £25,000 (exclusive of compensation for land) say -

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|--|----------------|
| For cutting a canal 9 miles long at £640 a mile. | £5,760         |
| For Damming George's River - Say                 | £15,000        |
| For Damming Cook's River - Say                   | <u>£1,000</u>  |
| Total  | <u>£21,760</u> |

But if it were to cost £40,000, or £60,000, or even £100,000, it would be the cheapest and most valuable work ever executed in New South Wales. I am told that the rough stone in the centre of the dam would soon settle down and become as solid as a rock, and that the large body of sand on both sides would soon fill up all the interstices of the stone.

Cummin's Point is also a most excellent site for a weir, equal to Tom Ugly's or Kangaroo Point, so that not one drop of water ever need run over the dam.

If, as I firmly believe, neither piles, nor cut stones, nor coffer-dams, are required in making the dams, but only an abundance of materials which has been so liberally furnished. There are no engineering difficulties, it is more labourers' work. We have merely to use the stone and sand, and separate the salt water from the fresh, deepen and widen the water-course nature has prepared, and the numerous complaints made by the citizens, of a scarcity of water, would cease for ever."

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Mr. Edward Moriarty, then Engineer for Public Works, however, did not appear to have had much faith in the George's River dam scheme as brought forward by Mr. Holt. In his report to the Government he mentions that "the feasibility of the project depends wholly on the successful construction of the dam; and there can be no doubt that, owing to the great depth of water, the nature of the bottom, which is composed of semi-fluid mud and sand, the permeability of the sand, and the fissured open character of the rock forming the sides of the channel, to make a dam water-tight in such a situation would be a work of extreme difficulty. In reference to the dam, the first question which presents itself for consideration is, as to the character of the work of which it should be composed - whether it should be constructed of masonry carried down to and founded on bed-rock which underlies the sand at depths varying from 50 to 60 feet below high-water mark; or of puddle enclosed by sheet piling, and faced on either side by a stone embankment; or of sand wholly as suggested. He thought that the sand barrier would leak, and also that there would be little hope of ever removing the salt from the enclosed waters and mud of the numerous bays sited along the course up-stream. He quoted the case of the Dutch built "Polder dams" erected for miles along the North Sea coast-line, in order to reclaim land for agricultural and other purposes, and pointed out that the Dutch only worked in shallow water."

The above expert opinion sounded the death knell of the George's River scheme, as proposed by Mr. Holt, and the Royal Commission recommended for adoption the Upper Nepean scheme, which had been considered as an alternative, as best fulfilling the needs of the community. However, it was not until 1878 that work on the project was begun, and eleven years later water from this source flowed into the engine pond at the Botany waterworks.

RE THE WRECK OF THE DUNBARFOOTNOTE.

The Dunbar was a small-time treasure ship from a skindiver's point of view.

Several gold sovereigns have been found in the wreckage area just south of Sydney Heads.

There were supposed to be 84,000 gold sovereigns on that ship from England. As far as is known, they were never recovered.

Have any of your skin-diving friends become inexplicably rich over the last ten years?

M. HOOK.

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

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### MUDDY CREEK - ROCKDALE

Muddy Creek is now no longer a muddy creek, but a large stormwater channel carrying almost all the drainage from the higher lands of parts of Hurstville, Carlton, West Kogarah and Rockdale. Nobody seems to know just where it starts from, as there are so many drains and street gutters flowing into it.

It comes under the railway line about mid-way between Rockdale and Kogarah. The first thing we notice from this point is a lovely line of willow trees on the right which helps to cover up an unpleasant sanitary tip. On the left we see an old cottage owned firstly by a Mr. Skidmore, one of the pioneer families of this district, now occupied by one of his granddaughters. From there on to Princes Highway it is built on with homes and factories and is not seen by passing people. Past Princes Highway on the right used to be Reuters vegetable garden and orchard, now wholly taken up by the Shopping Plaza. On the left was a paddock, then came the late J.P. Lister's very fine property, on the right was Mascord's garden, now the Air Force base, and their Bowling Green. On the left again was Gearson's Garden, then Mr. James Beehag's land, now the Illawarra Tennis Courts. From there to Bay Street it is all built on, but the right hand side is still mostly vacant land.

From Bay Street to the crossing at West Botany Street, the whole of the left side is taken up with the Youth Centre, and on a Saturday afternoon, is quite a gay sight with hundreds of children playing all kinds of sport. On the right hand side is the Rockdale Bowling Club, with its four greens and large Clubhouse.

Crossing West Botany Street on the right was one of the first market gardens in this district, owned by the late Charles Napper. Mr. Napper was one of the first six Aldermen to form what is now the Rockdale Council. He was also a leader in many other progressive moves for the welfare of Rockdale. His old garden has made way for the new Elizabethan Ladies' Bowling Club, which is a gay sight now at week ends.

On the left are the Chinamen's gardens, originally owned by David Wilson. Following on south eastern, is the garden originally owned by John Bowmer, who was a well known pioneer of this district. Mr. Bowmer was Mayor of Rockdale for seven years. He also was the Returning Officer for the State Elections, member of the School Board and held many other honorary positions. His old garden is still in the Bowmer family being worked by a grandson. From here on to Bestic Street is mostly vacant land on both sides.

On the right hand side past Bestic Street is the Fishermen's Club, with a nice hall and many boats of various kinds anchored in the water, making a very pretty sight.

On the left is Barton Park, which is a large playing area under the control of Rockdale Council.

From here, Muddy Creek enters what is generally known as the Canal, being an arm of Cook's River, and finally into Botany Bay.

C.W. NAPPER.



### ARNCLIFFE'S "HIGHBURY BARN"

It could truly be said that the taverns in the pioneer days of the St. George District were intimately connected with the history of the early settlements which gave them birth.

No less was this so than in the settlement (known in later years as Arncliffe), which actually was the location of the first tavern in the district. It bore the name "Highbury Barn".

This 'Ale House' was erected for a Mr. Thos. Kelsey on the northern corner of the present Kelsey Street and Wollongong Road, where the cellars of the original building are still extant beneath the cottage which now covers the site.

"Highbury Barn", of slab structure, is said to have been built by paid convict labour and came in the wake of the construction of the first main road through the Illawarra District - the Wollongong Road (1843 - 1845).

### Historic Wollongong Road

This famous road, convict made, began on the southern side of Cooks River, adjacent to "Tempe House", and followed the reverse side of the Knoll, on which Arncliffe came to be built. Thereafter, it climbed, then followed the ridge (now Forest Road) and wended its way to the crossing at Lugarno on Georges River.

The country through which the road passed became the source of supply of timber and charcoal for early Sydney for many years, and in the wake of the road came the pioneers - the axemen, sawyers, charcoal burners and settlers, to gain a living in these primitive surroundings.

The intriguing question arises as to how the "Highbury Barn" came to be built on the particular site on Wollongong Road.

The answer - WATER. There was in existence at that time a creek which ran through Kesley Street and which provided, until the first decades of this century, a watering place for the horse teams drawing the waggons and drays along Wollongong Road.

In addition to the spot providing a watering place for the horses, an astute publican saw the business possibilities in erecting a tavern nearby a camp which had been made there to meet the voracious liquor needs of those engaged in denuding the forests and conveying the timber, and charcoal to Sydney Town. And so the first tavern in the District was built (about 1845).

In 1861, it was decided by the Government of the day to reconstruct the Wollongong (or Forest Road) from its primitive conditions, along most of its old route. However, on this occasion it was to begin near the present junction of Forest Road and Princes Highway, representing a detour, in the Arncliffe section, from the original Wollongong Road.

### Historic Detour

The reason for this detour, which we know so well today, was due primarily to the drier and better conditions which had been discovered by the pioneers on the ridge extension of Forest Road than on the lower reaches of Wollongong Road, which after rain often became a quagmire. These, of course, were the days before the modern drainage systems were known.

This ridge, it had been found, provided better traction for the waggon teams than the lower areas of the old road which often became impassable, holding the waggons in the tight grip of deep black mud.

The reconstructed road was opened in 1864, and it was this innovation which caused Kesley's old tavern to decline in popularity. It was found that the horse-drawn vehicles (mostly to and from Sydney) were travelling along the new ridge extension and thus by-passing the tavern on Wollongong Rd.

### Water and the new "Highbury Barn"

So, paradoxically, water, which had acted as the force which gave birth to "Highbury Barn" on its creek site, became also the prime factor in its loss of popularity to the better drained ridge nearby, which became the location of a new "Highbury Barn" as we shall see.

After observing the changed traffic pattern, a Mr. Fred Barden acquired a home (probably the first on the Forest Road extension), which stood on the corner of the present Barden Street, and converted it into a new "Highbury Barn", the liquor license having been transferred from the original site and owner.

The new inn was of stone construction and local tradition has it that the stone was gained from the quarry (the remnants of which may be seen today near the corner of Roach and Gore Street,) only a short distance away.

### Stood in Isolation on Arncliffe Hill

Barden's inn, standing in relative isolation at this time on Arncliffe Hill, had a monopoly of the passing trade and for many miles around for over a decade, until a new hotel was built in 1880 and named the "Botany View" (the site of the present Arncliffe Hotel).

"Highbury Barn" was modernised in the 1880's and continued as an hotel until a referendum brought about a reduction in licences in 1911. Soon after the famous inn, which had been an institution in Arncliffe and the district, closed its doors for the last time.

The building was converted in 1914 into a number of shops which persevered until it was demolished, along with the Arncliffe theatre, just on four years ago, to make way for a service station.

So the name "Highbury Barn" which had been a household word in the district for almost 120 years passed into history, but the old Barden home named after the inn, "Highbury Heights", at top of Queen Street, is still extant.

The home will serve to remind us of the times when the two "Highbury Barns" were intimately connected with the early road developments, events and natural forces which moulded Arncliffe and indeed the whole St. George District.

V.M. Saunders.