



# ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

53 Bruce Street,  
BEXLEY.  
14th October, 1966.

Dear Friend and Member,

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

PLACE. COUNCIL CHAMBER of the Rockdale Town Hall, ROCKDALE.

DATE. FRIDAY EVENING NEXT, 21st October, 1966, at 8 p.m.

GUEST SPEAKER. DR. ALFRED THOMAS, M.B., Ch.M., FRCSE, FRACS.,  
Senior Life Consultant in Surgery at the St. George Hospital  
will present an illustrated paper on the history of the  
ST. GEORGE DISTRICT HOSPITAL.

Would lady members please bring a plate.

Gifford Eardley  
President.

R.W. Rathbone  
Hon. Secretary.

## FIRST BOOKLET A COMPLETE SELLOUT.

The St. George Historical Society's first publication, "The Early History of the Wolli Creek Valley" has been a complete sellout. Applications from all over N.S.W. have been received and less than a dozen copies are still available from Moore's Book Shop in Pitt Street, Sydney.

The publication of a second booklet will be discussed at the October meeting.

## TOUR OF PADDINGTON ARRANGED.

An interesting walk around the fascinating inner city suburb of Paddington has been arranged as our outing for November.

DATE. SATURDAY AFTERNOON, 5th November, 1966, leaving the Rockdale Town Hall at 1.30 p.m. sharp.

Full details will be available at the meeting with a short historical background of the area we are to traverse.

SOCIETY DECIDES TO ASSIST H.M.S. ENDEAVOUR TRUST.

At the September meeting of the St. George Historical Society it was decided to assist the H.M.S. Endeavour Trust Fund which is to build a replica of Cook's famous ship as a means of celebrating the two hundredth anniversary of his landing at Botany Bay, in an unusual but very practical way.

It was agreed to acquire a painting of the Endeavour by a well known maritime artist, and to raffle it - all proceeds going to the trust.

Enclosed with this month's bulletin is a book of tickets to the value of two dollars - ten tickets at 20 cents each and we are asking each member of the Society to assist us by selling this book.

We are very conscious that many of our members may have objections to selling raffle tickets and if this is the case we are asking that they might consider making a donation to the value of the book enclosed.

Closing date for these tickets is MONDAY DECEMBER 5th, 1966, and the result will be announced at our Christmas Social on DECEMBER 9th.

Please help us to assist in the celebration of this most important event in Australia's History.

### ALEXANDER BRODIE SPARK

- a precis of a talk delivered recently to the Royal Australian Historical Society by Mr. B. T. Dowd (Fellow).

Alexander Brodie Spark was born in the town of Elgin in Morayshire, Scotland, in the year 1792, the son of a well-to-do watchmaker. He had a sister and two brothers and not unnaturally was known to his family as "Sandy". Although of a quiet disposition he also had some spirit of independence and adventure and in 1811 at the age of 19, he left the family home and journeyed by sea to London where he obtained employment as a clerk in the counting house of Spencer Todd and Company.

At first he occupied his spare time in study and at a private literary club which he formed but by 1817 there is reason to suspect he had shed his serious way for a life of high wild living. A diary he kept at this time refers to a mysterious "Mr. L" who gave lavish dinners; dressed pretentiously and gambled passionately. Letters from his father complained of wasteful living and by April 1817 he was heavily in debt. A month later he was dismissed by his employers and everything points to "Mr. L." being Alexander Brodie Spark.

He was still unemployed in 1818 when his father died and it is believed, left him a substantial legacy. At the age of 28 he set off on a Grand Tour of Europe visiting France, Italy and Greece and on his return to England he applied to the Colonial Secretary, Earl Bathurst, for a passage to Australia under one of Governor Bourke's Immigration schemes.

Alexander Brodie Spark landed in Sydney on February 16, 1823 after a voyage of five months aboard the "Princess Charlotte" and only eleven days after his arrival had set himself up as a Merchant in George Street. In April, he applied for and was granted 2000 acres of land in the Hunter Valley near Branxton and was consigned 20 convicts to work it. He was not a farmer and employed one Benjamin Hall whose son of the same name was to become one of Australia's most famous bushrangers a few years later, to oversee his properties.

Within a year Spark had taken over two of Sydney's leading merchandising establishments and was successfully tendering for Government contracts. In 1825 he was elected to the board of the Bank of N.S.W. and in 1826 he broke into the shipping business with the brig "Macquarie" consigning wool to London, Hobart and Calcutta.

He was one of the founders of the Hunter River Steam Packet Company which operated the famous "Sophia Jane" and "William IV" and everything he seemed to touch turned to money. In 1825 he had acquired Packer's Farm on the south bank of the Cooks River and between 1828 and 1829 built a small cottage on it. He also applied for and was granted nine acres of land at Darlinghurst on which he had erected a fine house called "Tusculum" no doubt named after one of the places he visited on his European Tour. Alexander Brodie Spark never lived at "Tusculum" but rented it to Bishop Broughton. He preferred his Cooks River Property "Tempe" where he entertained lavishly.

His original cottage proved to be too small for those activities and in 1836 it was demolished to make way for the substantial stone building which still stands on the site.

By 1836 Spark was the owner or part owner of eighteen vessels trading from the Port of Sydney and he was entertaining over 500 visitors a year amid the glorious gardens and orchards at "TEMPE". In April 1840, at the age of 48, he proposed to Mrs. Frances Radford, the 30 year old widow of Surgeon Radford who accepted him the same afternoon and sealed the arrangement by dropping her former husband's wedding ring from the Dam into Cooks River. They were married later that year in St. Peters Church of England, Cooks River, the erection of which had been largely due to Spark's generosity in 1836. There were six children of the marriage.

Late in 1841 rumours began to circulate that Spark was in financial difficulties and eighteen months later the Bank of Australia in which he was a large shareholder, crashed. In 1843 on his own petition he was declared bankrupt although he still continued in the shipping business. He was also prominent in the early moves to set up the Sydney Stock Exchange and was the original Treasurer of the Australian Gas Light Company.

Throughout 1844 and 1845 he was involved in one court case after another as his creditors tried to recover their debts and he began to suffer chronic ill health. In 1852 he received a second legacy, this time from the Estate of Colonel Spark, his recently deceased elder brother to the extent of £700 but the following year he was forced to offer "Tempe" for sale. Although valued at £8,000 the best offer he could get was £7,000 and so the sale fell through.

But time was running out for the banker, broker, company director, pastoralist and shipping merchant and on October 21, 1856, at "Tempe", Alexander Brodie Spark passed peacefully to his rest.

R. W. Rathbone.

#### SCARBOROUGH PARK. RAMSGATE. NSW.

Gifford & Eileen Eardley.

Scarborough Park, one of the least known natural reserves in the district of St. George, is sited at Ramsgate, about midway between Rocky Point Road and the western shores of Botany Bay. The dedication of this particular area is of great interest, and the liberty has been taken of quoting in full part of a chapter, which deals expressly with Scarborough Park, from an old-time "paper back" entitled "BOTANY BAY - Past and Present". This booklet is somewhat rare and was written by Francis Myers and published in 1885 by John Woods and Company Ltd., Steam Machine Printers, of No. 13 Bridge St., Sydney. The description as culled, written in the flowery prose of the period, is as follows:

"Take your station then upon one of the heights of Rockdale or Kogarah, as you please, choose a good height - and you may choose from amongst many - and look down below where the sea roads run through the bush, and the green trees fringe the beach. If on Rockdale, the tramway will be right beneath you; and a couple of miles off you will see a road running down from Kogarah township to Sandringham. Between the Sandringham road and the Rockdale tram is a broad area of country, covered with a fairly dense forest growth, with clearing here and there marking far-out suburban homes or market gardens. Fairly in the

centre of this area a greener patch of denser growth with signs of water in the centre. That is the site of the future Scarborough Park. In and about the centre was in old time a swamp, marked on Government maps as of no value. Some far-seeing man, however, with a good knowledge of the locality and a strong belief in its future, saw an especial value in that swamp, and thus applied to the Minister for Lands that with some surrounding country, it might be dedicated to the public service. Mr. Garrett was Minister for Lands at the time, and he, with his characteristic astuteness resolved, that if the Government did so much, private land-owners should do a little more. He therefore stipulated that, Government agreeing to resume certain areas, and to dedicate others not yet alienated, the Hon. Thomas Holt should surrender to the public certain lands held by him adjacent to the proposed park. The condition was somewhat onerous, but to Mr. Holt's lasting honour, be it recorded, he at once accepted it, surrendered his freehold, and thus enabled the trustees to secure and proceed with the formation of the park. How well they worked in the reclamation of that original wilderness, a little perception will show, but with that we are not immediately concerned. It is enough just now to tell the tale of the dedication of the park; to fix the fact of the existence of the park in the public mind, and then to proceed further description. The park was about half a mile from the beach. There should be a broad boulevard leading to the beach. There shall be - said Mr. Holt, proprietor of the intervening land, and forthwith surveyed and set apart a three chain road. A three chain road from the Scarborough Park to Lady Robinson's Beach. "The Seven-mile Beach" it was called, and a fair seven miles it extended from Rocky Point to Webb's grant. But of what use or could it be when one man ran his fence down to high water mark and another reserved a dozen chains of frontage for the use of as many tenants. There could be no public drive or walk there - no pleasure ground for the people worthy of the name. The beach, and a good strip of the land adjoining the beach, ought to be reserved in the public interest. This was the idea which occurred naturally to any man who concerned himself at all with the public weal, and the idea not only occurred to Mr. Samuel Cook, but received his prompt and practical attention. He took the idea in, and entertained it with thoughtful attention. He dressed it in proper form, and presented it to the Minister of Lands, at that time Mr. J.S. Farnell, and that gentleman at once saw that it should be acted upon. In the very last days of his late administration he wrote a minute expressing his opinion that the reservation and dedication should be granted. Mr. Abbott, succeeding him, endorsed his action, and thus the resumption and reservation were ordered, and the grand fact established and accomplished; and, wrote Mr. Abbott, "in notifying the park, it is to be called Cook Park, after Mr. Samuel Cook, who was the first person to ask for it, and doing so has rendered good service to the colony, and more especially to the people of Sydney and the suburbs, "which also will be generally and heartily endorsed by those to whom the park is given."

The foregoing quoted letterpress affords a graphic description of the reasons advanced for the retention of the tree-covered marsh and bushland for the purpose of public recreation. The official dedication of Scarborough Park reserve took place on May 23rd, 1879, and its management was invested in a board of trustees, the appointees being Messrs. M.A. Black, John Bowmer (then Mayor of West Botany Municipality), Samuel Cook, W. Jolly, John Lucas, M.P., and W. Neill. It will be appreciated that those land speculators, including Thomas Holt and Jacob Marks, who owned estates in the immediate vicinity, had high hopes of establishing public interest in the purchase of suburban-allotments in close proximity to a local pleasure-ground and its adjacent watering place.

The name "Scarborough" was evidently chosen as a reminder to displaced Yorkshiremen of their erstwhile seaside resort on the shores of the stormy North Sea, whilst the name "Ramsgate" would, perhaps, have a similar effect on the minds of the Men of Kent, not forgetting the Kentish Men. However in spite of the blandishments of land salesmen and auctioneers the proposed Scarborough Township and its nearby subdivisions lay largely dormant until early in the present century.

To return to the narrative contained in "BOTANY BAY. Past and Present", we find mentioned therein a most elaborate scheme for the development of Scarborough Park, Cook Park, and Lady Robinson's Beach. The details are as follows:-

"Thus the most perfect park was obtained; and now, to justify the term perfection, we will jump five years and endeavour to realise what the park will be. Five years hence will bring us to 1890, and, as we may suppose, to the last year of the governorship of Lord Carrington. We shall have passed over the great centennial celebration by that time. We will imagine a day in the year 1890, whereon the trustees of the Cook and Scarborough parks, have sent an invitation to the Governor to be present at the formal opening of a temple upon the central island of Scarborough Lake. His Excellency accepts. His Excellency proceeds. The four bays quit Government House, with the outsiders in advance, and followed by other bays and greys, and drags and coaches rattle over all the wood-paved streets and the asphalt or tarred metal which covers the whole breadth of the country road; past Arncliffe, which but for its superior architecture and broader breathing spaces, might well pass for the Ashfield of today; past Rockdale, whose residents fill regular trams, running to and from the beach; past Kogarah, a city with suburbs of its own stretching from Georges River to the sea, and down the broad avenue to the park. A splendid stone archway opens to the park, gift of a resident who appreciated its pleasures and blessings; and through the gate, the avenue continues still, with grassy lawns on either side to an open space fronting the lake. The lake is not very broad or deep, and is spanned in a dozen places where points of the island approach the shore, with light rustic bridges leading to the narrow entrances to the pagodah, the triumph of art and pleasure. There are a dozen courts to the temple, beneath whose central dome, beside an ever flashing fountain, a band plays. East and West are open courts where a thousand people may dance. North and South entrances, through passages carefully curtained and guarded, galleries of art pictures of all the other lands; statuary and all manner of quaint carving, fabrics of all kinds - results of Australian looms; of all things, in fact, that the cultured eye desires to see, or the reasonable mind to understand. In various little nooks and corners, alcoves and bowers, are specimens of the flora and fauna of Australia. Some relic of the poor blacks, in another place, and upon a broad platform the anchor of the old "Endeavour" with Captain Cook in marble above. Easy enough to imagine such a place if natural instincts and teachings be only followed, and easier still to imagine the opening ceremony, and the further procession by the boulevard to the beach, and the marine promenade. Scarborough, with every street an avenue, with every house set in a garden, with every garden abloom with roses and pansies, and pinks."

"These are things, His Excellency might well say, which, more than cell, or lash, or scaffold, and scarcely less than school and church, tend to maintain amongst a people body and mind sound and pure, and these with full joy and most cordial congratulations and honest wishes for perpetual maintenance, I dedicate



now and for ever to the people who live and enjoy life to the full upon the shores of Botany Bay."

So much for the pipe dreams of 1885. Needless to say the pagodah, the temple, and the light rustic bridges did not eventuate, but the lovely lake and its centrally placed island came into being. By 1910 the shores of both lake and island were bordered by tall swamp-oak trees and the shallow margins fringed with a dense growth of bullrushes. It was a most picturesque setting and provided a sanctuary for the various marsh frequenting birds, including the Eastern Swamp Hens, reed warblers, and the plaintive-voiced grass birds, whilst the honey-eaters were to be noted amongst the banksias and coral trees, which grew along the slightly higher, and therefore drier, eastern side of the parkland.

The enclosed portion of Scarborough Park has a length, from the northern to its southern boundary, of about half a mile, whilst its extremely narrow and at places angular width averages about one hundred yards. A rough split post and two rail fence protected the western side of the reserve from the inroads of cattle pastured on Jacob Mark's dairy farm, whilst a neat post and single top rail white fence, threaded with wire, enclosed the other three sides.

Very early in the history of the area a drainage channel, reminiscent of an English navigation canal in its appearance, was dug to an average depth of two feet and an even width of about eight feet. This channel, in a straight north-south course, traversed the full length of Patmore's Swamp and its waters sluggishly flowed southwards through the enclosed portion of Scarborough Park near its western border. The western bank of the channel is just above normal water level and inclined to be muddy, after the manner of an English barge tow-path. The eastern bank is an age old wilderness of swamp-oaks, and the ground beneath being water-logged and covered by a dense impenetrable growth of rushes, ferns, and other marshy growth. Very few birds appear to haunt the dim shadows of this sombre hued swamp-oak forest and the wind sighing through the countless clusters of needle-like foliage is pleasant to those whose ears are attuned to these simple things.

No paths enter this water-logged forest area, which is all to the good, as it keeps out the vandal element who delight in insensate tree destruction. Here and there a weeping willow tree, a native of China, has been planted, its beautiful pendulant foliage a striking contrast to the dark green, almost black, foliage of the equally beautiful swamp-oaks. The eastern side of the park enclosure is slightly elevated above the level of the marsh lands, the sandy soil once being covered with a wealth of Australian wild flowers, such as Sydney Wattle, Coastal Ti-tree, Bottlebrush, Flannel flowers, Sour Beer, Bread and Meat Plants, Dillwynia (eggs and bacon), Pink Wax Flower, Wedding Bush, Ten-corners, Soldier's Buttons, Five-corners (which supplied small boys with quantities of pea-size jelly-like fruit of sweetish taste), and many others which flourish amongst the sandy coastal scrublands.

Unfortunately most of the native flora has been destroyed and the spring season of 1966 only displayed about a dozen Soldier's Buttons and one solitary Dillwynia plant, together with a couple of vines of the purple hardenbergia (false sarsaparilla), and two bushes of the Peach Leaf Groundsel, whilst a few banksias, and one lily-pilly, amongst the larger shrubs, have survived the onslaught of progress. Field botanists and nature lovers generally deplore the unbridled destruction which has taken place, over the years, of the wonderful plant life that once covered so much of the enclosed lands of the reserve.

The eastern, southern, and the southern half of the western boundaries of the park were planted, against the inner fence line, with a great number of trees which include *Pinus insignis*, Bunya pines, Scotch Firs (from which the edible "monkey nuts" were prised from the cones), Coral trees, and Box Trees. These trees are now fully mature and retain their natural shapeliness and, therefore, good to look upon. A caretaker's cottage was erected about midway in the length of the park and over the years this place became surrounded by a dense growth of coral and other trees and proved a perfect oasis for the native birds.

The administrative trust founded to control the affairs of both Cook and Scarborough Parks continued to function until 1924, when its land holdings and responsibilities generally were ceded to the Rockdale Municipal Council. Rockdale Council gave full attention to the ever present wave erosion and wind blow sand problems associated with Lady Robinsons Beach, and it was not until the early nineteen thirties, the period of the bank depression, that the needs of Scarborough Park were considered. The question of finding relief work, of a suitable nature, for members of the Scarborough Ward Unemployed Relief Association became necessary, consequently a number of men were given the job of cleaning up the grounds. In due course the two divided sections of Ramsgate Road were united by continuing this thoroughfare through the park boundaries in an east-west direction. Previously it was necessary for road traffic to travel around the southern confines of the park, via Tonbridge Street, Park Road, and Chuter Avenue.

It was most unfortunate that, in response to a complaint regarding the prevalence of mosquitos in the Ramsgate-Scarborough area, the local authorities decided in their wisdom, or lack of it, to fill in the once lovely lake. Previously, for reasons not apparent, a large number of swamp-oaks growing around the banks of the lake were destroyed, in the best traditional manner, thereby spoiling the natural beauty of the scene. It is evident that the breeding habits of mosquitos were little understood, likewise the feeding habits of countless numbers of tiny fish, of the minnow variety, which still abound in the streams and ponds associated with the park. Only an untidy unlevel piece of sward marks the spot where once the reed warblers sang their spring song. However, it is pleasing to note that so far the swamp-oak forest, located at the northern end of the original park enclosure, is still intact and fortunately free from "improvements". This area is unique in its marsh-land setting and should be permitted to remain so.

For many years the question of draining Patmore's Swamp was recommended and debated by many private individuals and vitally interested organisations. During the 1955-56 period the outlet afforded by the semi-tidal creek, which meandered its sluggish way northward from Dolls Point, was replaced by a covered drain which passed along Florence Street, giving a quicker get-a-way for floodwaters. The reclamation of the huge expanse of swamp lands, to the south of the original Scarborough Park enclosure, was also taken in hand and the spoil from a large excavation, made along the alignment of the original shallow drainage channel, gave the necessary filling material. This excavation, now completely filled with water, provides a most picturesque waterway which is often favoured by a "paddling", to use the old English term, of black ducks. This former ti-tree covered swamp, the haunt of bull-frogs and tiger snakes, has been converted into a magnificent level playing field, which is greatly appreciated by the sporting section of the community at large, and is certainly a credit to those responsible for its creation.