



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

53 Bruce Street,
BEXLEY.

11th November, 1966.

Dear Friend and Member,

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

Date: Friday evening next, 18th November, 1966, at 8.00 p.m.

Place: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Rockdale.

Guest Speaker:

MRS. M. O'NEILL

of the Macquarie Regional Historical Society will give a talk, illustrated with coloured slides of the historic Hawkesbury-Nepean area.

Would lady members please bring a plate.

Gifford Eardley.
President.

R.W. Rathbone.
Hon. Secretary.
58-4813.

SECOND BOOKLET TO BE PUBLISHED.

Following the resounding success of our first publication "The Early History of the Wolli Creek Valley", the Society at its last meeting authorised the preparation of a second volume dealing with the famous Kogarah Sans Souci Steam Tram.

This publication, which will be lavishly illustrated with both photographs and drawings, is expected to be ready before Christmas.

ACCOMMODATION PROBLEMS.

If meetings of the St. George Historical Society continue to be as well attended as the last two, then this Society is going to have a very real problem on its hands.

60 people packed the Council Chamber to hear a most detailed address on the St. George Hospital by Dr. Alfred Thomas.

We were particularly pleased to welcome among them, Dr. Fenton, a former Medical Superintendent of the Hospital, and Mr. William Foster F.R.A.H.S. a Fellow of the Royal Australian Historical Society; Headmaster of the James Cook High School and a most distinguished historian.

WE JOIN THE GENIES.

The St. George Historical Society has agreed to affiliate with the Royal Society of Australian Genealogists, a most active body of researchers into various Australian family trees.

"ENDEAVOUR RAFFLE" GETS GOOD RESPONSE.

Many thanks to those people who have already returned their "Endeavour Raffle Books" or who have made us an equivalent donation.

Please remember this competition will be drawn at our next meeting when this very handsome painting will be won by some lucky person.

THE COMING OF GAS TO THE ST. GEORGE DISTRICT

Of the suburbs south of Cook's River, West Botany (which became Rockdale in 1888) first aspired to a gas service. On December 7, 1881, the Municipality requested the A.G.L. to erect two street lights. To do so would have necessitated the laying of 409 yards of 4 inch main and 264 yards of service, the cost being estimated at £155. An annual rental of £20 would be returned from the public lights, but there was little prospect of business with private consumers. The A.G.L. decided not to carry out the proposal.

There was great growth in the Illawarra suburbs in the early 80's following the construction of the railway. Kogarah was incorporated in December, 1885, and on August 28, 1886, the borough, being dissatisfied with its dozen oil lamps in the streets, wrote to the A.G.L. asking if the Company intended to extend the gas mains to Kogarah. If so, at what price would gas be supplied for private lighting? It was found that 5,720 yards of 9 inch, 6 inch and 4 inch main would have to be laid. The Council expressed willingness to take 25 public gas lamps as a beginning, but the A.G.L. replied that gas could not be supplied just then.

In April of the following year representatives of the Municipalities of Kogarah and West Botany (Rockdale) met in conference to consider whether it would be practicable to establish municipal gas works to serve the two boroughs and possibly Hurstville. The gas company investigated the whole position again and now estimated that to inaugurate a service in all three boroughs, 13,111 yards of 12 inch, 9 inch, 6 inch and 4 inch main would be necessary. Thomas Saywell, who had a large hotel, baths and other properties at Lady Robinson's Beach, offered to guarantee consumption to the amount of £40 a year. The A.G.L. viewed the proposal with favour, but the project for municipal works still had its supporters. The Borough Council of West Botany was unanimously in favour of taking gas from the A.G.L. and a ballot of ratepayers at Kogarah gave a majority of 17 in favour of the A.G.L. as against a local enterprise. Kogarah Municipality asked the A.G.L. to supply 31 lights, of which 5 turned out to be too far off the lines of mains. Hurstville asked for 12 and West Botany for 41. Taking the three districts together, the A.G.L. had before it a concrete proposition for an expenditure of £10,264, yielding a gross estimated revenue of £1,327 (13 per cent) from public and private consumption combined. On that basis the A.G.L. proceeded with the work.

From the Official History of the Australian Gas Light Company.

CHRISTINA STEAD.
(Authoress).

Christina Stead has won acclaim overseas as a great novelist. Recently her books were re-published after many years and book reviews praise her as "one of the most gifted Authors this Country has ever produced." Both England and America claim her as their own, as most of her working life has been spent overseas.

It is not generally known that Christina was born and educated in the St. George area. Christina lived at Bexley and attended the Bexley Public School and St. George Girls High School.

David Stead was left a widower with a small daughter, Christina. He later married a Miss Gibbons from "Dapetto" the Gibbons family home in Wollongong Road, Arncliffe. He brought his second wife to his home "Lydham" in Bexley. Christina recalls that when a small child, she walked from "Lydham" to "Dapetto" (the Grandparents' home) to fetch fresh milk and unsalted butter for the little ones. "Dapetto" had its own cows, dairy and a milk maid.

Christina writes:- "I was very young then, it was a long long walk and I used to get very tired with the milk can. There was a dairy then at the very junction of Wollongong Road with Forest Road, which ran right down into Stony Creek. The dairy gradually declined. I don't know why. The people and cows lived in a few ramshackle sheds with faded whitewashing and were very poor.

There were quite a number of people living about the District (which was very scattered) in very very, you might say up country conditions then."

"As a child I went to Bexley Public School which was at first a little old place of the real old penitentiary style of school building - though they changed it while I was there."

"The School often went on nature study expeditions down Stony Creek and the gully beyond. The gully was quite fresh and lovely at times and quite bare of buildings." The gully in those days was a paradise of native flowers and shrubs, Lilli-pilli trees and weeping willows were entwined with wild clematis, sarsaparilla and hardenbergia vines, wild bush orchids, bracken, maidenhair fern and violets are a few of the varieties which covered the banks of the gully.

When at St. George Girls High School the pupils used to visit Brighton-le-Sands Baths. Christina remembered the water as being slimy and sometimes full of jellyfish. She describes the Botany Bay mud as not very refreshing.

Her father, David Stead, belonged to many nature loving Societies, and was a great walker and firmly believed in it. So Christina often accompanied him on these expeditions. She often walked from Bexley via Tom Ugly's to Cronulla. When holidaying at Cronulla they walked along the beaches to Kurnell. There were quicksands there then. They also walked around the surrounding districts.

Christina has been described as a very quiet almost shy girl. Her school mates called her "Peggie".

David Stead was left a widower for the second time, with the responsibility of Christina and a young family. He married Miss Thecla Harris, a teacher of St. George Girls High School, and in 1916 the Estate was sold. The family moved to Watsons Bay. Christina was almost 14 years old, and it was about this time she lost contact with the Bexley District. She became familiar with Watsons Bay and the Harbour area.

Quote: "I used to live on the top of the highest climb from Arncliffe a mile or so away in Bexley, in a stone house called "Lydham" which may be still there although I am sure it is now surrounded by brick villas, if it exists at all, for the last of the Estate, a few acres on top of the hill, was sold in sub-division when I was about 14, this was about 1916. This old house of big

sandstone blocks, quarried from the bottom of the hill, was surrounded by old Pines of good growth, which went downhill with the paddocks, (there were three, they were what was sold in sub-division.) and from our windows, verandahs and attics of course, we could see straight through the heads of Botany Bay, as well as clear away west to the blue mountains. It was a lovely situation." "Dapetto" which was part of the same Estate, was sold to the Salvation Army as a Childrens' Home.

Christina lived at Watsons Bay from 1916 to 1928. When 26 years of age she left for England and her career as a novelist began. Her recently re-issued books are:-

"Seven Poor Men of Sydney."
 "Salzburg Tales".
 "For Love Alone".
 "The Man who loved Children".

She also wrote a book on Finance which amazed the Bankers and Professional men of that day. Amazement was expressed at a young woman showing such a knowledge and insight in Finance.

Christina married C.S. Blake, an Author whose novels include:

"The Angel"
 "The Copperhead"
 "The World is Mine"

Christina Stead's early days in our district can be visualised by seeing her old home "Lydham" and "Dapetto", the latter being the Salvation Army's Girls' Home. Her description of her schooldays and the long walk with the milk can, give a realistic picture to her life here at the turn of the century.

(Mrs.) V.W. Long.

EXTRACT FROM "THE ECHO"
Thursday, October 9th, 1890, Page 2.

The Suburbs of Sydney
 No. XXV - Rockdale
A History of its Progress.

The pioneer of the southern side of Cook's River is said to have been Mr. Alexander Brodie Spark, who built Tempe House about 64 or 65 years ago. His stables were on the northern side of the river, about 200 yards from where the Tempe Railway Station now stands, and he had a punt which took over not only himself and his family, when necessary, but also strangers. The house is a fine specimen of early Australian architecture. It is of one storey, with a large entrance hall approached by a flight of steps, and on either side a semi-circular verandah, supported on large ironbark pillars, which appear to be as sound now as when they were first placed in position. On the other three sides of the house there are wide verandahs. The rooms are lofty and well proportioned. About the year 1833 the attention of Governor Bourke was

drawn to the state of the Tank Stream, which had up to that time been the only source of water supply for the town. The water, it was said, had become so polluted as to endanger the health of the public, and the mud carried down its course was silting up the head of Sydney Cove. The water supply had received a good deal of attention during Governor Darling's administration, and in 1827 a tunnel to convey water from Botany swamps had been begun under the supervision of Mr. James Busby, engineer and surveyor, but considerable doubts were felt as to whether this tunnel could be made through the sandhills. With the view, therefore, of allaying the apprehensions of the people, and to ensure a water supply for the settlement, it was decided to place

A Dam Across Cook's River,

to keep out the salt water. A large body of prisoners were sent to Cook's River under the superintendence of Mr. Calvert about the year 1835, and the dam was built so that it would not only effect the object required - namely, of separating the salt water from the fresh - but also serve as a road to the Southern districts. Busby's bore, however, was finished in 1837, and, as it answered the purpose admirably, and afforded an ample supply not only for that time but also for a very large increase in the population, less care was perhaps given to the building of the dam. However, this may be, it never at any time prevented

The Water above the Dam

from being brackish, and therefore unfit for use. But as a roadway it was a complete success. It was a gang of these prisoners which was sent to build Unwin's bridge, to enable Mr. F.W. Unwin to get from his residence, "Wanstead", on the rise between Cook's River and Wolli Creek, to Sydney. Some of them appear to have been industriously inclined, as they also built the Highbury Barn Hotel for Mr. Charles Kelsey on what is now the old Wollongong Road, then newly opened, for which they, of course, were paid. For the other works for private individuals effected during the ordinary working hours nothing was paid, the Government finding rations, tools, clothing etc. free of cost. The prisoners appear to have been much better provided for than the free men who were working in the district, as it is said that some of these suffered severely.

For Want of Water

to drink, and they frequently had to pay 1s. or a fig of tobacco for a small bucketful. Among the prisoners was one man who is said to have been remarkably clever in stirring up strife. He was in the habit of making rhymes on any person or occurrence, and would probably have composed a very fair topical song. His rhymes appear, however, to have been sometimes prompted more by ill nature than fun, as frequent complaints were made against him to the visiting magistrate. On one occasion Captain Innes attended at the stockade to hear and dispose of charges. The rhymster was brought up; and after he had listened to what the officers had to say, the magistrate remarked that the man was always giving trouble, and that something must be done to prevent it. He lectured the prisoner.....and sentenced him,.....the prisoner listening with respectful and downcast manner. The Magistrate had no sooner finished than he claimed:

"Captain Innes, if you please,
Make it "hours" instead of "days"."

"Go along with you. You're incorrigible, take him away!" exclaimed the Captain; and then he left the court to have a good laugh.

THE LARGEST GRANT IN THE DISTRICT.

was one of 1200 acres, made by Governor Darling in October, 1831, a few days before his term of office expired, to Mr. James Chandler. This grant, known as the Bexley Estate, is partly in Rockdale, partly in Kogarah, and partly in Hurstville. Among the earlier grants - some dating from the time of Governor King, and others from the time of Governor Macquarie - were 100 acres to Mr. Reuben Hannam; 60 acres to his son Mr. David Hannam; 300 to Mr. John Webb, 100 to Mr. A.B. Sparke; 30 to Mr. G.W. Newbold, purchased by Mr. F.W. Unwin; 100 to Miss Ritter, besides grants to Mr. Patrick Moore and his son, Mr. Peter Moore; Mr. F. Mitchell, Mr. T. Erskine, Mr. Simeon Pearce, Mr. William Beehag, Messrs. Hughes, Hoskings and others. Miss Ritter, who was the orphan daughter of an officer, was married to Mr. Robert Cooper, son of Mr. Robert Cooper (or "Big Cooper") of the distillery, Blackfriars' estate, who erected a house on his wife's grant and called it

Rocky Point House.

This house was built by convict labour about the time the dam at Cook's River was being constructed. It was leased by Mr. Thomas Holt from Mr. Chapman, who married the widow of Mr. Cooper, and the name was changed to "Sans Souci". It is beautifully situated and commands a splendid view of Botany Bay, Georges River and the surrounding country. In spite of this, however, Mrs. Holt objected to living there, perhaps on account of

The Distance from Town

and therefore, some 25 years ago it was sold to Mr. William Edward Rust, formerly of the Sir Joseph Banks Hotel, Botany, who opened it as an hotel. He laid out pleasure gardens, built boatsheds, and otherwise improved the place. It was afterwards kept by various persons, among whom may be mentioned Mr. Louis Dettman (who accompanied Mr. Holt from England). Mr. Dettmann appears to have fared badly at Sans Souci, as he was heard to say that the name should be changed to "Sans Cent". The place was a great resort for fishermen, woodcutters, shell-gatherers, and others. Private picnics and fishing parties were also sources of profit, and on holidays large numbers of people drove out to Sans Souci to enjoy the scenery and amuse themselves.

The Old Stockade, as the house built by Mr. Connelly Laycock on the Holt-Sutherland Estate on the southern side of Botany Bay, was called, was taken as a mark by the old fishermen, who got it in line with a clump of pine trees to find what was known as the flathead ground.

The old Stockade.

is said to have been built on the spot where the convicts were landed from the first fleet. In the opinion of some old residents, they were conveyed by boats to between Shea's Creek and Bunnerong, and marched thence into Sydney, after it had been decided to form the settlement there. The balance of the evidence, however, appears to favour the idea that they were merely conveyed across the entrance of Botany Bay to La Perouse and were marched in from there. A street at the southern end of Rockdale - named Endeavour Street - is said to point towards the spot where the Endeavour was moored while she lay in Botany Bay. The present host of the Sans Souci Hotel is Mr. John Frater. In 1871 Mr. Rust

purchased some land at Stripper's Point, where he erected the Prince of Wales Hotel. He named the place Sandringham after his birthplace in Northern England. This house is also beautifully situated at the end of the Seven Mile Beach, along the western side of Botany Bay, named

"Lady Robinson's Beach"

by Mr. Thomas Holt, who invited Hercules Robinson (Governor of N.S.W.) Viscount Canterbury and Colonel Blackall and a number of ladies and gentlemen to a day's pleasuring around Botany Bay. Lady Robinson is said to have remarked that she had never seen a better place for a gallop than that stretch of sand from near the mouth of Georges River to the mouth of Cooks River. The Prince of Wales Hotel was afterwards kept by Mr. Edward Whelow, Mr. Tidswell and others. The present proprietor is Mr. Cauvarel. Another large and handsome hotel is being erected a short distance nearer Sydney than Sandringham at

Dolls Point

This point is reported to have been named after a convict named Doll, who made his escape from Sydney in the early times and camped there. A well is still shown, which is said to have been dug by him. It still contains a supply of good water. The new hotel there is being built by Mr. James Eve of Enfield. The house is to be fitted with all modern improvements, and will have a promenade on the roof 50 ft. long and 100 ft. wide. The Highbury Barn Hotel, at the place where the teams going to the South Coast were wont to camp on the old Wollongong Road, was built by convict labour on Sundays for Mr. Charles Kelsey and was the oldest hotel in the municipal district. It was afterwards kept by Messrs. William Trimby and Lew Barden and Neumann, and lastly by Frewin Sleath (who in 1872 removed the licence to a house on the Forest Road about a mile from the old site.) The new Highbury Barn Hotel was purchased by Mr. Frederick Barden, who leased it to Mr. Frederick Gordon. It is now owned and kept by Mr. Edwin Barden. The Tempe Inn was built by Mr. John McInnes in 1869 on a rise near the dam over Cook's River and near Mr. A.B. Spark's Tempe House, which, by-the-bye, was also opened as an hotel for a time. It was kept for many years by the late Mr. G.R. Jacobs. Mr. Tom Malone, the famous pedestrian, was also one of the proprietors, and formed a race track at the rear of the hotel, which was well patronised for some time, but has now disappeared. The house is now kept by Mr. George A. Akers, and is known as the Gladstone Hotel. The Botany View Hotel was built on the Rocky Point Road some nine years ago by Mr. John Clune. It is now conducted by Mrs. Sarah A. Clune.

.....To be continued.
