



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

53 Bruce Street,
Bexley.
12th May, 1967.

Dear Friend and Member.

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

Date: Friday evening next, 19th May, 1967, at 8 p.m.

Place: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale.

Guest Speaker: Mrs. Marion O'Neill, who will speak on "The First Ten Governors". Members will remember this delightful personality who addressed the Society last year.

Visitors will be most welcome.

Would lady members please bring a plate.

Gifford Eardley.
President.

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

OUTING TO CAMDEN BEING ARRANGED.

The St. George Historical Society has written to the Camden Historical Society to arrange an outing to that historic district.

A tentative date of June 10th has been set and we are waiting for final confirmation.

Details should be available at this meeting.

KOGARAH-SANS SOUCI TRAMWAY. NOW A COLLECTOR'S ITEM.

With no more than a dozen copies out of the 500 we had printed left unsold, our second booklet has been an unqualified success.

SOCIETY ASKS COUNCIL FOR HISTORICAL MUSEUM.

The St. George Historical Society has approached Rockdale Council to ask if a room or gallery suitable for the display of historical relics could be incorporated in the rebuilding of the Rockdale Branch of the Municipal Library due to take place in the next few years.

Members felt this was a better proposition than trying to acquire a suitable old property with all the problems of maintenance, supervision and probable remoteness from transport.

THE ROCKDALE ESTATE OF WILLIAM A. BRAY.

Based on the recollections of A. H. Matheson.

William A. Bray hailed from the Duchy of Cornwall and, so it is understood, first settled in the St. George District during the year 1853 when he took over a property in the vicinity of Pat Moore's Swamp. Evidentially the wet-lands were not wholly to his liking as, about the time of his marriage in 1856 to Elizabeth Hogg at St. Peters Church of England, St. Peters, a lass who also came from Cornwall, he moved to a small weatherboard cottage facing Rocky Point Road immediately south of Iliffe's Nursery. Here the couple remained for a year or so whilst negotiations were finalised for the purchase of about five acres of arable land, which, today, would be enclosed within the boundaries set by Rocky Point Road on the west, Bryant Street on the north, George Street on the east, and the twenty-foot width of Bray's Lane on the south. This latter laneway was formerly incorporated in the estate but was later ceded to the Rockdale Municipal Council as an access road.

In 1858 a very pleasing two-roomed cottage, which gained the charming name of "ARBOR", was constructed of locally hewn sandstone. The hip roof of this edifice extended, in a north-south direction, for the full length of the building, and was originally covered with she-oak shingles, cut, no doubt, from trees growing in the vicinity. An open-fronted fireplace occupied the northern wall, the stone built chimney protruding through the roof to be capped by a small conventional terra-cotta pot. The northernmost room was entered from a front verandah which also ran the full length of the house. As was customary at that period, the kitchen was housed in a small separate building sited near the south-eastern wall of the cottage. There was an atmosphere about Mr. Bray's home which was somewhat reminiscent of the cots of his native Cornwall, although in that lovely county, not to be confused with England, the roof would have been thatched with yellow-coloured straw in place of the silver-gray she-oak shingles. The stone walls were given a liberal coat of whitewash, as a protection against dampness, a colouration which also gave a Cornish touch.

The kitchen, constructed of brick, was provided with a huge open fireplace where large logs smouldered in comfort, and sundry pots and pans dangled on chains above the flames. Cooking was a hot and somewhat messy business which needed great care to avoid burnt fingers. An assortment of pokers, tongs, ash-rakes, trivets, and other hearthside accoutrements were necessary, whilst a "crokke", or iron cauldron kept a constant supply of hot water on hand. Great pleasure must have been experienced by Elizabeth Bray when a new "Younger" make of self-contained stove was installed in her kitchen, together with a copper urn which gave hotwater both day and night.

A small weatherboard building, erected some twenty feet or so eastwards from the kitchen and immediately adjacent to the well, for reasons that are obvious, housed the laundry, or wash-house, facilities, and also came into use as a bathroom, where conditions were somewhat spartan and devoid of all refinements except that of privacy. A brick fireplace surrounded the base and sides of the boiling copper, and the actual washing and rinsing of the clothes, and or bodies, was carried out in large circular-shaped portable tubs,

the blueing process being relegated to a similar but smaller oval shaped tub. The gathering of sticks and chaff bags full of dead leaves for the copper fire was the prerogative of the younger generation and, at one time, a regular chore for little Albert Matheson when his grandfather desired the luxury of a hot bath. Another chore for this little boy was the turning of the handle of the ponderous mangle, a cast-iron contraption provided with wooden rollers, used for removing creases from cloth materials after the drying had been completed. The arduous and seemingly endless roller turning job warranted its own ditty which was chanted as follows, to no particular tune:-

"Cheer, boys cheer.
 Me mother's got a mangle.
 Cheer, boys, cheer.
 She turns it with a handle.
 Cheer, boys, cheer.
 Me mother's got a mangle.
 Bring us all the work you can".

No doubt they felt better after the recital.

The household commodities, placed conveniently around the various shelves of the wash-house, are interesting to recall at this late date, although some items are still in everyday use. There were nobs of Reckitt's Blue, contained in small circular shaped blocks wrapped in loosely woven pieces of calico tied at the top by a fine white string. These were dipped in water to soften the substance and then squeezed out to "blue" the water on an "Out of the blue comes the whitest wash" basis, an ode which is still familiar. Soap came in long bars, some eighteen inches in length, about four inches in width, and say two in thickness, moulded into four cakes as a large bar, or into two as a small bar. The present day "Sunlight" and another now defunct brand, known as "Siren", being well to the fore. There was a cheaper length described as "Bar Soap", heavily charged with caustic soda, which was cut by knife into smaller pieces for washing and scouring purposes. Messrs. Day and Martin's boot polish and Oakey's Knife Polish, together with the ever useful Bath Brick, were always handy for their various specialised uses, and the "Younger" stove looked fine after its treatment with "Nixey's Black Lead" or a coating of "Zebra Stove Polish". The floor scrubbing tasks needed, in addition to plenty of elbow grease, the cleansing properties of "Monkey Brand" and "Pearson's Sand Soap".

Household water was taken from a well, some twenty-five feet deep, which was dug at the rear eastern side of the house and convenient to both kitchen and washhouse. This well provided a copious supply of sweet water and, after heavy rains it overflowed its brim, a circumstance greatly appreciated by the women of the house as their buckets could be dipped and filled with ease. The sides of the well were lined with brick for a depth of six feet, the head being level with the ground surface. A wooden cover was provided which had a small central trap door for protective purposes. For raising the heavy bucket when filled with water a device known as the whip was erected. This appurtenance, whilst comparatively common in the eastern section of the United States, was a novelty in the St. George District. It consisted of an upright length of hardwood, about ten feet in height above the ground, at the

top of which a long cross-arm of oregon timber was centrally pivoted. At the outer end of the arm, above the well, an attachment was made for the chain and the three gallon bucket dangling at its end, whilst at the opposite end of the arm a small diameter iron railway wheel was affixed which acted as a permanent counter-weight. Lifting the hinged lid of the trap-door, the bucket was lowered into the water, by pulling down the chain in hand over hand fashion, until it was submerged. The upward movement was greatly assisted by the action of the balance weight.

The possession of a well of sweet water was highly prized amongst the early settlers, many of whom had to be content with supplies drawn from house-tanks or the nearest creek, a source which was often polluted and unpalatable. The advent of the City Water reticulation scheme made the well on Mr. Bray's property redundant for general household and stock watering purposes, although it continued in limited daily use until about 1950, when some dispicable misanthrope, to discourage such use, lifted the trap-door and dropped a dead cat into the water. The well was subsequently filled with earth and is now, like the old house it served so unstintingly, only represented by a memory of by-gone days.

A stable, fitted with four stalls and a cow-bail, together with a separate gableroofted weatherboard feed-shed, was established a little way to the south of the house, the stable structure being built with walls of vertically placed slabs of rough-hewn timber, and roofed with she-oak shingles. In the course of time this truly rural covering rotted away and was replaced by sheets of galvanised corrugated iron, nailed to the original battens. The cow concerned in the menage was an amiable beast of black and white Holstein parentage. This colour scheme was duplicated in the usual assortment of White Leghorn and Black Orpington fowls, and their attendant and attentive roosters, which wandered in and around the stable, and sought the comfort and shelter afforded by the feed mangers when it was decided to lay an egg. The birds roosted at night in the neighbouring trees. Sundry cats were to be seen who, apart from sleeping twenty-two hours out of twenty-four per day, paid due attention to the mice that chose to frequent the confines of the feed-shed. There was a general homeliness about the farmhouse and its occupants which created a sense of well-being and restful comfort. The place was good to look upon.

The front of the residence faced towards Rocky Point Road (now Princes Highway) from which it was divided by a picturesque creek, known by the unlovely name of Bray's Drain. This tiny waterway led northwards from a frog-infested and reed-fringed waterhole which once existed between King and Bay Streets, said pond and its oft-times noisy inhabitants being responsible for the name of "Frog Hollow", that was loosely applied to what is now the business centre of Rockdale. In its pristine state the shallow banks of the stream were covered with maiden-hair and other ferns and, after clearing away the native brush growth, William Bray bordered his drain with a row of water-loving quince trees, and planted water cress in its bed. The stream still flows northward to junction with Spring Creek, between Albert Street and Short Street, at Banksia. Its former meandering course has been straightened, and its tricklings and gurglings, now unseen and unheard, restrained by an underground stormwater channel.

A post and rail fence protected the western boundary of the Bray Estate against the alignment of Rocky Point Road, entrance from this thoroughfare being gained through a pair of white painted picket gates. A driveway then led, on a slight reverse curve, eastwards to the house, crossing, about midway in its length, over Bray's Drain by means of a short wooden bridge, beyond which the drive diverged southwards to give access to the stables.

The area between the creek and Rocky Point Road was devoted to the cultivation of vegetables, cabbages being a specialty. The crop was usually taken in a spring cart to the Newtown markets for disposal. In addition to market gardening William Bray carried on his trade as a builder. That portion of the estate, which lay between the house and a paling fence erected along the border of the present day Bryant Street, but then marked the southern boundary of Konrad Franck's orchard property, was used for the cultivation of pear, plum, and apple trees. The eastern portion of the estate, between the house and George Street, was enclosed by a post and rail fence, and used as a grazing paddock for the horses and the Holstein cow. Large specimens of Black-butt, red-gum, white-gum, and honey-suckles, together with a few swamp-oaks were retained from the indigenous forest growth which formerly covered the estate, whilst the inner fence lines were planted at thirty feet intervals with other native trees, a chore carried out by Albert Matheson. Water for the farm animals was contained in three open-topped casks placed near the homestead fence immediately adjacent to the well, from which they were topped up as required by the boys of the family. In later years a small revenue was gained by letting Bray's Paddock, as it was called, to local trades people for horse agistment, entrance being gained through sliprails let into the post and rail fence about midway in its length along Bray's Lane.

The garden enclosure surrounding the cottage was rich with old-fashioned English flowers, amongst which could be noted roses, blue and also white agapanthus, "strip-jacks (a quaint name for the pink belladonna lilies), jonquils, daffodils, nerines, tansy, and a host of other brilliants, topped and protected, of course, by privet hedges.

The house-name "ARBOR" was fully justified by a magnificent English oak-tree in the front garden, whilst a beautiful background was formed by a camphor-laurel, a kurrajong, and a Horse Chestnut tree, the latter being a species which is rare to the Sydney area.

Family increases were no doubt responsible for the addition of two extra stone-built rooms to the house about the 1864 period, which, under their own separate full length roof with end gables, were placed against the western wall of the original building, the front verandah being brought forward to its new location in the process. The northern wall of the new extension included a chimney piece of the open grate type, the top outlet being surmounted by a Venetian type terracotta pot incorporating a covered cowl. Shingles were obtained to cover the new roof.

William and Elizabeth Bray were blessed with six children, three sons and three daughters, who, in order of arrival, were named Emma, Walter, William, Annie, Jack and Maggie. In due course Emma married William J.

Matheson, Walter wedded Kate Rutter, William wedded Aggie Matheson (a sister of the aforementioned William J. Matheson), Annie wedded Erastus Pullen, Jack wedded Elsie Wailes, whilst Maggie chose to remain in single blessedness and lived on in her old home until her death in 1924.

William Bray Senior, with a large family to support and accommodate, built a further extension to his cottage about the 1883-1885 period, when a lengthy room was built, in an east-west direction, along the southern wall. This new section was later adapted as a workshop in connection with his trade as a builder. In following this occupation he had the misfortune to break his right leg when he fell from a scaffold during the erection of the original Wesleyan Church in Wollongong Road, Arncliffe. This accident left him permanently lame, consequently this disability, coupled with the breaking up of his family through marriage, forced him in the early eighteen-nineties, to forego any further gardening activities, and the front "cabbage patch" was given over to animal agistment. A block at the south-western corner of this section was sold about 1894, to a Mr. Smith, whereon to Mr. Bray's annoyance (he was a staunch "Blue Ribbon" teetotaller), the Grand Hotel was erected. However the remaining portion, facing on to Rocky Point Road, lay vacant for many years.

Reverting to the mid-eighteen-eighties another home, named "AIRLIE", was erected on the southern side of the estate to house William J. Matheson, who, as before mentioned, married Emma, eldest daughter of William Bray. This new double-fronted cottage was built of brick, with a corrugated iron roof, and faced towards Rocky Point Road. A well was sunk for their domestic water supply. A similar residence in every respect was also placed north-eastwards from the old home, where it was occupied by Walter Bray. This gentleman eventually moved to Concord about 1894 and the house was then occupied by Mr. J. W. Apperly, a carpenter. Modifications were made to the original homestead about 1900 when the shingled roof was replaced by one of galvanised iron, a covering which greatly detracted from the comely appearance of the old home.

Two frontage allotments, at £10 per foot, were purchased about 1908 by open-air picture-show proprietors. The first of these later rival places of entertainment, owned by Mr. Searle, occupied the north-west corner of the property at the intersection of Bryant Street and Rocky Point Road. An intervening vacant block divided Jackson's Picture Show from its opposition number, and may, perhaps, be regarded as the more popular amongst the general public. The Saturday afternoon matinees in particular inspired local juveniles to carry out great games in Cowboy and Indian fashion, for which the rocky and bushy terrain of Rockdale lent itself most admirably. The remaining frontage blocks were sold about 1911 as shop sites.

Elizabeth Bray passed away in 1911 and after her death it was decided to subdivide the remaining portion of the estate. The matter was placed in the hands of Messrs. Raine and Horne and their subdivision required the construction of Market Street and also an extension of King Lane, both in a north-south direction through the property. It was necessary to demolish the houses formerly occupied by Walter Bray and William Matheson to permit this project being placed into effect. A total of thirty house allotments were

offered for sale as Bray's Paddock Estate, "In the heart of the town", on Saturday, September 16th, 1911. Twelve blocks had frontages to Bryant Street, six to George Street, and six on each side of Market Street. The old home "ARBOR" was listed as occupying blocks Nos. 42 and 43, with its frontage now turned towards the western side of the newly constructed Market Street, and was retained by William Bray and his youngest daughter Maggie. The stable site, as block No. 41, was taken over by Albert Matheson and a house erected thereon.

William Bray Senior died in 1914 and was buried at Woronora Cemetery. The house was subdivided in 1917 into three self-contained flats, one of which was occupied by Miss Maggie Bray until her death in 1924. The former estate became a residential area until 1960 when it was decided to resume the area between Market Street and King Lane as far north as the rear of the properties facing Bryant Street, for use as a car park. The houses on this area were demolished, but the old residence, "Arbor", remained intact within its small garden until 1965 when it too came into the hands of the wreckers. Before this event took place application was made by the St. George Historical Society to have the house retained to be used as a Regional Folk Museum, a purpose for which its historical background, insofar as Rockdale was concerned, made it eminently suitable. The application, unfortunately, did not find favour, but at the express wish of Albert Matheson, the ancient oak and the Horse Chestnut tree have been preserved, beautifying an otherwise drab featureless expanse of asphalt.

ST. GEORGE IN 1894.

It comes as a shock to discover that there was once a time when otherwise knowledgeable citizens of Sydney had only a hazy notion where Rockdale, Kogarah and Hurstville were. Moreover, Banksia was not then in existence!

The following press report, discovered by Mr. Philip Geeves, describes our home suburbs in the St. George District as they were in 1894, when the now defunct Australian Joint Stock Bank was Rockdale's only bank and Chinese market gardens supplied the green symmetry between Rockdale and Lady Robinson's Beach.

Down at the Beach Saywell's Hotel had been transformed into the first home of one of our Great Public Schools - the Scots College (the Hotel had been delicensed for an infraction of the liquor laws . . . see Municipal History for details) and the hotel parlour, which had once catered to the gargantuan thirsts of its patrons, was now transformed into a Presbyterian chapel.

In those far-off days, when a home at Sans Souci was regarded as "a country residence" and Rockdale railway station was noted for its floral display, a journalist wrote this description of St. George's suburbs, as they then were:-

ST. GEORGE'S ELECTORATE (1894)

ILLAWARRA LINE

There are many thousands of Sydney people who know little or nothing of this one of the most beautiful and attractive of our suburbs, simply because it does not lead to one of the holiday resorts, for pleasure-seekers. Yet for beauty of scenery we are not aware of any suburb which excels it; and for attractive residential sites, easily accessible, at moderate rates, with frequent trains running punctually from Sydney at 5.10 a. m. to 11.38 p. m., and from Hurstville 5 a. m. to 11.5 p. m., persons travelling on business or pleasure have every accommodation which Sydney residents enjoy. St. George's electorate commences at Arncliffe, on Cooks River, five miles from Sydney, and terminates at Hurstville, on the Georges River on the south, bounded on the east by the shores of Botany Bay, and on the west by a continuation of Saltpan Creek, comprising an area of about forty square miles. The towns on the railway line are Arncliffe, Rockdale (with a tramline to Lady Robinsons Beach), Kogarah (with a tramline to Sans Souci), Carlton and Hurstville.

ARNCLIFFE.

At this point we get clear of Sydney proper, with its continuous lines of streets, with their closely-packed houses, with back premises 12 by 12 feet, the hotbeds of disease, and get into the country proper, with its fresh air and breezes from Botany Bay, charged with life-giving ozone.

In this neighbourhood are many attractive residences within the reach of every class of society. There is a considerable elevation above the station, on the highest point of which is the handsome residence of Mr. Barden surrounded by a verandah on the upper floor, with some enchanting views, including Botany Bay and Cooks River, with its new improvements and reclaimed land, which will become very valuable for manufacturing and other purposes. In addition to the residences there are several large landowners who have sites for sale. Campbell's Hill, for instance, has a high and commanding position; Dr. Clay Hill, etc. Arncliffe is one of the wards of the Municipality of Rockdale, to which it extends on the west side of Rocky Point Road as far as Harrow Road, where the Kogarah Municipality commences.

ROCKDALE.

Rockdale is the principal business centre of St. George's, and is divided into three Wards - Arncliffe, Rockdale and Scarborough, constituting the Municipality of Rockdale. It has an area of about eight square miles, and an estimated population of five thousand; has a Town Hall and School of Arts, with a good library. There are several first-class stores and business houses, and in the neighbourhood some very nice residences, with more or less ground up to six acres, well planted with fruit trees. There is a large number of market gardens, producing first-class vegetables, some of these being kept by the irrepressible and indefatigable Chinaman. The immediate neighbourhood is well adapted for fruit and vegetable growing, to which might be added fruit canning; it only requires capital and the right people. There are churches of different denominations, also public schools. A

branch of the A. J. S. Bank; two hotels; a College for Boys (see advt. of Scots' College). A tramway runs, on the arrival of each train, to Lady Robinson's Beach, about a mile, where there are baths for both sexes. This could be made a very attractive pleasure resort on the same plan as Coogee and Bondi, and ought to pay if taken up with spirit.

It is much to be regretted that many of the residents will waste their time and spend their money in going to Sydney to get bargains (!), when they can buy the same goods on the spot at the lowest Sydney rates, and keep the money at home; also, they will subscribe to the Sydney School of Arts, pay a pound per annum subscription and take all the trouble of going to Sydney to exchange their books, while they can get the selection from a good library on the spot for three shillings a year! Perhaps they want a free library as well as a free paper.

This is a good live town to live in, as there are frequent dramatic and other entertainments, which could be supplemented by lectures, if encouraged. There is a latent spirit of enterprise in the people, but they are shy about supporting a paper run in their interest. There is an excellent hotel, the Royal, for the accommodation of visitors.

KOGARAH AND SANS SOUCI.

This Municipality is divided into three wards - East, Middle and South. It has an area of about five square miles, and an estimated population of four thousand; has a School of Arts and Public library. It extends from Harrow Road to Oatley, and has seven churches of different denominations.

On leaving the station at Rockdale, the railway line is on the up grade, and although the ground is rather rocky, and not suitable for cultivation, it presents most charming sites for residences, with views at various points of Botany Bay, with a well wooded country intervening, and the charming little suburb of Sans Souci, to which a tramline runs on the arrival of the trains from Sydney.

We recommend our town readers to pay a visit to this locality, particularly if seeking a country residence.

The Moorefield Racecourse is an attraction, and there are many horses in training in the neighbourhood. This is one of our holiday attractions. The Moorefield Hotel has extensive stabling and the landlord as a sporting man will command a good share of support.

CARLTON.

This is little more than a railway station, but between it and Botany Bay there is one of the greatest attractions in the florists and nurserymen's grounds, where the flowers which made the great display at the late exhibition of chrysanthemums were principally grown. A reference to our advertising columns will give the names of the principal growers, and a visit to this beautiful locality will be a treat for those who take an interest in the subject, and will give them an opportunity of securing some beautiful specimens for

their grounds. We regret that, for reasons stated in our last issue, we were prevented from giving a description of our late flower show, as we would have wished. The Royal Hotel at this place, kept by Mr. Mitchell (see advertisement), is a first-class house which we recommend to visitors.

HURSTVILLE.

This Municipality is divided into three wards - Bexley, Hurstville, and Peakhurst. It has an area of about twelve miles square, and an estimated population of three thousand five hundred, being an increase of about seven hundred and fifty over 1890. It has nine churches and four schools, a library and the scenery is very attractive. There are indications of gold in the neighbourhood, resulting so far in little more than the colour. There is some desirable land near worth the attention of investors.

To sum up. It is the general impression that the first step towards getting the several municipalities out of their financial difficulties, will be a Bill for Local Government, to enable the municipalities to collect overdue rates and force the land, now held by the speculators, into the market. In the meantime the necessity for retrenchment is felt very severely by those dependent on local work, and the refusal of government support in the shape of customary subsidies, leaves the municipalities helpless for the present.

We have to thank Mr. George W. Leeder, Council Clerk of Hurstville, and Mr. Sayers, of Kogarah, for their kindness in furnishing information, also the Mayor of Rockdale, Mr. W. Taylor, for his valuable suggestions; and trust the publicity given in this article will be as we wish it of value to the electorate, and a proof of the value of a local paper. The floral display at this station is quite an attraction. Mr. Hall, the station master, deserves a notice for this good taste.

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