



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

53 Bruce Street,
Bexley.
8th December, 1967.

Dear Friend and Member,

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

Date: Friday evening next, 15th December, 1967, at 8 p. m.

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

As this is our Christmas Meeting it will take the following form:-

1. Short business session.
2. Exhibition of and talk on old Oil Lamps.

(If you have an old oil lamp please bring it along.)

3. Musical Items.
4. Carol Singing.
5. Christmas Supper.

During supper the competition for the painting of the sailing ship "Dunbar" will be drawn and those members who have not done so are urged TO RETURN THEIR BOOKS IMMEDIATELY.

Would lady members please bring a plate and gentlemen something to drink.

Supper Roster.

Mesdames Eardley, Coghlan & Perkins and Miss McCartney with Mrs. Wright, Miss Noble and Miss Gettens.

D. H. Sinclair.
President.

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

THE VILLAGE OF TEMPE AND ITS REGATTA OF 1855.

Gifford and Eileen Eardley.

Casting the mind's eye back to the mid-fifties of last century one can visualise the extensive land and water scape surrounding the then picturesque environs of Cooks River, in the immediate vicinity of "Tempe", the country home of Alexander Spark, Esquire. Gazing northwards could be seen, on the right, the vast salt swamp area, covered with a dense growth of mangroves, which spread their mottled green foliage over a wide area towards Mascot, and terminated at the embouchure of Shea's Creek, in the vicinity of the present day Ricketty Street bridge at St. Peters. This extensive and sombre bird-haunted tidal marsh was threaded by numerous narrow waterways, of no great depth, which meandered through the mud flats, and gave access to small craft used by those sun-tanned and horny-handed men engaged in dredging, and collecting, oyster and other sea shells, the deposits of countless centuries. These shells were taken to a lime-burning kiln, located on the northern bank of Cooks River, adjacent to the terminus of the bush thoroughfare known as Cooks River Road. It should be mentioned that the shell-gatherers were amongst the earliest white inhabitants of the Botany Bay district, and included in their number such old established families as the Cairncrosses and the Chappelows. It is recorded that shell lime, for building purposes, was being sent away from the area, in sailing boats, during the early eighteen-hundreds, for building purposes at Sydney-town.

Another industry was the felling of mangroves, the woody portions of which were taken ashore and burnt for their ash content. The ashes were then placed in vats, tamped down hard, and covered with water. After soaking for a period the water, heavily charged with lye-salts absorbed from the mangrove wood, was evaporated in pots placed over a fire, and the residue, when mixed with grease, formed soap which was in demand for household use.

With the exception of the confined and re-routed channel of Shea's Creek, the whole of this once vast swamp land has been reclaimed for the enlargement of the runways associated with the nearby Mascot Aerodrome. In the early nineteen-fifties the course of Cooks River, between "Bonnie Doon" and Botany, was diverted to a new man-made channel to permit further extensions to the aerodrome landing fields now known as the Sydney, or Kingsford Smith Airport.

Reverting to the theme of our story, and gazing ahead in a northerly direction, the aforementioned Cooks River Road could be seen descending the shallow slopes of the ridge, upon the crest of which stood St. Peter's Church of England, surrounded by a cluster of small habitations, many of which still remain in occupation. This fine church, now bereft of its copper sheathed steeple, was consecrated on November 20th, 1839, and is regarded as the third oldest church in and around Sydney, and also as being the first church constructed by "free labour". At the period under review there was a toll-gate located at the northern road entrance on to the Cooks River Dam wall, which gave entrance to the eastern St. George area, where a charge was made on horses and vehicles, although fees were waived in

respect to foot passengers. In the immediate foreground, and on the north-western side of the dam, was the heterogeneous assortment of buildings, all gables, attics, high-pitched roofs, lean-to's, and out-shuts, of the shell lime burning factory, grouped around its bottle-shaped brick kiln. For those who enjoy the higgledy-piggledy in building construction these premises were an architectural gem. They were strictly functional in aspect, built from local materials, added to as occasion demanded, free of all council restrictions, and also of paint, and mellowed by the sun and the ever-present north-easterly winds which sweep across the flats from Mascot and the hills beyond. A real delight to the eye, for the artist at least.

Across the neighbouring highway and immediately adjacent to the unloading staith erected on the river bank, were piles of firewood, rough-cut from the bush, and large heaps of oyster and other shells dredged from the river shoals or retrieved from the extensive kitchen middens thrown up at places by generations of aborigines in days of yore. To this staith came the sailing ketches and other small craft, of divers sorts and sizes, engaged in the shell gathering business. These shallow draught vessels, each possessed some particular characteristic, either as to hull design or sail arrangement, and each was a joy to behold. Their names were equally distinctive and often betrayed the imagination of the owner, or his love for his wife, as female Christian names predominated at this busy port of call. When off duty the boats were tied to slimy stakes driven into the bed of the stream, or fastened by mooring ropes to the trunks of river-side trees that had been suffered to remain in the area.

Further to the west of the lime-burning establishment could be, and still can be, seen the quarry face where the stones necessary for the construction of the nearby dam were hewn by a convict gang during the year 1835, their superintendent being Mr. Colvert. Directly west, beyond the marshy margins at the junction of Wolli Creek and Cooks River, lay a flood land covered with a dense growth of casuarina trees, the haunt of shingle-cutters. Above the tops of the trees could be discerned the gumtree covered ridge known as Unwins Hill. Following along the southern bank of Cooks River, towards our vantage point on the dam, the mansion of "Tempe" was to be noted, situated amidst a splendid growth of both native and exotic trees, and protected from the easterly and southerly winds by a low sandstone hillock, a large portion of which has, in recent years, been blasted away to widen the approach to the new Cooks River bridge.

The extension of Cooks River road, southwards from the dam, was known as Rocky Point Road (now Princes Highway) and skirted the eastern foot of the last mentioned hillock before crossing a marshy tract of land overspread by a mass of casuarina trees, cabbage-tree palms, tea-tree, and other water-loving vegetation. In the midst of this growth a rough timber bridge carried the roadway over the waters of a small creek, the name of which has so far escaped identification. This stream wended its way from the Wollongong Road Valley, where its head was located at a spring adjacent to the intersection of the present day Fripp Street and Lorraine Avenue. Its course has long been channeled underground, and its surface continuation, eastwards of the Illawarra Railway, confined within the brick walls of an open-

topped drainage conduit. The trickling fern-clad and tree-lined banks, likewise the horseponds and gardening ponds, together with its erst-while beauty, have long departed from the Arncliffe scene. On the eastern side of this lowlying portion of Rocky Point Road was a semi-circular shaped indentation of Cooks River, known locally as "The Bay", which was also used for the mooring of boats. This area has now been reclaimed, and the former tidal mudflat built up to form the grassland of Cahill Park.

Clear of the marsh area, in the vicinity of the intersection of Gertrude Street, was the initial junction of Mauor Mitchell's "Line of Road to the South Coast" with Rocky Point Road, a bush track which dodged around the southern verge of the wetlands (now marked by Messrs. Stevens' factory premises) and other natural obstacles to lead westwards and then southwards to climb the western slopes of Arncliffe Hill. This ancient highway has had most of its many "kinks" removed and its straightened alignment today is known as Wollongong Road. The precipitous but narrow slopes of the northern outlier of Arncliffe Hill, now topped by Duncan Street, but formerly covered by a dense forest and an undergrowth noted for its beautiful wildflowers, lay immediately ahead and south of the aforementioned road junction. Further to the west was the rough hilly terrain marked by the long low elevation later known as Waltara Heights, and its pimple-like northern outlier, now named as The Knoll, was once known as Vinegar Hill, the latter term being gained through its one time ownership by Mr. Monk, a brewer of vinegar.

Gazing eastwards from our position of 1855 the view of Botany Bay and its opposing headlands were obscured by the high forest trees which grew in profusion between Rocky Point Road and the Seven Mile Beach, in the vicinity of the now populous suburb at Kyeemagh. It was not until the woodcutters had cleared all the timber away, in the interests of the domestic fires of Sydney-town, that the now extensive view of Botany Bay and its surrounding shores could be enjoyed by travellers along the highway at Tempe.

The above word-picture may give an inkling of the landscape conditions and, to a certain extent, the affairs and activities associated with the small village of Tempe. To enliven this somewhat tranquil atmosphere, insofar as the populace was concerned, and perhaps to improve his bar trade, the publican of the Cooks River Inn, mine host, Mr. J. S. Henry, sought to organise a regatta to be held on Boxing Day, December 26th, 1855. To this end he gathered together a few kindred souls and at a preliminary meeting it was decided to proceed with the exciting scheme. A committee was appointed to attend to the thousand and one details necessary for the success of such an important event.

On Monday evening, October 29th, 1855, at 8 o'clock to be precise, a second meeting was held and all interested parties were invited to attend. The Cooks River Inn became a scene of much enthusiasm and public debate, and, no doubt, gallons of beer,

distributed in foaming tankards, were consumed as the local farmers, lime-burners, shell gatherers, and woodsmen generally, came together to discuss the merits of this boat and that boat, its sailing qualities, the seamanship of its crew, and the need for a handicap if necessary. Even small sized dinghies came into the discussion, whilst great credit was bestowed upon the local landlord, Mr. Henry, "for the pains he took to make everyone comfortable".

The novelty of the regatta, the first of its kind to be held on Cooks River, attracted many of the husbandmen settled around the fertile lands bordering both Wolli Creek and Muddy Creek. They came to Tempe on Boxing Day, girded about with their wives, their boys and girls, their men servants and their maid servants, and the strangers within their gates, and their dogs without number. It is questionable if any of the populace of St. Peters or the Eastern St. George area were missing on this great day. All manner of horse-drawn vehicles threaded their way through the winding shady tracks leading to the Cooks River Dam. The indigent arrived on foot, and the prosperous on horseback. One can well imagine the family parties having their picnic meals beneath the age-old trees, which grew around the marshy shores of the river, the crowd of froth-blowers at the Inn, and the excitement in and around the boats. It must have been the gayest of all days as yet experienced in the huge wilderness which spread southwards from Tempe to the Georges River. Checking the Sydney Morning Herald of December 27th, 1855, the day after the regatta, we find full mention of the boats involved, the racing course followed, details of the prize money (paid in gold sovereigns) and, above all, a great coverage of the names of the participants, which today is of interest from an historical angle.

The First Race, spoken of as the "Amateur's Purse of Eight Sovereigns", was open to all skiffs pulling a pair of oars. The entrance fee was twenty shillings, and providing that four boats were entered, a second prize of twenty shillings was offered for the next best performance. Three entries were listed for the event, as follows:- James Gannon's "VOLUNTEER". (light blue); John Doyle's "TIGER" (red); and John Saunders' "TIGRESS" (black). However, the latter boat did not put in an appearance. The other two boats left together from the flagship, pressed round the flag-boat moored off Gannon's Deck, and back to the flagship. The "VOLUNTEER" managed to gain a lead and kept ahead of its rival until, on the return course to the flagship, the "TIGER" shot ahead to win by a few lengths. The "VOLUNTEER" was pulled by Robert Bogan and Joseph Corby, and the "TIGER" by John Doyle and John Saunders.

The next contest, "The Cooks River Purse of Twenty Sovereigns", was open for all sailing boats over 26 feet on the keel. This was the great event of the day. The course commenced from the flagship at Tempe and negotiated the three and a half miles of the winding and difficult channel of Cooks River to its entrance into Botany Bay. A south-easterly direction then led to a flag-boat moored off Bumbarra Point (now Bumberah Point), located in the vicinity of the Bunnerong Electric Power Station). Rounding the flag-

boat the course led southwestwards across Botany Heads to a flagship moored off Bonna Point, located at the western end of the sandy promontory formed by Kurnell, or Silver Beach. Rounding this latter vessel the contestants sailed northwards across Botany Bay to enter Cooks River and finish the race at the Tempe flagship. This course had an approximate length of seventeen miles, of which some ten miles had to be covered in the open and often squally waters of Botany Bay.

The entrance fee to the second race was fixed at two pounds, and a prize of three pounds was offered for the boat that came "Second Best". Robert Curtis entered "SANTA BARBARA" (red with blue stripes); William Woods entered "SARAH" (blue with red stripes); George Morris entered "EMMA MORRIS" (Australian blue); and John Naughton entered "THOMAS AND MARY" (red). It was most unfortunate that the "SANTA BARBARA", at starting, ran aground on a shoal, however, the other three boats got well away, no doubt a pretty sight, as with their sails all set they glided effortlessly round the mangrove-fringed river bend and out of sight of the crowd at Tempe. This was a most exciting race, according to the press report, and was won by "THOMAS AND MARY", the "EMMA MORRIS" and "SARAH" coming in about five minutes afterwards.

Whilst the above three boats were away the Third Race was contested for a prize of seven pounds, the entrance fee being fifteen shillings. It was open for "All Shell Boats", of proportionate size, and "employed at Cooks River pulling a pair of oars." This race commenced from the flagship at Tempe and proceeded downstream to a flagboat moored in Muddy Creek, presumably at the point named Gum-an-nan, a placename which has, so far, baffled experts in their efforts to trace its origin. Rounding the flagboat the outward course had to be retraced to the flagship at Tempe. Three "Shell" boats entered and were listed as follows: Matthew Campbell's "BARNEY McGEE" (red); John Saunder's "LONG JACK" (black), and James Pointer's "DEFIANCE" (white). The "DEFIANCE" was withdrawn and the other two boats got away together, the "LONG JACK" taking the lead, but on rounding the flagboat at Muddy Creek the two boats changed places several times. The "BARNEY McGEE" at length won the race. The pullers in the "BARNEY McGEE" were Charles Gwilliam and William Bailey, and in the "LONG JACK", William Brown and John Saunders.

The fourth race was listed as "The Shell Gatherer's Purse of Fifteen Sovereigns" and was open for all sailing boats between 20 feet and 26 feet on the keel. The same course to Muddy Creek and back, as covered by the third race, was set out for this fourth event. A prize of Three pounds was made available for the second best performance and an entry fee of thirty shillings was required. Three boats entered for the race and were listed as follows. James Pointer's "ENTERPRISE" (True blue). Charles Hick's "HELEN" (blue with white star) and Dennis McQuire's "ROVER'S BRIDE". (White with blue star). In this race the three boats got away together in fine style, the "ROVER'S BRIDE" taking the lead, and was never headed. The "HELEN" came in second, about ten minutes after the "ROVER'S BRIDGE".

For the fifth race a prize of three pounds, with a sweep of five shillings each added, was offered for all dinghies over 11 feet on the keel. The entrance fee was five shillings and the course of the river between Tempe and Muddy Creek was to be followed. Robert Lamb's "MARY ANN" (Currency blue), James Bardon's "BUTTERFLY" (white), and John Doyle's "MIDGE" (red) were the contestants. According to the report this was an excellent race and was won admirably by the "MARY ANN"; the "BUTTERFLY" following a few lengths behind.

THE LIMEBURNER'S PURSE OF TEN SOVEREIGNS, was the title of the sixth race, which was open to all boats under 20 feet on the keel. This race started from the Tempe flagship, followed the meandering course of Cooks River into Botany Bay and thence to the flagboat moored off Bumbarra Point, returning by the same route to the flagship at Tempe. A second best prize of two pounds was offered and an entrance fee of twenty-five shillings was required. Amos Salmon's "TOM" (white with red cross); Joseph Nobb's "WILLIAM MARY" (Currency blue with pink cross), Thomas Busby's "CREEPING JANE" (pure white), and Master Thomas Morris' "LOUISA" (red) were entered on this occasion, but "CREEPING TOM", evidently was not deemed fast enough and was withdrawn from the race. The "TOM" was the winner, the "WILLIAM MARY" coming in about seven minutes behind, and the "LOUISA" two minutes behind the second boat.

The seventh, and last race had a prize offering of two pounds, with a sweep added, for all Cooks River Dinghies, barring those entered in the sixth race. The entrance fee was five shillings and the course was from the flagship at Tempe to the flagboat at Muddy Creek and back to the starting point. Four boats were entered as follows: John Common's "MOSQUITO" (green); William Brown's "FLEA". Edward Bramwell's "SANDFLY", (white), and Joseph Webb's "FOLLOW ME", (blue with pink cross). The "SANDFLY" was withdrawn and the other three entries started at the usual signal, but when half way "FOLLOW ME" gave up and the race then lay between "MOSQUITO" and "FLEA", and ended in the "MOSQUITO" coming in an easy winner. A result, if there is anything significant in a name, was only to be expected. "And thus ended the day's sports which seemed to be enjoyed by everyone present".

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THE "SPOT" TOY SHOP, REGENT ST., KOGARAH.

Gifford Eardley.

The importance of toys in the training of young children has always been appreciated by the general run of mankind, and from the very earliest times small replicas of people, in the way of dolls, were given to girls in order to foster the desires of motherhood. Concurrently, the boys received miniature weapons to play with, and thus learn the rudiments of the arts associated with the chase, and also those appertaining to war in the way of offence and defence.

Without a doubt toys have kept pace with the growth of civilisation, and to gaze at the exhibits displayed in a modern day shop window exemplifies the truth of this assertion. Rockets, presumably for outer-space exploration are to be seen, together with a wide range of guns, aeroplanes, helicopters, and the thousand and one items associated with our every day life, all manufactured to attract youthful attention and thereby gain a sale. It is evident that the desire, and the demand, is there to warrant production and distribution costs.

Comparatively speaking it is only in recent years that shops specialising in the sale of toys have come into being, and, perhaps, one of the first such shops in the St. George District was established in Regent Street, Kogarah, by Mr. Tyreman about the period set by the end of the First World War. This particular emporium was widely advertised as "THE SPOT", and quickly became the "Mecca" of the local lads and lasses. Previously toy selling, insofar as the suburbs were concerned, was a sideline adjunct to millinery shops, news agencies, and those dealing in domestic hardware. Here stocks of toys were invariably limited and, to a certain extent, lacked subject variety. It was unfortunately that "THE SPOT" went out of business in the nineteen-thirty depression period, but this firm set a pattern which has been emulated in almost every important suburban business centre.

Gazing in pleasant retrospect at the wondrous toy display once presented in the double fronted shop windows of "THE SPOT", one can recall with interests the sights and sounds common to the fancies of the period. There was a vast array of small lead soldiers arranged in martial order across the lower shelves, some on foot and some mounted on spirited chargers. The cheaper members of the force had been dipped in gold paint, whilst the more expensive were individually coloured in the reds, blues, and greens, associated with the different regiments. Those latter, nowadays, are greatly sought after by collectors. Gardening sets, mostly unusable when put in practice, consisted of a rake, a spade, and a tinny fork, all fitted with wooden handles and attached by string to a suitable card. This equipment was purchased by mummas to influence their boys in the affairs relative to the back yard but, somehow or other, they never did. Carpenter tool sets were likewise displayed and much boyish chagrin was engendered when the claw head of the small cast-iron hammer came apart whilst pulling out a nail. However, these tools stimulated a desire to use those belonging to father, much to his annoyance.

The desire to play shop was catered for by the display of expensive boxes containing several small labelled jars of sticky sweets, a counter of cardboard, and, most important, a pair of tin scales. The weighing out of the sweets was always a sight to behold and, with little girls in particular, a most complicated and exacting undertaking, teaching them the benefit of thrift, but certainly not that of kindness. A great range of horse-drawn carriages were on display, some cavorting around in circles when their clockwork spring was wound up, and others were pulled around by tots per medium of a short length of string. Hobby horses were in demand by the three-year olds and consisted of a lath of wood with a cut-cut profile of a horse's head, complete with a mane of cut leather, at one end a small pair of wheels at the other. Toy motor cars were just being introduced at the period under review and the few that have survived childist breakages and the onslaught of time now bring a high price in the collector's market. Chinese kites, fashioned out of garish red paper glued to a lightly constructed framework of split bamboo, resembled birds with their wings wide open, but what the local boys did not know was their power, according to Chinese lore, of clearing away storms and the evils that came with them.

Then there were the brass-boilered donkey engines of German manufacture, which, on the lighting of a methylated spirit burner and the filling of the boiler with water, send their fly-wheels whizzing around at a great rate, teaching the first principles of steam power in a way which made learning easy. Boxes of trains, with ornate coloured prints on the lids, were a must for most boys, and much pleasure was gained in watching the wind-up engines career around the circle of tin-plate track, particularly by the child's father. Most popular was a tiny box of trains, without rails, which came from Japan and sold for one shilling. This set had a push-type engine and seven or eight carriages, all made of lithographed tin-plate. One such set is still to be seen, high up in the window display of a refreshment shop near the baths at Sans Souci. Humming tops of gaudy tin construction vied with the wooden top and cord units in catching the juvenile eye, whilst small flat boxes displayed a fascinating variety of marbles. Wooden hoops for the girls and metal ones for the boys hung in the window, together with a range of "Cowboy and Indian" suits which proved ideal for the eight-year olds.

Most pleasing for the girls was a truly gorgeous array of dolls in all stages of dress and undress. Some were made of cloth, some had heads of china and "real hair", some went to sleep, others uttered "mumma" in a plaintive voice when pressed in the right part of their sawdust anatomy, and some of the golliwog type, were as black as ink. The materials used in their construction ranged from baked clay in the Japanese dolls, rubber (which squeaked when squeezed), celluloid, and painted wood, amongst a variety of other substances.

The distribution of toys at Christmastide is a most pleasant feature associated with this important religious occasion, and the modern day Santa Claus is based on a jolly fat Dutch burgher, and was inspired by the person of Jan Duyckinck, who settled in New York

about three centuries ago. The name Santa Claus came from the Dutch "Sinter Klass", which in turn came from Saint Nicholas, the patron of children, chain stores, and chambers of commerce. Saint Nicholas was Bishop of Myra in the fourth century. He was a bringer of gifts on his feast day, December 6th, some three weeks or so before Christmas. His fame spread over Europe in the Middle Ages and the strange story of his life has been told and re-told. He became the patron of cities and whole countries, as well as patron of the bakers, merchants, and sailors. Most of all he was the special patron of children.

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