



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

53 Bruce Street,
Bexley.
9th February, 1968.

Dear Friend and Member,

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

Date: Friday Evening next, 16th February, 1968, at 8 p.m.

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

After a short business meeting a series of films of places of historic interest will be shown. These have been kindly loaned by the Rural Bank and the National Trust of N. S. W.

Would lady members please bring a plate.

Supper Roster: Mrs. E. Eardley (organiser) and Mesdames
Sinclair, Chase, Osborne, Austin and Day (organised).

D. H. Sinclair,
President.

R. W. Rathbone,
Hon. Secretary.

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BOOK NUMBER THREE NOW AVAILABLE.

The third book by Mr. Gifford Eardley to be printed by the St. George Historical Society is now available.

It is entitled

"Thomas Saywell's Tramway 1887 - 1914
Rockdale to Lady Robinson's Beach."

Profusely illustrated with ancient photographs and pencil sketches, this attractive publication is available for 65 cents (70 cents posted).

Both previous publications have been complete sellouts so that if you want a copy - be early.

A WORD OF THANKS.

In the last few years two people have rendered the St. George Historical Society outstanding service which was recognised at our last meeting.

It was decided to place on record our sincere thanks to Mr. Gifford Eardley not only for the three books he has written on the Society's behalf but also for the delightful essays he has contributed month by month to the Society's Bulletin.

We would also like to say a word of thanks to Miss Betty Baker of the Rockdale Council Staff who, since the Society was formed in 1961, has been responsible for the printing of our Bulletin. Usually working under extreme pressure and often at very short notice Miss Baker has managed to turn out this publication in time for each meeting and in the very acceptable form with which all members are familiar.

I am sure all members would want us to record our thanks not only in the minutes of our meetings but also in this form.

THE TERRACES OF SINGLE FRONTED COTTAGES OF GIBBES STREET, ROCKDALE.

Between Tabrett and Bestic Streets, on both sides of the street, in Gibbes Street, and Farr Street, Rockdale, stand Terraces of 12 separate single fronted cottages. These were erected by the Mercantile Building Land and Investment Co. Ltd., and were sold to private owners for three hundred odd pounds. They could be purchased for Cash or on Terms. The Terms were so much Deposit and the balance at 9% Interest. Nine Per Cent Interest would be fantastic to-day, but in those days it must have been even more so, when an ordinary workman was lucky to earn £1/10/- per week.

Needless to say, that many of the folk who purchased them found that this Interest was too much for them, and so lost their homes. At one stage, many of the houses became neglected and fell into such disrepair, that some of them were sold for as little as £45 each. Anyone who purchased at this figure and still owned the cottage today, would be

showing a nice profit, as one of these homes was offered for sale recently for £5,150.

Although the cottages appear small from the front view, they were in fact quite comfortable inside, and just as big as the ordinary run of double fronted homes. Firstly there was the front verandah, when you went through the front door you entered a long hall, which went past two bedrooms and entered into a living room. All these rooms had fireplaces. Then you went down four steps into the kitchen, the laundry and bathroom. There was no gas, electricity or water laid on. The householder used candles or kerosene lamps. He had a fuel stove, and the water was pumped from a very deep well in his backyard. These wells were very deep with bricked walls, planks on top, and a hand pump. Some of these cottages had one box window facing on to the front verandah, others had two.

The Illawarra Railway Line had been put through as far as Hurstville in 1884, and this created a land boom. My grandparents, Mr. & Mrs. J. C. Walker, then a young married couple, purchased one of these cottages, No. 36 (now No. 24) Gibbes Street, and came to live there on 29th November, 1886. They were the first ones to move into that row. My grandfather sold it many years later for £450 just before moving into a new brick home in Bryant Street. They were first offered No. 38 (now No. 26) the last in the row, but for some reason my grandfather did not fancy it, and apparently neither did anyone else, and so it was a rented house for many years. My grandfather was the Bandmaster firstly of the Rockdale Firebrigade Band and then the Rockdale Municipal Band for over 44 years, and in 1941 the Rockdale Council named the Band Rotunda at Brighton le Sands Baths, the "Walker" Band Rotunda in his honour. My grandfather also had a coach building business on Princes Highway, almost at the corner of Bestic Street, near where the Metropolitan Funeral Parlour now stands.

During the following year 1887, their first child, Elsie Pearl (now Mrs. A. B. Christison, who is my mother), was born to them at No. 36 Gibbes Street. My grandfather had to drive into St. Peters in his sulky to bring out a nurse to attend my grandmother during her confinement, and whilst he was absent a friend and neighbour, Mrs. Fransdon and her infant daughter, Trina, minded her. Trina later became Mrs. Arthur Stevens and now lives in Cameron Street, Rockdale. Mr. Stevens is a Boer War Veteran. Mrs. Stevens and my mother have been friends for over 80 years. A record friendship, don't you agree?

My grandparents kept their Gibbes Street cottage in perfect condition, and also added more rooms to the back of it as the family grew. The house was always beautifully painted. Grandfather, who did all the paintwork in his coachworks, had a secret clear, durable, non-sticky, glass-like varnish; something like the modern product Estapol. When he had painted the walls and stained the floors, he coated it over with this special varnish, which gave a wonderful effect. The floor of the hallway was just like a mirror. This varnish could also be used on linoleum. When the water and gas services came along, he had them installed. He then had the well in the backyard filled in, and as it was

extremely deep, it took a considerable amount of earth etc. to completely obliterate it and make it safe for all time. There have been a number of accidents, where old wells have been left, and unsuspecting folk have fallen through the rotten timbers and been drowned.

All the people, who came to live in these cottages, were young couples like my grandparents. Some of the owners and occupiers of these Gibbes Street homes in those years were: Fransdon, Wenholm, Dade, Dunne, Pike, Goff, Skinner, Nowlands, Welch, Arnold.

Like all streets, there were incidents and events that were always remembered and talked about, the following are some which our family recall from time to time.

Late one evening, when everyone had retired to bed, there was an urgent knocking at my grandparents' front door. My grandmother jumped out of bed and went to the front door, grabbing a heavy poker (which she always kept just inside the door for her protection) as she went. On opening the door she saw a neighbour, Mrs. Dunne, who was crying and very agitated. "Come quick Mrs. Walker", cried Mrs. Dunne, "some one is killing my Claude". My grandmother was a diminutive 5-ft. nothing, but very down to earth and with a heart like a lion. So grabbing her trusty poker, and closing the door behind her she rushed to Mrs. Dunne's house. Mrs. Dunne explaining as they went that she had awakened to hear her boy screaming, and then a terrible thud. The little boy slept in the front bedroom. My grandmother smashed the front window and climbed in to find that the ceiling had fallen in on Claude knocking him unconscious, otherwise he was unharmed!!!

My Uncle Horace, who was always bringing home stray birds and animals, (all the family were very fond of animals), had a pet possum. One evening the possum went walk-about, and crept into a house further down the row. Here it made itself very comfortable and very much at home. The son of the house returned home after spending the evening out, prepared for bed, blew out the light and scrambled into bed. As he stretched his legs down under the bed clothes they struck something smooth and curled up. With a terrified shriek he shot out of bed, calling out that there was a snake in his bed. When his family came running with lighted candles, and gingerly pulled back the bed clothes, there was THAT POSSUM sleeping blissfully unconcerned by all the fuss.

Another of these pets was a Muscovy Drake, which grew into a giant of its species. My grandmother had a washing line running through the yard in which this drake was kept. One day, whilst putting some washing on the line, for no apparent reason the drake attacked her. Knocking her to the ground, it beat her unmercifully with its huge wing. My grandmother fought back, and eventually broke away from it and scrambled over the back fence. Bruised and shaken she made her way around to her front gate only to find that the drake had somehow got out of its yard, and was at the front gate waiting for her. She went to a

neighbour opposite for help, a Mr. Taylor, and he brought a very heavy dog chain which, after he had subdued the drake, fastened round its neck. The criminal was then led away, and finally finished up as someone's dinner.

It became a decorating vogue in those days to dress the lace curtains with butterflies made from dolly (clothes) pegs. You painted the wooden body of these pegs with some colour to your fancy, and added wings made of crepe paper, tulle, or some stiff material, which you threaded through the slot in the peg. You then attached cotton around them, and suspended them at various intervals and heights along the curtains. Of course grandma wanted to be in the swim, and so decorated her front room curtains in this manner. Imagine her surprise when a heavy knock came on her front door one day, and when she opened it, she found two policemen on her doorstep. They wanted to know why she had the butterflies in her curtains. She explained. Then they put her through all manner of questions, and finally when they had established the fact that she was a decent citizen, they told her that underworld characters were using the butterflies as signals to their confederates, as to when "the coast was clear" etc. These policemen were trying to track down some thieves, whom they were sure were living in the vicinity. Well, to cut a long story short, they eventually located them. Two fashionably dressed women and their husbands had come to live in one of the cottages in about the middle of the terrace. It turned out that they were bike thieves from Melbourne. The women used to engage the proprietors of bike shops in conversation, whilst the men snatched off with the bikes. When the Police pulled up the floor boards of their house, they found an Aladdin's Cave full of bikes and bike-parts.

On another occasion grandma, her two children and her sister, had just arrived home from a shopping spree in Sydney Town, when this time a loud hammering was heard at her side door. When she opened the door, there stood an elderly woman wielding an axe, and screaming that if they ever passed her place again she would come and kill them all. The poor woman was of course mentally unbalanced, and was later removed to a Reception House. But it was a very unnerving experience.

A familiar sight in Gibbes Street was to see "John" Chinaman walking up the street from the Chinese Market Gardens, which were only a little distance away, with a rod or pole resting on his shoulders, and suspended therefrom two brown wickerwork baskets. Sometimes 3 or 4. One basket would be filled with fresh vegetables, and the other with jars of preserved ginger, paper fans, spices, peanuts, silk handkerchiefs, and feather dusters. Some of these Oriental gentlemen wore pigtails, loose fitting garmets, and large hats. One of these happy, smiling pedlars called regularly at No. 26; he was always addressed as "Charlie" by my grandmother and family. If "Charlie" happened to have extra baskets to carry, grandma always allowed him to leave them in the cool of the laneway at the side of the house, (it was always cool there owing to the shade cast by the next cottage being so close), when he had sold all his wares from the first baskets, he would return for the second lot. This would save him going all the way back to the gardens again.

"Charlie" was always grateful for this, and at Christmas or Chinese New Year would always leave some gift such as roast pork, preserved ginger or a silk scarf. My brother and I as tiny children visiting grandma, thought it marvellous fun if "Charlie" put us in his empty baskets and gave us a ride to the front gate.

Well I guess that all these 81 year old terrace houses are just bursting with human interest stories, memories and antidotes, if they could only speak.

The very early pioneers of Rockdale, the farming folk, must have felt sick at heart when the rolling green and sometimes rocky hills and dales were cut up in ribbons for these terraces of houses, as the company who built the Gibbes Street and Farr Street terraces also built them in Bay Street. How would they have felt if they could have foreseen home units, and now the new terrace houses "The Villa Units" rising from their paddocks.

I must say in closing that from some of these small cottages came many of our leading citizens. A boy who was born and reared in one of the Farr Street cottages, William Foster, became the founder of this Society.

Jean W. Faulkner.

SOME NOTES ON KEROSENE LAMPS AND KEROSENE FOR LIGHTING.

By Edward A. Downs.

At our meeting in January last, I read a paper which I had prepared, covering briefly the story of domestic lighting from ancient days through the eras of iron and tin lamps, the later pewter and brass lamps and lanterns, candles and candle-holders, glass lamps, and astral and luster lamps, bringing us to the advent of kerosene lighting a little over a century ago. You will recall that members brought along a fascinating variety of lamps, candle-holders, wick trimmers and flame snuffers; a simple and effective reminder of our relatively recent lighting history was provided by Mr. Napper with a candle mounted in an empty sauce bottle suitably clothed in dripping candle-wax.

It is proposed now to provide a little information about kerosene lamps, with which we have been so familiar. Towards this end, it is helpful to consider some of the refinements of the old whale-oil lamps which influenced the development of kerosene lighting.

The first half of the nineteenth century saw marked activity on the part of inventors interested in lighting. It took a long time for the world to awaken to the fact that the open-wick lamp was not adequate to light the progress of civilisation in other fields. However, in 1783, M. Argand, a Swiss chemist, introduced an epoch-making invention, and, although the old type whale-oil lamps continued to be made for half

a century, Argand's principle was a long step forward in domestic lighting. The lamp wick, instead of being flat or solid and closely woven, was made in the form of a hollow tube which fitted closely into a metal tube extending downward through the bottom of the oil reservoir, allowing a current of air to rise through the centre of the burning wick as well as upon the outside, thus providing an abundant supply of oxygen as the heat from the lamp created a draft, giving a strong light without smoke as the wick carbon was entirely consumed. Gradually, as its merits were recognised, the Argand burner and the glass chimney came into general use.

Argand lamps cast a large shadow due to the location of the fountain head, so around 1810 there was developed the Astral lamp with the same shaped font and a central burner with a shade. A further refinement was the Sincumbra lamp of the 1820's with a wedge shaped font and a spiral wick raiser, which cast very little shadow at all. Solar lamps were similar to Astral lamps, with a saucer-shaped draft-deflector just above the top of the wick.

After the turn of the nineteenth century, another development of the old whale oil lamps was the Rumford lamp with advantages of a wide wick, a wick-raiser, a shade to reflect light down to a table, and an oil font on a level with the top of the wick tube; these lamps were much cheaper than Argand lamps of the period. It is of diversionary historical interest to note that the designer was Count Rumford, who was born Benjamin Thompson in 1753 at Woburn, Massachusetts; he was a Tory and fought for the English in the American Revolution; at the end of the War he was knighted by King George III and later joined the Court of Prince Maximilian of Bavaria; in 1791 he was made a Count of the Holy Roman Empire and chose his title Rumford from the old name of Concord, New Hampshire, his one-time home; he died in France in 1814. Rumford lamps were mostly of English and French manufacture.

Moderator lamps were the most popular of all costly pre-kerosene lamps, the flow of oil from the font to the wick being controlled by a tube of small diameter. Oil was forced into the tube by a large spring in the base, attached to a piston. Moderator lamps were identified by the large key in the base of the burner, to wind up the compressing spring. The wick adjusting button was smaller and higher on the opposite side of the burner.

A somewhat similar and efficient lamp of the period was the Carcel lamp, a French patent of 1800 originally, which had a spring-driven pump to deliver oil from the font to the top of the burner. People were not so technically minded in those days and tended to keep clear of these mechanised lamps, although they provided great improvements in lighting.

Oleostatic lamps were subsequently developed, providing a non-mechanical method of supplying oil to the wick, on the hydraulic principle that liquids balance in a U-shaped tube according to their specific gravities, so a high specific gravity liquid was placed in one

tube arm, and lighting oil was placed in the other arm which had a greater diameter. Although there was nothing to get out of order, they were considered rather complicated and did not become very popular.

These improvements to the whale oil lamp were only an important few of the hundreds of developments during the half-century prior to the advent of kerosene lighting.

The kerosene lamp is the best oil-burning lighting device the world has known. As early as 1818, a patent was granted in England to a Sir Thomas Cochrane for street lamps burning a bituminous substance known as spirit of tar. However, it was not until 1850 that a Scotsman named James Young, patented an efficient method for extracting liquid hydro-carbons from coal and shale, and resulted in the distilling commercially of large quantities of oil from roasted shale.

At the time Colza oil, a vegetable derivative obtained from the wild cauliflower, was in common use as a lighting oil, as was Camphene, a dangerous mixture of turpentine and alcohol. However, Colza remained the chief luminant during the transition from the whale oil to the kerosene eras of lighting.

In Berlin, a fellow named Stobwasser in 1852 had introduced his Solar Oil Argand Burner for use with photogene, an oil prepared at Hamburg by distilling coal, as well as a flat-wick burner for the oil obtained from lignite. This burner was soon adapted for burning shale oil and was largely manufactured by Laidlaw and Son for Young's Paraffin Light and Mineral Oil Company.

In 1859, an oil strike by famed Colonel Drake at Titusville, Pennsylvania, changed the whole lighting scene. In the United States some fifty small refineries were already distilling kerosene from rock oil skimmed from ponds, and by 1866 there were 194 distilleries in that country with an output of 28,000,000 gallons. Within two years of Drake's discovery, barrelled oil was being shipped across the world, and much of this new oil, as kerosene, was burned in the old whale oil lamps.

Prior to 1859 the only lamps used in England and America, specifically made for burning kerosene, were imported from Vienna, but in that year no fewer than forty patents were issued in the United States for kerosene or petroleum lamps, burners and appliances. We do not know who invented the common kerosene burner, but the development of a burner with a flat wick, a spur turn-up, and a dome-shaped deflector with a chimney eventually became practicable, with the draft deflector the important feature of the kerosene burner. In the 1860's solid round wicks were used in nearly all hand lamps, which had no wick turn-ups and could be tilted and carelessly handled with comparative safety. The new kerosene lamps were top-heavy and chimneys were easily broken, so burners were patented for use without chimneys, such as the common Danforth's Atmospheric Coal Burner.

The Hitchcock lamp was the latest lighting device a century ago, with a flat wick and without a chimney, having a spring-driven blower to provide the necessary draft. A lamp of this type had been patented in England as early as the 1840's, and in the United States in the 1860's with the availability of kerosene. These patents were acquired by Robert Hitchcock of Waterton, New York, and Hitchcock lamps were manufactured and sold well into the Twentieth Century as late as the 1930's. Outwardly they resemble the also well-known Rochester lamps which originated in the 1890's, but have flat wicks and are much heavier.

Meanwhile in England, J. & J. Hinks in 1865 obtained a patent for a popular duplex burner with two wicks in tubular holders to provide a dual flame; to carry this principle further, additional wicks provided circular, elliptical or other shapes of flame.

Designs developed of varying technical styles and complexities, most of the later improvements being of American origin. The flat wick burners gradually became more common and cheaper, with hinged cones for easy wick-trimming. American burners were made of thinner metal than the English burners to minimise the conduction of heat to the reservoir. The Moderator and Carcel principles of earlier fixed oil lamps were adapted to kerosene lamps in their development, and an added improvement was the provision of a porcelain cylinder, so placed to become heated and thus raise the air temperature at the cone for more efficient lighting.

Kerosene lamps in Australia were for many decades imported mostly from England and America, notably the well known Miller and Juno lamps, although cheap general-purpose lamps have been made in this country. Significantly, most of the better quality lamps found in antique shops appear to be of American origin.

Our older members may recall some of the earlier brands of kerosene for lighting, imported from the United States, notably "Home Light" of the Empire Refining Company of New York, and the "Diamond" and "Evening Star" brands. After the turn of the century most of the imported kerosene was marketed in Australia by the Colonial Oil Company - a subsidiary of the Standard Oil Company of the U. S. A. with brands "Snow Flake" and "White Rose", and the Shell Transport and Trading Company of Britain with the brand "Rising Sun", a kerosene from Russia, whilst "Excelsior" kerosene was marketed by the American and Oriental Export Petroleum Company. We all recall that kerosene prior to World War 11 was contained in tins holding five U. S. gallons - 4.16 Imperial gallons - packed two tins per case. Empty tins were used for a variety of purposes, ranging from farmers' buckets with the provision of wire handles, to the makeshift cricket stumps so popular with small boys, whilst the soft pine cases in the hands of amateur carpenters became anything from shelving to henhouses. Marketing procedures have changed, and now a number of oil companies produce kerosene under a variety of brand names all packed in round steel drums.

We should certainly include in this brief story mention of our own production of kerosene. In 1866 oil came on the market from the shale-processing works of the Hartley Kerosene Oil and Paraffin Company at Hartley Vale where, two years later, the Western Kerosene Oil Company also commenced operations. In 1871 these companies merged to form the New South Wales Shale and Oil Company, which closed the retorts and sent the shale to Botany for refining, each ton of shale producing 150 gallons of crude oil, 60% kerosene, marketed under the brand "Comet Oil". There were associated shale oil workings, and a number of dissociated operations here in New South Wales, but that is yet another field of fascinating history.

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