



# ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

53 Bruce Street,  
BEXLEY.  
10th May, 1968.

Dear Friend and Member,

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

Date: Friday Evening next, 17th May, 1968, at 8 p.m.

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

Speaker: Members will be delighted to know that our Guest Speaker will be

MRS. MARIAN O'NEILL

who made such an impact when she first addressed us about 18 months ago.

Supper Roster: Miss J. Noble, Mrs. E. Wright, Miss U. Gettens, Mrs. V. Wilson and Mrs. L. Monk.

Would lady members please bring a plate.

D. H. Sinclair,

PRESIDENT.

R. W. Rathbone,

HON. SECRETARY.

58.4813.

TWO DATES TO REMEMBER.

MONDAY 13th MAY, 1968, at 8 p.m.

Kanyana Room, Hurstville Civic Centre.  
McMahon Street, Hurstville.

Mr. Keast Burke, B.Ec., Consultant in Photography to the Australian National Library in Canberra will present an illustrated lecture of life on the goldfields at Hill End and Gulgong almost a century ago.

Sponsored by the Hurstville Historical Society.

All members are cordially invited to attend.

SATURDAY 25th MAY, 1968.

OUTING TO LIVERPOOL AND BURRAGORANG LOOKOUT.

We have arranged with the Liverpool Historical Society for an inspection of places of historic interest in Liverpool on Saturday, 25th May, 1968, followed by an outing with members of the Liverpool Society to Burragorang Lookout.

This will be our last bus trip until about August and will present an excellent opportunity to meet members of our sister Society.

LEAVING ROCKDALE TOWN HALL at 9 A.M. as usual.  
Fare \$1.50 per person.

If you cannot get to the meeting, ring 58.4813 for a booking.

... Mrs. P. Christison.

First let me describe that part of Rockdale, now known as Fiveways, in the heart of the shopping centre, as it existed some seventy years ago. At this time Frederick Street meandered down from Forest Road, Bexley, crossed the Illawarra Railway on the level, where traffic and pedestrian gates were provided, to junction with Rocky Point Road. East of the railway crossing a level piece of vacant land was enclosed by a rough post and rail fence and bounded on the north by a pair of two-storied brick houses. On the opposite, or southern side of Frederick Street was a long narrow paddock which extended from the railway boundary fence to the Royal Hotel. The St. George Bowling Club established its first rink and premises on this latter portion of land in May 1900.

However, prior to this date there was an elevated platform, and two small dressing rooms adjacent thereto, which had been erected to cater for Saturday night concert parties. Here Mr. Joe Bailey and his good wife Ruby, assisted by at least five other artists, presented a vaudeville show. Two "Sambo" minstrels, with the burnt cork variety of countenance, were seated at either end of the half circle of performers and songsters gathered on the open-air staging, and played accompaniments on their tambourines, or with the vigorous use of hand clappers, as the occasion demanded. They, and the "centre-man", Mr. Joe Bailey in person, enlivened the proceedings between items, by a regular flow of highly amusing patter.

While the first part of the programme was taking place one of the artists came amongst the audience gathered below the stage, rattling a collection box. I never heard how much was collected, but I guess it was mostly threepences and sixpences that were contributed, the children, presumably, gave their pennies or half-pennies, although this is somewhat of a moot point. Then came interval, and the kids scampered across the roadways to Bay Street and Mrs. Croft's corner bakery and lolly shop. This dear old lady was known throughout the district for her unstinting generosity to all children, and, as she dispensed with the use of scales for weighing the penny bags of lollies, straight from the jar, she had the whole school population as customers. One group ran from Kogarah and these youngsters had found, on a trial and error basis, that two bags at a ha'penny each contained more lollies than one at a penny. What Mrs. Croft made in profit on the sale of sweets to Juveniles in those now far off days is a matter for serious conjecture.

Returning to the outdoor theatre most of the children and teenagers, regardless of splinters, sat on the top rail of the fence as the few hardwood seats placed in front of the stage were taken over by the adults. It was a relief to get down off that rail as our "botties" felt a bit sore. After the interval, with everyone chewing or smoking to their heart's content, a farce was enacted on the stage. At times, however, a sob-story brought tears to the eyes of the beholders, whilst occasionally a dramatic show was presented with plenty of pistol shooting to enliven both the act and the audience.

At 11 p.m. or thereabouts the concert ended and all folk wended their way homewards, walking of course. Some people had to negotiate bush tracks through tea-tree scrub, to gain the wilds of Bexley, guiding their course by hurricane lamps. These weekly shows held on Saturday nights, in addition to



late shopping facilities and the music of the brass bands and the band of the Salvation Army, created a most pleasant interlude. I often wonder, with all the culture and conveniences of today, are people as friendly and as happy as we were at the turn of the century.

THE WEST BOTANY STREET WESLEYAN CHURCH, ROCKDALE.

... Gifford Eardley.

It has been my special privilege to scan through the pages of an ancient exercise book, now decidedly the worse for wear, which fulfilled the functions of a Minute Book detailing the actions of the Trustees of the West Botany Street Wesleyan Church between the years 1885 and 1897. The original title page and portion of the front cover of this book provided nutritious fodder at one period for voracious white-ants, but fortunately sufficient substance remained, at April 1916, for a copy to be made which has been set out as follows.

"To all whom it may concern.

The first leaf of this Minute Book was damaged by incets and worn out. to preserve the Minute I rewrote it and fixed the first leaves up that it may be handed on intact. I certify that this is a correct copy of Minute that was destroyed.

Eli Godfrey.

who was first secretary to the Trust and held that office for over 25 years. 30 anniversary. April 9. 1916."

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On the copy of the original page we read "Minutes of First Trustee Meeting Held in School Rooms. Rockdale. November 28th, 1885. to form Trust and to take steps towards the erection of a Church in West Botany Street. Reverend J. Bowes in the chair. Eleven persons had been previously nominated. Nine were present. - Mr. Bowmer Senior. Mr. Andrews. Mr. W. Napper. Eli Godfrey. The other two not being their but was duly enrolled, all being duly proclaimed trustees.

It was moved by Mr. Andrews, seconded by Mr. Bowmer, Senior, That Eli Godfrey be secretary to Trust. Carried.

Moved by Mr. Bowmer, seconded by Mr. R. Goode, That Mr. Andrews be treasurer to the Trust. Carried."

On Page 3 of the Minute Book it is to be noted that "The Trustees desired to return their Sincere and hearty thanks to Mr. Foolks for the Generous Gift of a site for the Church at West Botany Street, and that the secretary be instructed to write and Convey to Mr. Foolks the thanks of the Trustees for his Splendid Gift. Also to convey to Mr. Horsey Hearty thanks who so kindly consented to the site being on his leasehold."

It was recommended and carried by the meeting "That a five-feet sawn paling fence be at once placed on either side and at back of the site." Mr. Bowmer moved, seconded by Mr. R. Goode, "That a Brick Church on Stone foundation, covered by slate, be built on the site." Carried.

Subsequent motions carried at the meeting were as follows:-

"That the inside measurements of the church be 22 feet by 36 feet."

"That the cost should be about £500."

"That the bricks used should be the best sandstock."

"That Mr. Andrews prepare plans and specifications for the proposed church."

"That said plans and specifications be submitted to the inspection of the Trustees on Saturday next, December 5th, 1885."

The plans and specifications were inspected and accepted on the appointed day. It was further moved that the inside of the new church be plastered, stuccoed, and painted. However, at the Trustee Meeting held at Rockdale, on December 25th, 1885, it was mentioned "That some little difficulty existed in reference to Conveyance. Mr. Fooks wished it not to be proceeded with at present, because of private Complications". Mr. Bowmer and Mr. Bowmer were delegated to wait on Mr. Fooks and ask him "to allow the Conveyance of Church Site to be made at once, as it might interfere with the building being commenced". Tenders had meanwhile been called for the erection of the church and that of Messrs. E. & J. Godfrey was accepted for £497. Negotiations for a loan of £400 were made with Mr. Lipman to carry out and finish the work of the church.

At the Trustee Meeting held on March 20th, 1886, it was moved "That a pickett fence with double gates be erected in front of the church and that closets be erected". These undertakings "to be left in the hands of Mr. Andrews and Eli Godfrey. It was further moved that "Seats were also to be got for church similar to those in Rockdale School. Length to be nine feet so as to allow a 4 feet aisle". Another essential requirement was the purchase of "Four 2 light burner lamps". Then came the need "for a permanent shed at the rear of the church, to be covered with iron and side panelled in". (In 1896 this small shed came into use as an annexe to the Sunday School). The varnishing of the church seats was entrusted to Mr. Andrews who had offered to varnish them for two shillings each.

On May 3rd, 1886, it was agreed "that the Church be opened on June 6th. It being a mistake it was altered to May 30th". It was moved "that the minister to officiate on that occasion be left to Mr. Parker. A Public Tea be provided on Wednesday 9th June, 1886, with tickets for admission at 1/6 for adults and 1/- for children under 12." It was also proposed by Mr. Goode, seconded by Mr. Bowmer "That a organ be got, the choice of an instrument be left to Mr. Parker, Mr. Andrews, and Eli Godfrey." Carried. The choice of a Bible and Hymn Book was left to Mr. Goode and Mr. B. Bowmer whilst the carpet, table and chair became the responsibility of Mr. Napper. Eli Godfrey had to see to the matting for the aisle.

The Rockdale Wesleyan Church Choir was asked to take charge of the musical part of the opening service at West Botany Street Church. Mr. Bowmer was requested to seek a Steward to look after the Church at a fee of five or six pounds per year. It was also suggested by Mr. Bowmer Senior "that a 12 foot path be made from the gate to the church porch and that a portion each side and along the front, next the fence, be trenched and that shrubs be planted".



And so the West Botany Street Wesleyan Church came into being, serving the spiritual needs of a small semi-rural community, mostly of pioneering stock, settled on the arable but swampy farmlands located about midway between the now populous suburbs of Rockdale and Brighton le Sands. Many of these families were engaged in market gardening, or as poultry keepers, and dairymen, whilst others conducted boiling-down works and odoriferous bone-mills which, unfortunately, functioned in close proximity to the church premises, giving a range of horrible smells which were not greatly appreciated by the congregation, either on Sundays or any other day or night of the week. In their far-sighted wisdom the original trustees set their new church well back from the street alignment, thus making provision for a larger edifice to be erected in the front section of their land if and when required.

The design of the West Botany Street Wesleyan Church was neat and closely followed the style of architecture adopted by non-conformist chapels of the period. The western entrance was guarded by means of a small porch, which had an end gabled roof and a side doorway, the upper portion being fashioned in semi-circular shape. The outer wall of the porch was ornamented by a "blind" recess in the brickwork which also incorporated the upper round-headed, or Norman, arrangement. The western facade was pierced by two long narrow width windows, with round-headed arches, placed one on either side of the central entrance porch. The facade was surmounted by a small brick belfry where provision was made to hang a church bell. However, it is questionable if a bell was ever obtained to call worshippers to chapel, a time-honoured custom frowned upon in certain quarters, whilst in others bells were supposed to have the power of dispersing both impending storms and the ravages of evil spirits. The side walls of the church each accommodated three equally spaced windows, between which the walls were strengthened by shallow brick buttresses. The internal fittings, already detailed, were of good utilitarian pattern, thus sufficing for the needs of the congregation for a great number of years,

The bank depression of the early eighteen-nineties played havoc with the finances of the church, whilst at the same period the white-ants played havoc with the floor joists and floor timbers of the structure. It was decided to relay the floor and saturate the ground beneath with carbolic acid as a deterrent to further termite attack. This work was ably carried out by the indefatigable Eli Godfrey, his fellow trustees enjoining him "to do the best that can be done to clear out the ants and make good the floor". At the Trustee's meeting held on September 7th, 1893, the Bill for labour and materials, at a total cost of £10/3/6 was presented for payment. It was proposed by Mr. R. Goode and seconded by Mr. Napper "That the Bill be paid". The motion was carried but the treasurer stated that there were no funds in hand to pay the Bill, and furthermore suggested that the trustees "pay them from their own pocket, which they did, each one present subscribing. Mr. R. Goode was delegated to wait on absent trustees and solicit donations to the amount required". Fortunately this sad state of affairs did not persist, and in the following year the organ underwent repairs which were most urgently needed. In May 1895 gas was introduced to the district and the trustees decided to introduce gas-lighting for the better illumination of the church. This work was undertaken at a cost of £8/15/-, of which sum the Band of Hope, associated with the church, subscribed £6, much to the delight of the trustees.



One cannot but admire the tenacity of purpose of the comparatively few adherents of the West Botany Street Church in their endeavour to maintain their chapel and property in good repair. It was an uphill battle, but they all felt that their Christian purpose was well worth fighting for. Toward the end of the nineteenth century there was considerable discussion as to the advisability of forming a union with other churches which followed principles to those of the Wesleyan faith. A special meeting of the West Botany Street Church trustees was convened and at the meeting held in the Wesleyan Church Hall at Rockdale, on September 19th, 1896, a motion was carried unanimously "That it is undesirable in the present divided state of opinion in our church, on the subject of Methodist Union, to fix any definite time for organic union with other Methodist Churches". However, by 1901, the union was implemented and the West Botany Street Wesleyan Church became known as the West Botany Street Methodist Church.

### A NEW CHURCH IS BUILT

The work of the church flourished to such an extent that by the nineteen-thirties it became imperative to increase the accommodation, particularly for Sunday School scholars. As the Golden Jubilee of the church was fast approaching it was thought that the time was opportune to establish a new church building and attach it to the existing fabric. To this end the trustees approached Mr. A. B. Hoile, A. R. A. I. A., an Architect of Rockdale, to proceed with the designs and specifications and submit them in due course for approval. Tenders were then called for the erection, Mr. Charles Gray's tender being accepted at a cost of £1,100. The dedication took place on May 2nd, 1936, when the President of the Methodist Conference, the Rev. E. Coplin Thomas conducted the inaugural service. The special ceremony of opening the entrance door of the new church was an honour bestowed on Miss Lily Bowmer.

The new church is most attractive in its general appearance. Its outer walls are laid with mottled face bricks, the joints being deeply raked. Window quoins and other constructional items have been moulded in synthetic stone and add greatly to the effect of the design. The entrance porch is set at the northern end of the western facade where it forms an interesting feature, likewise the small proportioned copper-encased spire which is located above the entrance porch. The roof is covered with Marseilles tiles, of many different shades, thus giving a mottled effect which has been pleasingly mellowed over the intervening years by the action of the sun, the wind, and the rain.

Internally the new structure has been physically linked with the former church facade by means of large "accordian" type folding doors, which can be opened on special occasions to afford the use of the old church in giving additional seating accommodation. A centre aisle is provided and a raised sanctuary platform supports the communion rail and communion table, together with the pulpit and choir seats, the latter appurtenances facing inwards. The communion table rests against a back screen of walnut wood panelling, which has been admirably executed, and looks most effective as it is placed beneath the beautiful western window. The internal walls and ceiling are finished in a "Light Biscuit" shade, which reflects, when the sunshine streams through the stained glass of the windows, a warmth of atmosphere and gay colour.



In memory of the various pioneering families associated with the old church at its inception it is most pleasing to record that a series of four stained glass windows were installed. That on the west facade has a richly coloured cruciform motive and is dedicated as the Pioneer's Memorial Window. Mr. C.W. Napper was chosen to unveil this particular memorial as a representative of one of the oldest of the nearby pioneering families. Side windows of stained glass were also unveiled in memory of the late Emma Bowmer, and the late Elizabeth H. Bowmer, whilst a fourth window of similar decorative type is in memory of Past Teachers and Scholars of the Sunday School, a very pleasing gesture.

The West Botany Street Methodist Church, as it stands in its quiet dignity today, is certainly a picturesque edifice and one that is maintained in immaculate condition. My only personal regret is that it has been thought fit to remove the lovely shrubs and small sized trees which once adorned the entrance path. The beautiful foliage set off the neat arrangement of the church building to perfection. Perhaps some Arbor Day the church ground will be replanted and the architectural merit of this chapel will once again be seen to its best advantage.

In conclusion, grateful acknowledgment is made to my friend, Mr. Albert Matheson, M.B.C., and also to the Trustees of the West Botany Street Methodist Church, for their kindness in making the original minute book of their church available for reference and quotation.

#### THE COAT OF ARMS OF LODGE BEXLEY, NO. 328, U.G.L. OF N.S.W.

... Contributed.

In delving through some old records of Lodge Bexley recently I became interested in the heraldic device incorporated in the Coat-of-Arms, and motto, "GRATA QIES", adopted by that particular masonic organisation which is shortly to celebrate its Golden Jubilee. Research proved that the Coat of Arms, or the major portion thereof, was originally granted to Nicholas Vansittart (1766 - 1851) Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was created First Baron of Bexley on March 1st, 1823. His Heraldic escutcheon was recorded as follows:- "Falcon upon two crosses - pattee ar, demi, eagle complex sa wings elevated - Small centre widening to the end. Silver color with black motto "GRATIS QIES". which may be translated as "WELCOME REST".

The ancient English village of Bexley is situated on the banks of the River Cray, a small tributary of the Thames, in the extreme north-western corner of the beautiful County of Kent. The place-name Bexley was transmitted to the location of the original Sylvester's Farm near King's Grove, New South Wales, by James Chandler, when he purchased this property from Thomas Sylvester on March 26th, 1822. Chandler later obtained a Government Grant of 1200 acres of land which spread over the rocky valleys and forested hill slopes southwards to boundaries now contained within the suburbs of Bexley, Kogarah, North Bexley, and Rockdale. This huge undeveloped area was utilised for cattle agistment and also for timber cutting and firewood purposes.

Nicholas Vansittart was born on April 29th, 1766, in Old Burlington St., London, the fifth son of Henry Vansittart (1732-1770) Governor of Bengal,



by Amelia, daughter of Nicholas Morse, Governor of Madrass. On the latter's father being lost at sea in 1770, young Nicholas was placed under the guardianship of his uncle, Sir Robert Falk and Arthur Vansittart. He was educated by Mr. Gilfrie's School at Cheam at Christ Church, Oxford, where he matriculated on March 29th, 1784, and graduated B. A. 1787, and M. A. in 1791.

He became a student of Lincoln's Inn on April 21st, 1788, and was called to the Bar on May 26th, 1791, going to the Northern circuit for about a year, but he never devoted himself to the profession. He was elected a teacher of Lincolnshire Inn on November 12th, 1812. In London he at first associated with somewhat gay fashionable circles but became interested in politics, in support of Pitt's Government, and eventually entered Parliament.

In course of time he became Secretary to the Treasury, confining himself in the debates in the House mainly to financial subjects. Lord Liverpool wrote him on December 14th, 1822, re the arrangement of Cabinet and offering him Chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancaster and a seat in Cabinet. He accepted this arrangement without hesitation, and on March 1st, 1823, was created Baron Bexley, of Bexley in Kent, and awarded a pension of £3,000 per annum. He died on February 8th, 1851 at Foot's Cray in Kent, when the peerage became extinct.

It is pleasing to note that this heraldic link with Nicholas Vansittart and the ancient English village of Bexley is maintained to this day on letterheads dealing with the affairs of Lodge Bexley, No. 328, of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales.

#### "HEATHCOTE HALL", HEATHCOTE.

If, when driving through Heathcote, one is able to glance over to the eastern side, a tall tower will be noticed rising amongst trees on a gentle slope in the "Bottle Forest" area. This is "Heathcote Hall", and dates from 1883.

Some 50 acres of freehold ground, now known as the "Heathcote Hall Estate" - although it has of recent years been subdivided - was purchased in 1883 by Mr. Isaac Harber, a wealthy brickmaster of that period. Like many other wealthy merchants of those days, he decided to build himself a home on English manorial lines. It was constructed of sandstone blocks, the interior cedar-lined, with tall-ceilinged rooms, paved verandahs around the front ground floor, and wrought-iron balconies above. Over all reared the tall "observation" tower, a landmark for many miles around. It was what it purported to be - the wealthy home of a wealthy owner.

Unfortunately, Isaac Harber had hardly installed himself in his opulent "Hall" when financial disaster overtook him, for he had made heavy losses in connection with the building of the Imperial Arcade, Sydney. As a result of this misfortune he had to abandon Heathcote Hall for the benefit of his creditors, but the mortgagees into whose hands the property fell did not find the estate a disposable proposition.

New South Wales was then in the throes of the temporary financial collapse that culminated in the bank smashes of 1892. Unable to sell the

property at anything approaching its value, the Financial Institution, which had become its possessor, made arrangements with George Adams of Tattersall fame, to dispose of it by lottery. The consultation was issued from Brisbane and Heathcote Hall was made the first prize at a value of £7,000.

The winning ticket was held by Mr. S. Gillett, a Sydney builder of those days. He retained ownership for five years and then sold the whole estate for very much less than its valuation. A mansion and park at Heathcote before the advent of the motorcar, and with only one-train-a-day service, was not a good proposition for any city contractor struggling through the competitive times of the 1890s.

Early in 1901, Mr. E. R. Brown purchased the Hall, retiring there to end the few short months of life which leading Sydney medical men had advised was left to him. However, Mr. Brown confounded his medical advisers and lived there until he died about 1923.

Since then, the stately Hall has had a variety of tenants. In the depression years it is said to have been a "squatters' camp"; and during the years of the 1939-45 war it was not much better; ugly fibro additions were used to enclose verandahs and so convert it into "flats"; and it became a general dumping yard for scrap collections. The present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Farrelly, have removed all the unsightly fibro and cleaned up the garden as far as possible, and are now turning their attention to renovating the old Hall - but it is a long and extremely costly business and finances are somewhat limited. They do hope, however, to restore both house and garden as far as possible to their original condition.

With an old house such as this, built many years ago, various stories are bound to be associated with it. During World War 1 it was stated that a "German spy" used to occupy the tower at certain stated times to signal to a German naval raider. One tale-teller some years ago even knew the name of the "spy" - "a German bloke named Braun - but they never caught him - he got away in time". Poor innocent Mr. E. R. Brown, who lived there throughout World War 1 ! A similar story was told of this 2nd War - the writer was quite seriously informed that a "fifth columnist" had been caught while signalling with a torch to a ship at sea ! Ghost stories and apocryphal stories always make an old home more interesting.

. . . . .  
(The basic facts concerning "Heathcote Hall" were obtained from an advertising leaflet circulating about 1924 when the Heathcote Hall Estate was first subdivided: my thanks to Mr. Philip Geeves, R. A. H. S., for making a copy of the leaflet available to me . . . . Ed.)

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Mrs. M. Hutton-Neve.  
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