



GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

53 Bruce Street,
BEXLEY.

13th September, 1968.

Dear Friend and Member,

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

Date: Friday Evening Next, 20th September, 1968, at 8 p.m.

Place: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Rockdale.

Guest Speaker: Mr. C. W. Napper, Senior Vice President, will speak on the Early History of The Rockdale Methodist Church.

This will be followed by a Members' Slide Night and all members are asked to bring along 12 of their best coloured slides - either of outings conducted by the Society or of other historical interest.

D. H. Sinclair.
President.

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

AN APOLOGY.

In the last issue of our Bulletin there appeared a most informative article entitled "John Murphy of 'Leeholme', Bexley, and The Horse Buses". This was the work of Mrs. Jean Faulkner whose name was unfortunately omitted from the script. We offer our sincere apologies to Mrs. Faulkner for this oversight.

RAFFLE FOR BARK PAINTING.

Remember, Friday 18th October, is the Deadline for tickets for the Raffle of a most attractive Bark Painting to aid our Publishing Fund. Please return your book as soon as convenient.

SUPPER ROSTER.

Mrs. Eardley and Mrs. Callister, Miss Dunsmore, Miss Cheetham and Mrs. Monk.

BOOKS FOR SALE.

We still have on hand copies of the Society's Three Publications - "The Early History of the Wolli Creek Valley", "The Kogarah-Sans Souci Tramway", and "Rockdale to Lady Robinson's Beach, each priced at 65c. We are anxious to clear these stocks so that we can proceed with Book 4. Have you bought your copy?

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LAND COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ILLAWARRA AND SYDNEY IN PIONEER DAYS.

.... Vincent M. Saunders.

A question which has exercised the minds of some local residents and others over the years concerns the period, quantity and type of traffic which travelled between the Illawarra District and Sydney Town, particularly the St. George District, in pioneer times.

It is known that Surveyor-General Mitchell's, the Wollongong or Illawarra Road, was commenced at Arncliffe in 1843 and it has also been frequently stated that this road was the earliest laid through the St. George district for the conveyance of traffic between Wollongong and Sydney and that the tavern built for Thomas Kelsey on the original Wollongong Road, for instance, was a favourite spot for the wagon-teams and their drivers traversing this route, for many years. Is this latter statement true?

To answer this, it is first of all necessary to get the matter into its true perspective and to be aware that the first regular connection by road was established when mail had to be sent to the Illawarra from Sydney. In April 1834, a carrier on horseback was drowned on the journey from Campbelltown to Wollongong via Appin, when the mail was returned for conveyance to the steamers. This was discontinued after a while and again resumed on horseback.

In 1841 an advertisement stated that a coach would run to Wollongong and the fare from Sydney to Wollongong would be 18/- per person.

Later the press complained that the mode of performing the journey to Wollongong was injurious to the promising district of Illawarra in "consequence of the uncertainty of steamer communication and the withdrawal of the mail coach from Campbelltown to Wollongong." The mail which had become a daily one had again to be carried on horseback (the mail coach service was often disrupted because of flooded rivers and the absence of adequate bridges.)

It was at this stage that Surveyor-General Mitchell furnished a report and surveyed a more direct route to the Illawarra in May 1843. This route considerably shortened the journey between Sydney and the Illawarra (the distance between Sydney and Wollongong was about 35 miles but via the circuitous route via Appin was about 70 miles) and as we know commenced near the dam causeway and proceeded to Lugarno at Georges River where a punt (installed in 1843) would convey the traffic to the Illawarra via a crossing at Woronora River.

Mitchell wanted the approaches to the Woronora crossing sufficiently wide to make it possible for carts but the Governor (Gipps) considered that if the lines were made practicable for horsemen it would meet the needs of the case.

Mitchell's son, Roderick, was directed to the abovementioned site (1843) in the same year as the punt was installed, with instructions to measure and survey the crossing at and about the Woronora River (the site of the ford and the connecting remnants of the roads may still be seen near Engadine) and the word "SABUGAL" was marked by Major Mitchell on his son's

field record as this area apparently reminded him of a similar ford with accompanying physical features at SABUGAL in Portugal. Mitchell, when in Portugal, was serving in a campaign under the Duke of Wellington and was instructed to compile a series of plans on lines of communication which apparently included SABUGAL.

At this time (1843) the first ferryman of the ferry established at Lugarno was appointed Charles Rowan, and Mitchell reported in 1844 that the progress of the convict gang between Bottle Forest (now Heathcote) to the top of the Bulli mountain was very rapid. Surveyor Darke was in charge of the work of clearing between these two points.

It was stated in the S. M. Herald (24/8/1847) that the road from Wollongong to Sydney had been completed but the official version on this matter was somewhat different to the practical results.

Little traffic passed along Mitchell's line of road. The press stated that many days and sometimes weeks went by without a single person being seen on the road. In 1847 the punt at Lugarno was wrecked.

The puntman, Charles Rowan wrote to the press stating that he had no means of repairing the punt and that he would not be able to subsist for want of traffic. The punt was removed in 1848.

The Governor, Sir Charles Fitzroy, received a deputation in 1848 to complete Sir Thomas Mitchell's line of road and in 1849 the punt was again in operation.

In 1850, complaints were again made concerning the need for a practicable road from Wollongong to Sydney. Fat cattle, being driven to market, were being delayed for days in flood time and in some cases had to return to Illawarra.

The first official admission that all was not well with the road came from a notice in the Government Gazette of 10/2/1852 when it was stated that the new line of road from the Goerges River punt to the head of the Woronora had still to be opened. In fact the road was still under construction in 1856 but not continuously, and a press report in 1870 stated that a settlement formed at Bottle Forest years earlier had been abandoned because, without a proper road the settlers could not secure a living.

Factors which no doubt played a part in this unsatisfactory progress were the cessation of the transportation of convicts to N.S.W. from 1840 and the Gold Rush from 1851.

However, the opening of the Sydney-Campbelltown railway in 1858 proved a boon to the Illawarra district as the overland traffic between the Illawarra and Campbelltown greatly increased and the coaches continued to run but on more sophisticated roads over this route until the construction of the railway to Illawarra in 1887. Many persons travelled on horseback or on the mail cart to avoid the sea trip at that time.

Meanwhile, over the years several Passes had been discovered, used and improved on the steep face of the range on the seaward side and in 1846

Surveyor F. C. Bolton was asked to report on the three lines - Mt. Keira, Rixon's Pass and Bulli (Westmacott's) Pass - he opted for the latter. (The attempts devising an adequate road over the ranges would be a subject for an article in itself).

In the same year (1864) Surveyor S. Parkinson surveyed a new line from the Georges River, this time from Tom Ugly's Point. It was mainly a new road which joined the old road (Mitchell's) at Bottle Forest but finally descended to the coast at Stanwell Park.

On 7th November, 1864 about 200 people assembled at Tom Ugly's Point to witness the inauguration of the new punt service at that point and Thomas Holt, politician and benefactor, who had large holdings on the southern side of Georges River, promised an annual donation of £30 towards the working of the punt.

A press report in 1868 stated that the road to Sydney (via Bulli Pass) (Mitchell's line of road) had been opened for use by horsemen for sometime and during the previous week a resident had driven a vehicle to the top of Bulli Pass and down again, which occasion was said to be the first on which a wheeled vehicle had used the road.

In 1870, the press reported that the Legislative Assembly had voted the sum of £400 towards the formation of a road from the punt (Tom Ugly's) at Georges River to a point on Bulli mountain.

The road was soon constructed and according to the Illustrated Sydney News of 15th May, 1871, some travellers journeyed over the road in a dog cart in April 1871. Their vehicle was said to have been the first to travel the whole distance from Sydney to Wollongong on that road. This journey, of course, was via Rocky Point Road and Kogarah Road (now Princes Highway) and constructed about 1864 through Arncliffe Hill.

This no doubt augmented the fortunes of the Gardener's Arms Hotel (1866) and the Tempe Family Hotel (1870) both hotels being situated on Rocky Point Road. (the present bridge over Georges River at Tom Ugly's Point was built in 1929).

And so it would appear that the vehicular traffic which passed between Sydney and Wollongong via the Lugarno ferry was to all intents and purposes, non existent, the original road to Wollongong being used as a horsemen's track probably used by drovers occasionally driving their herd of cattle to the Sydney market up to 1858 as the shortest land route then available.

However, since the coming of the motor car in the early years of this century, many sections of Mitchell's old road have been revived and even neglected sections will soon come into their own with the rapid expansion of the present day Sydney metropolis.

ROCKY POINT ROAD

..... by Philip Geeves, F.R.A.H.S., District Historian.

The majority of our pioneers made their homes along the Rocky Point Road. At the time of which we are speaking this road was primitive and often dangerous. The Rocky Point Road ran from Cooks River Dam to Rocky Point, or Sans Souci as we call it today. It was an extension of the Cooks River Road from Newtown, which was then the principal shopping and trading centre of the entire Botany Bay District. As the traveller crossed the Dam into St. George, he paid toll at the toll bar 150 yards from Mr. Spark's old Bathing House and a little further along he came to the junction of the Rocky Point and Muddy Creek (now West Botany Street) Roads. From this junction the road to Rocky Point began to rise steeply up Arncliffe Hill, known to our pioneers as Cobbler's Pinch. After negotiating the rocky brow of the hill the road ran down sharply to a natural stream which crossed it near the present site of Spring Street, Banksia, and continued across swampy ground in what is now the vicinity of Ricketts & Thorp's factory. Here the road surface was mainly corduroy track, for it skirted an extensive swamp between the present site of the Town Hall and the corner of Bay St. Further on was another creek crossing close to Skidmore's Farm where Muddy Creek or Black Creek was often impassable after rain.

It is no exaggeration to say that the early roads through the district were deterrents to the traveller.

In 1871 a traveller passed along Rocky Point Road and has left us this description.

"After passing Cooks River Dam, for a mile or so, I pity a traveller's poor bones if he proceeds faster than at a slow walk - but afterwards the road is tolerably good. It appears that the part of the road just described is a kind of "no man's land" which partially accounts for its ill conditioned state. Beyond this we come upon numbers of market gardens and nestling among them a neat well-kept nursery called "Rosevale" which, when we passed, reminded me of a rich Brussels carpet, a patch of dahlias as a centre piece with their many varieties of colour, being its chief attraction."

When the railway came to Rockdale in 1884, one reporter described our town - such as it was - as "a pretty little village".

If we could go back in time and walk the rutted, dusty length of Rocky Point Road from Moorefield to Arncliffe, this is what we would have seen had we confined our observations to the eastern side of the road. From the boundary fence of Peter Moore's estate "Moorefield" - the fence that ultimately became President Avenue - we would have made downhill to Skidmore's Bridge which was built in 1862 and was the first improvement of its kind provided from Government funds in the district. It was merely called Skidmore's Bridge because it was adjacent to Frederick Skidmore's farmlet. On the eastern side of the road the principal families were those of Samuel and John Schofield, gardeners, Joseph Twiss, Engineer, and Thomas Mascord, gardener and orchardist. No doubt many of you are

familiar with the old Mascord home which still stands in Chandler Avenue but faces towards Rocky Point Road. In rear of these properties lay the Patmore Swamp, so called after the original grantee of Moorefield, Patrick Moore, who received this land from Governor Macquarie. This swamp, once a paradise for sportsmen who came there to shoot the abundance of water birds, was a continuing problem to many Councils over the years. After heavy rain the swamp came right up to the lower levels of Bay Street and was one immense sheet of water from that point to Moorefield. Boats could be rowed on it: indeed, James Beehag's granddaughter informed me that her mother once fell out of a boat in the vicinity of what was previously James Street - named, of course, for James Beehag, the original proprietor of the land thereabouts.

But we have strayed from our subject let us return to Rocky Point Road. Crossing the bridge near Skidmore's Farm we would have encountered the homes of two professional men living near Dr. Lofberg's residence; they were James Gannon, barrister, of "Kent Villa" and William Rudolph Clay, Rockdale's first doctor, whose home was "Montreux". James Gannon was a relative of Michael Gannon, the onetime proprietor of much of present day Hurstville, then known as Gannon's Forest.

Then came a small shop kept by John Andrews, draper, but cared usually in charge of his wife. It was Mr. Andrews who conducted Rockdale's first school in the Wesleyan Chapel built on James Beehag's land and from which Chapel Street took its name. As we proceeded past Andrews' we would have passed Mr. Bryant's saddlery, F. and A. Moir, timber merchants, several small shops and the branch of the Australian Joint Stock Bank, which closed its doors in the great bank crash of the 1890's. Speaking of banks, the position on the corner of Bay Street and Rocky Point Road now occupied by the Bank of N.S.W. was originally church land, part of the Wesleyan's gift from James Beehag and two large trees stood on the very corner. In rear of the trees, fronting Rocky Point Road, was an ironmongery kept by Mr. Harry Jobbins and nearby on the Bay Street frontage, was the greengrocery of Benjamin Bowmer. Other pioneer businessmen on this eastern side of Rocky Point Road were Charles Barsby, draper and boot importer, who came to Sydney from Victoria, opened a business in Hurstville and later conducted two shops at Kogarah and Rockdale. His Kogarah premises are now occupied by Turner Bros. Rockdale's first Chemist was T.P. Swindale; his business later passed to Oscar Lofberg.

Bay Street was and still is the bisector of Rockdale township. In an age when most people and even doctors fondly believed that all ills could be cured by sea bathing and ozone, Bay Street carried much more traffic than Rocky Point Road because it led directly to the beach. This easy access enabled Rockdale to leap ahead of Kogarah in popularity, principally as a holiday resort, but also as a residential area. This traffic was, of course, the direct result of Thomas Saywell's enterprises at New Brighton, Lady Robinson's Beach - or Brighton le Sands as he later called this imaginative venture.

Saywell's tram was the link between Rockdale Station and Lady Robinson's Beach . . . but before the tram tracks could be laid Bay Street had to be made. From the beach front to Farr Street it was little better

than a chain of ponds; between Farr Street and the station there was a small mountain of rock, one of the features that prompted Mary Ann Geeves, when requested to give the settlement an official title, to coin the descriptive name of "Rockdale" a dale surrounded by rocky outcrops. When this rock was excavated at Thomas Saywell's expense, the spoil was dumped into the marshland known as Frog Hollow which extended along the eastern side of Rocky Point Road, as we mentioned, from the corner of Bay Street almost to Bryant Street. In places this water lay more than a foot deep and supported a lush growth of bulrushes. In rear of the swamp were age old mahoganies, about 100 feet high. Frog Hollow was well named because, when night fell the residents of this little hamlet were regaled with a croaking chorus which was louder than that in "The Frogs" of Aristophanes. Even after the swamp was filled in and shops were built along the eastern side of the road, the frogs remained.

Apart from the few shops, the principal landmark between Bay Street and Bryant Street was the Grand Hotel, of which Mr. Charles W. Linke was minehost. It was the second hotel in Rockdale, the first being John Keats' Royal Hotel. In rear of the Grand and extending to Bryant Street was Bray's Paddock. The Brays were indeed a pioneer family; William and Walter Bray were both builders and William Bray Jnr. was a van proprietor. Their neighbour and relative was Mr. William Matheson. Mr. Bert Matheson who did so much for the Boy Scout Movement in this district is a grandson of Mr. Bray.

The street which now bears the name of Mr. E. J. C. Bryant was once the boundary fence of Conrad Frank's garden and orchard. I am reliably informed by some schoolboys who tasted them eighty years ago that Frank's peaches were the finest in the district particularly when they were stolen, forbidden fruit always being sweeter.

Adjoining Frank's to the north was Iliffe's "Rosevale" nursery which was mentioned earlier.

The first name for Bestic Street was Goode's Road, so called after Richard Goode whose market garden was nearby. This was a most interesting thoroughfare which could have become the focal point of Rockdale. In 1882 whilst the railway was still being built, there was some doubt as to where the stations would be located. The plan was to space them as evenly as possible having regard to the existing hamlets along the route - although, with the possible exception of Hurstville, there were no centralised communities of any significant size. By May 1882 the location of Arncliffe station was certain; it was dictated by the great tunnel which is now an open cutting on the southern side of Arncliffe village. But the exact position of Rockdale Station was very much in doubt. Thomas Saywell, with his wealth and connections, kept himself abreast of developments. When he suspected that the station might be placed near what is now Bestic Street and was then Goode's Road, he approached Council in January 1883 to open this thoroughfare all the way to the beach, undertaking to contribute a substantial sum towards the cost of the work. No doubt he envisaged his tramway taking this route from the new station to his planned holiday resort at Lady Robinson's Beach. The plan came to nothing, however, for the Rockdale station was eventually pegged out further south on Yeoman Geeves' property

and Saywell was then committed to the infinitely greater expense of cutting down the great rocky barrier in Bay Street to strike the levels for his tramway. Consequently Goode's Road remained in its pristine state.

At the northern corner of Goode's Road and Rocky Point Road was Peter Hermann's garden, noted for its delicious strawberries. This portion of Bestic Street was often called Hermann's Road in the early records.

Adjoining Herrmann's property was Philipp Muhlhausen's orchard. Like the Franks, Reuters and Herrmanns, the Muhlhausens were German migrants. The children of our pioneers divided their attention between Frank's peaches and Muhlhausen's quinces in their quest for vitamin C. At Frank's it was a question of climbing a fence but Muhlhausen's orchard could be entered much more adventurously by crawling through a subterranean drain which ran beneath Rocky Point Road. However, Mr. Muhlhausen knew about the larcenous tendencies of boys. His first line of defence was a pet parrot which screamed at the approach of strangers. Muhlhausen himself also kept a shotgun which he loaded with a mixture of shot and saltpetre ... and his third protection was his son Fred, a giant of a man who could lift two boys across his outstretched arms.

Next to Muhlhausen's was William Lawrence's paddock which ran to the alignment of Spring Street. At the northern corner of Spring Street was Alfred Vincent's nursery on the lower slopes of Arncliffe Hill and next to it the charming residence, still standing "Elysian", the home of successful printer H. W. McKern.

But we have come far enough. The road has been rough and dusty and we are tired from climbing Arncliffe Hill. It is fortunate that we are right at the door of Mrs. Clune's well-named hostelry, "Botany View".

HENRY KINSELA - GENTLEMAN

..... based on some recollections of Mrs. A. B. Christison.

In the mid 1880's Henry Kinsela took up 27 acres of timbered land at the junction of Forest and Stoney Creek Roads. Here he built a gracious two-storied mansion "Kinsel Grove", which faced east with a delightful view of Botany Bay. The entrance gates were in Forest Road and a curved driveway brought one to the front steps. The wide door opened into a spacious hall, on the left of which was Kinsela's study. Here he spent most of his time guarded by a huge dog. This dog was very friendly to friends but always barred the way to strangers. The grounds were divided into three sections. These surroundings of the house were laid out in lawns and gardens. Here a lot of entertaining took place always with a brass band in attendance. From the back of the house to what is now Highworth Avenue were the coach house (later to become a bakery), groom's residence, stables and a paddock for the horses. A little distance from the front of the house and running to the junction of the two roads was a park like enclosure where shady gums and English trees grew and several deer grazed.

Apart from his interest in his father's funeral business, Kinsela owned huge areas of real estate. He took an intimate interest in his church giving considerable financial assistance to St. Georges Church at Hurstville as well as a large and inspiring stained glass window which he presented in 1889. He was one of the prime movers in the founding of Christ Church at Bexley which also he richly endowed.

Although he was handicapped with a practically useless right arm, he was a particularly keen sportsman. As well as deer, he kept at "Kinsel Grove" kangaroos, wallabies, emus, hares and a string of well known racehorses. He was also the owner of a remarkable trotting stallion "King Harold" and three or four beautiful Hungarian ponies. He was a frequent exhibitor at the Royal Show and won many prizes.

It is interesting to note that in spite of his crippled right arm he was able to drive single-handed a coach and six horses, a feat made possible only by the unusual unfluence he had with these animals.

With Charles Lardner he convened the first cricket meeting which ultimately became the St. George Cricket Club and had a cricket pitch laid on his back paddock. He became the first secretary of the club and was the president of the original St. George Band to which he made a magnificent gift of £100 for the purchase of the band's instruments.

At Burraneer Bay, an arm of the Port Hacking River, Henry Kinsela built his country residence - a large stone cottage set in grounds terraced to the water's edge. Here a boatshed was built and also a swimming pool. On the rocks nearby was a plentiful supply of oysters. Kinsela gave the band many enjoyable picnics at his Port Hacking residence and it was no uncommon sight in those days to see the St. George Band being rowed around the port in Mr. Kinsela's clipper whale boat, while the dulcet music wakened echoes across the bays.

This home still stands as does the lovely avenue of gum trees which led down to it.

In March 1915, this patriotic and public spirited gentleman and sportsman passed away, mourned by a widely drawn circle of friends and admirers and lies peacefully in the little old churchyard at St. George's.

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THE ST. GEORGE AMBULANCE.

The St. George Ambulance Brigade was formed in 1902 before motor vehicles had threatened the path of human life. Mr. J. Ingram was the first Secretary and a hand litter was donated by Mr. Donald McCormick of Harrow Road and was housed in the Fire Brigade Station at Rockdale.

Its first superintendent was Mr. Charles Royall and its first official duty was to transport ten men to the St. George Hospital who were injured when a bolting horse collided with an overcrowded tram making for Brighton.

Soon after this event the litter was moved to a weatherboard building in Tramway Arcade and instruction in First Aid was commenced under the supervision of Mr. J. Wood.

In 1910 the Ambulance Brigade was reconstituted with trained men under the superintendence of Mr. C. Fillingham, Mr. S. Wennholm being Secretary and Mr. P. Stell, Treasurer. The same litter which consisted of a two-wheeled stretcher with a detachable canvas hood and a flap screened aperture on top to permit an occasional peep at the patient was used.

By 1915 the brigade was under the superintendence of Mr. P.W. Stell and was backed by an enthusiastic ladies' auxiliary under the direction of Mrs. A. Goode. Regular first aid classes were being held in the School of Arts supervised by Dr. Halliday of Rockdale and were numerous attended.

The conveyance by litter was painfully slow and often laborious and quite frequently by the time the patient had reached the hospital, death had ensued.

It was not until 1918 that a 15 h. p. Minerva automobile was purchased but as no one could drive it, it was often some time before a volunteer could be found and the roads were so fearfully rough that frequent mechanical repairs were necessary to the vehicle.

In 1918 new brick premises were opened for the Brigade in Bay Street, Rockdale, and during the pneumonic 'flu epidemic of 1919 the brigade did yeoman service.

The following year an additional vehicle was purchased and in 1924 a Fiat six cylinder ambulance made its appearance. In November 1927 this equipment was supplemented by two fine Hudson motors.

New and more commodious premises were opened in Princes Highway in 1929 complete with workshops and instruction hall. Additional premises were erected in the Sutherland Shire in the same year.

Since those days the service has grown out of all recognition but its commencement was due almost entirely to a small band of voluntary workers who spared no effort to provide it with the facilities it needed.

Among those whose labours for the St. George Ambulance Brigade will always be remembered are Mr. F. Morgan who was its secretary for many years, Mrs. A. Goode who commenced the ladies' auxiliary and Miss Collins, daughter of Captain Collins of the Bexley Fire Brigade who lost her own life whilst ministering to the victims of the pneumonic 'flu epidemic in 1919.

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ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

53 Bruce Street,
BEXLEY.

10th October, 1968.

Dear Friend and Member,

An Outing to

MINNAMURRA FALLS

has been arranged for

SATURDAY, 9th NOVEMBER, 1968

Leaving ROCKDALE TOWN HALL AT 9 A.M.

Come along and enjoy a glorious day's outing along the South Coast. Visit the Museum at the Falls. Facilities are available to barbecue your lunch.

COST \$ 1.50 per person.

RING OUR PRESIDENT, MR. D. SINCLAIR for BOOKINGS Ph. 58 4555.

R. W. RATHBONE
Hon. Secretary.