



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

53 Bruce Street,
BEXLEY. 2207.
8th November, 1968.

Dear Friend and Member,

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

Date: Friday Evening Next, 15th November, 1968, at 8 p.m.

Place: Council Chamber, Rockdale Town Hall.

Guest Speaker: Mrs. Marjorie Hutton-Neve, Editor of the Sutherland Shire Historical Society's Bulletin, will deliver an illustrated address on "Historic Homes of the Sutherland Shire".

Would lady members please bring a plate.

D.H. Sinclair,
President.

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

Supper Roster:

Mrs. V. Wilson (Captain) and Mrs. Piper, Miss Binns,
Mrs. Monk and Mrs. Chase.

Successful Raffle for Bark Painting.

More than \$50.00 was added to the Society's Funds as a result of the Raffle for the Bark Painting. The lucky, and very appreciative winner, was Mr. Frank Hook of Carlton - a most active member of our Society.

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A SERMON IN STONE. ROCKDALE METHODIST CHURCH.

Part 1. C.W. Napper.

In the light of the present day bustling activities, centres on the shopping quarter of Rockdale, it is extremely difficult to envisage the tranquil rural scene that existed here in the early days of the eighteen-sixties. The narrow bush track, called by the grandiose name of Rocky Point Road, wended its way through dense forests of gum-trees, amidst the rocky ramparts of Rockdale Hill on the east, and the more shallow ridges and slopes descending eastwards from the sinuous divide along the crest of which the Gannon's Forest Road was carried. Near the intersection of the present Bay Street with Rocky Point Road (later Princes Highway), the very heart of Rockdale, was a sombre swampy region covered with paper-bark trees, casuarinas, and a dense undergrowth of ferns and reeds, the habitat of frogs and snakes. It is quite understandable why this secluded spot on the old road gained the name of FROG HOLLOW, although some folk preferred the more high-falutin name of WHITE GUM FLAT. At the time under review there were no shops, stores, or hotels, only rough grazing land, divided into paddocks by post and rail fences, cut from the neighbouring forest. It is possible that at this period the nearest residence would have been that occupied by William Bray, on a site contiguous to the present day intersection of Bryant Street with the Princes Highway, and the tiny home of the Skidmore's which was sited where the Rocky Point Road forded Muddy Creek opposite to the present Southside Plaza.

It is more than passing strange that the majority of the pioneering families, mostly fore-gathered around the fertile flats of Muddy Creek, roughly midway between Rockdale and Brighton le Sands, were devout Wesleyans, a circumstance which included the Beehags, Bowmers, Brays, Mascords, and the Nappers, amongst their number. The district at large came under the administration of the Newtown Wesleyan Circuit, and through the activities of William Beehag in particular, on behalf of the Home Mission interest, a "HOUSE OF PRAYER" was established on the eastern side of West Botany Street at Arncliffe. This primitive edifice, little more than a shelter from the sun, was constructed of sapplings, calico, and roofed with tea-tree, "with internal furnishings of a corresponding character". The temporary nature of the structure, known as THE BUSH HOUSE, was far from satisfactory, and several moves were made, including a temporary site on the land later occupied by Iliffe's ROSE VALE VILLA' nursery on Rocky Point Road at Rockdale. Then the roving congregation settled in 'THE IRON HOUSE', evidently a small prefabricated structure of galvanised iron, which may have been imported from England on the package principle and was established on the western side of West Botany Street, near the intersection of Muddy, or Dark, Creek, on the property of Mr. Quirk. This site today constitutes the broad expanse of Rockdale Park. I quote, "Mr. Quirk, who though not of the Protestant faith, cheerfully lent his home for Methodist services, thus showing a tolerance that has not always been a distinguishing characteristic of his co-religionists".

However, the need for a permanent place of worship was generally felt, and at length the opportunity arose whereby two sites for a chapel were made available, one being offered by William Beehag, and the other by his brother James Beehag. The allotment offered by William Beehag was in the neighbourhood of the original "BUSH HOUSE" at Arncliffe, whilst that

proffered by James Beehag was at the extreme western end, or rather apex, of his property, adjacent to the later intersection of Bay Street with Rocky Point Road. This last named site was finally accepted, and a Deed of Conveyance was duly signed on August 18th, 1858, the trustees being named as follows:- James Barker. John Walker. Barnabus Shaw Walker. James Canham. Benjamin Barker. William Bailey. Robert Dunlop and John Andrews.

Plans were drawn up for a small neatly designed rectangular shaped building, some thirty feet in length and twenty feet in width, built from sandstone ashlar quarried from the neighbouring hill through which the alignment of Bay Street was later excavated. The roof was covered with wooden shingles, no doubt cut from the casurina trees which flourished around the margins of Pat Moore's Swamp. Three large windows were inserted in each of the side walls, and access was gained from the western end of the structure, the headstone over the doorway reading "WESLEYAN CHAPEL, 1857".

It has been related that "during the progress of erection, while the floor was yet unlaid and the roof open, Mr. Finlayson preached within the walls of the new building". On Sunday, 26th December, 1858, the dedicatory services were conducted by the Reverend Richard Amos, a missionary from the island of Tonga, who had that year returned to the Colony of New South Wales. The inevitable tea meeting followed on the Monday, and in the notice of the event, as recorded in the "METHODIST" newspaper of the time, it was stated that "A large number of friends assembled. The day was fine, and the excursion to the bush was enjoyed thoroughly by all. After tea, addresses were delivered and subscriptions were handed up, which placed the Chapel in easy circumstances". The new church was regarded as the finest public edifice for some miles around; an estimate which does not appear unreasonable when it is compared with buildings of contemporary date erected for similar purposes. Amongst the old people's reminiscences of the occasion there "was a fear lest they had been too audacious and ambitious in their enterprise, and had built a church that would never be filled".

For night illumination a number of the "B" Burney type oil lamps were purchased. However, owing to the lack of made approach roads to the Chapel it was customary to hold the Sunday services at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m., an arrangement which gave the worshippers an opportunity to negotiate the bush tracks during the hours of daylight. The building became extensively used in the early days for public meetings concerning the welfare of the small community, and also serviced as a public school, conducted by John Andrews, where most of the children from the surrounding farms and residences gained the rudiments of their education.

The old Chapel has acquired three additions in the course of its long history, and was placed at the disposal of the National Emergency Services during the Second World War, when it came into use as a First Aid Post. In 1955 the ancient structure was completely reconditioned, and the interior beautifully adorned and furnished as a "Beginner's room for the Sunday School. It later came into use as a "Childhood's Sabbath Home". It is pleasing to note that the Chapel of 1857 is maintained in excellent order by the Trustees, and the little building can certainly be grouped amongst the few structures of the pioneering days of the St. George District which have been suffered to remain in situ.

At the time of its dedication in 1857, the Rocky Point Chapel, as it was then known, was attached to "the Newtown Circuit, which at that time included such distant and outlying preaching places as Ashfield, Botany, Camperdown, Botany Bay, Canterbury, Moorfields, and Peakhurst. The superintendence of the Circuit was in the hands of the Reverend W. A. Quick, who had arrived in the country from England in 1855, and after a year in Maitland, had been appointed to Newtown in 1857 and at the conference of 1859 was appointed to the charge of Horton College in Tasmania. He states in a letter "Mine was but a two years residence in Newtown and my circuit was extensive and, for one minister, its working was a difficulty. Rocky Point was, I think, 'taken up' towards the close of my time, so that I was there but a few times".

During the thirty years of its association with the Newtown Circuit, Rocky Point was one of a number of preaching places which owed a large debt to local preachers, as the minister of the circuit could but rarely take Sunday appointments in the smaller more distance places. The names of men like Saxby, Findlayson, Butcher, Dunlop, Popplewell, Bowmer, and others have honourable places in the annals of the Rocky Point Chapel. Mr. Findlayson related, many years ago, that after his examination at the hands of Mr. Quick, for admission as a fully credited local preacher, his Sunday round of appointments often meant a walk from Newtown to Peakhurst, or Rocky Point in the morning: thence to Moorfields for the afternoon, and on to Canterbury for the evening service; and after that back to his house at Newtown. And such a round trudged over difficult roads, was a frequent experience in those early days.

Of the group of workers in the Rocky Point Chapel of the early period, Mr. James Canham occupied a position of honoured pre-eminence. Superintendent of the Sunday School when the chapel was built, there are traditions of his walking to morning school, carrying his lunch in his handkerchief, to be partaken of under the trees on the chapel ground in the interval between the morning and evening services. Fellow worker with Mr. Canham, and later his successor, was John Andrews. Born in London, he came as a youth to New South Wales and continued for nearly sixty years as a faithful member of the Rocky Point Chapel, for fifty-seven years of which period he was a local preacher and for fifty-two years a class-leader; for forty years secretary of the Rockdale Trust, and for twenty-three years its treasurer, and for thirty years in unbroken succession superintendent of the Sunday School. "His life presents a record of Christian service so honourable and so rare as to justify this minute particularisation."

Amongst others associated with the work of the Chapel should be mentioned the names of John Bowmer, and Messrs. Morse, Warren, Colborne, Godfrey, Shelton, Goode, Wilson, and Charles Napper. Mr. William Bray began to teach in the Sunday School in 1862, whilst Thomas Mascord was an early secretary of the Sunday School. It is my pleasure to record the names of these men, coming from such well known pioneering families of our district, in reference to their stirring worth and their association with Rockdale's historic Chapel. Its later history will be described on another occasion.

THE TAVERNS OF THE SANS SOUCI PENINSULA.

..... Gifford Eardley.

The Sans Souci Peninsula, which has had a long and comparatively unrecorded history, dates back to the visit of Captain James Cook in 1770. For years in the early days of the settlement of New South Wales its dense bush-land, and equally dense swamp-land, formed a haven for escaped convicts, and others of like ilk, who sought to get away from it all; a place where no roads went by, and one that teemed with game of all description, water-fowl, fish, and shell-fish. With a bark humpy to live in, a gun of sorts, and fishing lines, one could eke out a good and comfortable life, without being troubled in the least by the voice of authority. The Peninsula was a small self-contained world, forgotten, and by the world forgot.

Into this peaceful solitude came Robert Cooper, and his good wife Catherine, who secured a grant of one hundred acres at the extreme southern end of the Peninsula, the area extending from the present Rocky Point (then known as Charlotte Point) westwards to St. Kilda Point, located at the south-eastern end of Kogarah Bay. Here a house was built but, unfortunately, details of its construction are not available, but one may assume that it had a sandstone foundation with walls of slabs, and a roof of shingles, cut from the trunks of casuarina trees which flourished exceedingly in the marshlands skirting the sand dunes about half a mile inland from the western shore of Botany Bay.

According to report Robert Cooper followed the occupation of a distiller, and took his kegs to market in Sydneytown by slinging them, in pairs, over the saddle of a pack-horse. At this time there was no pathway through the dense forests which lay between Charlotte Point and Cooks River at Tempe, so the horses were taken along the waterfront of Botany Bay, skirting Stripper's Point (now Sandringham), Dolls Point, and following the course of Seven Mile Beach in a northerly direction, to, one may surmise, the vicinity of present day Bestic Street. Here a bush track would lead westerwards, avoiding the densely packed forest trees as best it might, until the salt water head of Muddy, or Dark, Creek, was reached and forded at its shallowest part. The lowlying swamp-land would then be by-passed to reach higher land in the vicinity of Eve Street. Here the bridle-path, again on a northerly course, would skirt the foothills of the densely forested Arncliffe Hill until Cooks River was forded, at the narrowest part of the river in the immediate vicinity of Mr. Spark's "Tempe House". The Cooks River Road, or rather its original track through the bush, would then be followed in all its windings until Sydneytown was attained.

In time the new Church of England at St. Peters, near Cooks River, was built. The services at this beautiful edifice were attended by Governor Sir George Gipps. His Excellency, according to ancient report, noted that Robert Cooper was not regular in his attendance at Divine Worship and, seeking an explanation, was informed of the difficulties of the terrain encountered in a journey from Charlotte Point to the Church. There upon, Sir George ordered that a bush track be made between Tempe and Charlotte Point, the work to be carried out by convicts, thus forming the nucleus of Rocky Point Road, a large part of which is nowadays incorporated in Princes Highway.

It would appear that Robert Cooper's property was taken over about the eighteen-fifties by Thomas Holt, who called the estate "Sans Souci" and built thereon a large two-storied house which followed the "Colonial" form of architecture, based on a "Georgian" design with the addition of a front verandah. Judging by early prints there were two large rooms on the ground floor, divided by a centre hallway. Each of these rooms had, in addition to a doorway leading into the hall, a separate entrance doorway placed in the facade at each end of the building. It is possible that there were at least five smaller rooms on the first floor, each having small paned glazed windows of the double vertical sliding sash type, three being inserted in the front facade, and two in each of the end walls. According to Miss Frater access to the first floor was given by means of a steeply pitched stairway which, in the early days, could be hauled up so as to lay flat against the ceiling of the hall on the ground floor by an arrangement of ropes, thus effectually preventing unauthorised intrusion to the sleeping quarters above. The kitchen, laundry, scullery, stables, henroosts, and other outbuildings were arranged at the rear of the premises, which incidentally, faced towards the east, and incorporated a circular shaped watch-tower in the design.

In all probability the kitchen was detached from the main building to avoid fire risk. It has been mentioned by Miss Frater that great difficulty was experienced in finding eggs laid by their poultry. The cunning hens in particular preferred secluded hollow logs, likewise the goannas, who appreciated the hens' preference in this matter.

It can be assumed that Mr. Holt was responsible for the planting of trees in the grounds around the house, namely Norfolk Island pine trees, Himalayan Cedars, olives, aloes, and the purple pea-flowered polygala which spread in such profusion in the sandy locality that it became known locally as "The Sans Souci" plant. However, by all accounts Mrs. Holt was not enamoured with the beauty of her surroundings, or the comparative loneliness of her existence at "Sans Souci". Consequently Mr. Holt transferred his attentions to a more elaborate home, known as "The Warren", which he had built on the eastern slopes of the hill which lays to the west of Tempe Railway Station.

At this juncture the house "Sans Souci" appears to have been taken over by a Mr. Dettman, about 1865, and converted into a hotel, catering for the slight local trade and the inrush of visitors at weekends. Then came a Mr. Cowsley, a contractor, who was responsible for the building of the stone paved approach landings on both sides of Georges River, necessary for the punt crossing at Tom Ugly's Point. As far as can be traced the next licensee was William Edward Rust, known affectionately to his intimates as "Daddy Rust", who endeavoured in many ways to popularise Sans Souci as a watering place, introducing boat racing at weekends and other sporting fixtures. He was instrumental in having a wharf constructed, whereby paddle-steamers could bring crowds of patrons from Sydney, via a short trip along the coast. The reconstruction of Rocky Point Road as a main highway eliminated the terrors formerly associated with Cobbler's Pinch at Arncliffe Hill, and the crossing of Muddy Creek at Skidmore's Bridge, south of the small settlement which later became Rockdale, were factors of importance in favour of the pleasure ground scheme at Sans Souci.

William Rust purchased an area of land at Stripper's Point and built a weatherboard hotel, known as the Prince of Wales, of which more anon. After the departure of Mr. Rust the Sans Souci Hotel came into the hands of Mr. Baker who, in turn, was succeeded by Mr. Dobson, a gentleman who added horse racing to the manifold attractions of the hotel. A course, surrounded by a white-painted low fence, was laid out on the flat land immediately north from the hotel premises. Then came John Emerson, a Sydney fishmonger, who introduced foot-racing and sponsored oyster-eating contests. This Scottish gentleman later became licensee of the Sea Breeze Hotel at Tom Ugly's Point. The district at this period was noted for its good kangaroo and wallaby shooting, whilst the sea-fowl and wading birds, frequenting the mud-flats nearby, also provided good sport for those misanthropes who can only find pleasure in killing off wild-life.

John Frater followed John Emerson as licensee of the Sans Souci Hotel, and Frater's Paddock nearby became the venue of horsedrag parties from the inner suburbs of Sydney. The Sans Souci Steam Tramway also trundled down from Kogarah with crowds of holiday makers from the metropolis, and the old established public house flourished exceedingly. A two, or may have been a three link bowling green was laid out on land which may now be sited at the rear of No 1426 Rocky Point Road. John Frater had five children, named as Alexander, Oscar, Ivy, Norman, and Holly Penelope.

At this time there were about eight huge Norfolk Island Pine trees clustered around the hotel property, each between seventy and eighty feet in height, and having a base girth of about three feet in diameter. Scattered amongst the olive trees were small "Summer-houses", made from scantlings partly covered with wooden lattice-work, and containing a central board table and a hexagonal surround of hardwood seats. One had to be wary of splinters. An old muzzle-loading cannon, retrieved from H.M.S. WOLVERINE, was placed in a commanding position on Rocky Point, and formed a great feature for the children, who loaded the gun with bottles and pretended to be in the midst of a great battle royal, with all the appropriate noises.

In the early days of the hotel it was necessary to obtain household water supplies from a well sunk on the property, and John Selman, John Frater's groom and handyman, had the arduous task of carrying water from this well contained in two buckets, slung at the ends of a shoulder yoke. Drinking water came from rainwater tanks which were filled from the guttering surrounding the roof of the premises. In course of time a pump was installed at the well and a piping system connected thereto. This pipe installation became suspect and some busybody reported to the authorities that an illicit still was in operation at the hotel premises. Said authorities sent down a couple of detectives to investigate the matter and certain faces became very red indeed.

The heyday of the Sans Souci Hotel was during the Edwardian period of the early nineteen-hundreds, when all manner of public entertainment flourished at weekends and on holidays throughout the year. A large dance hall on the property was well patronised, and even on hot summer days the lovelorn couples danced to their heart's content. A constant stream of merry-makers adjourned to the liquor bar, ensconced amidst the trees at the rear of the main hotel building. John Frater, with his integrity and attractive trading methods, built up a lucrative business which, unfortunately, fell apart with

the passing of the Local Option Act in 1911. It has been stated that had John Frater seen fit to "Oil the works" to the extent of 30 or 40 golden sovereigns his hotel would have been suffered to remain open. But this was not to be and in due course the famous pub was closed, to the almost complete detriment of Sans Souci as a watering place.

John Frater had previously purchased a property out from Berowra, and one fine day, after negotiating with his friend, Captain Childs, he loaded his goods and chattels on board the good ship the "S.S. ERINA". This vessel steamed from Sans Souci wharf, through Botany Bay Heads, up the coast to Broken Bay, and thence along the Hawkesbury River to the solitude of the lovely Berowra Waters. Here, away from the madding crowds, surrounded by beautiful bush country, a land of hills, deep valleys, with waterside delights of fishing, boating, and pleasant idling, he set up house.

After the departure of John Frater from Sans Souci, so it has been said, the hotel premises were utilised from a laundry business, but it was not very long before the wreckers moved in to demolish the grand old building. The property was eventually subdivided by Mr. McMillan and Fraters Avenue came into being. A few of the gray-green olive trees near Humphrey's boat shed survived the onslaught, but unfortunately the beautiful Himalayan Cedars, and the majestic Norfolk Island pine trees, aroused no interest in the iconoclastic minds of the developers and were razed flat in the best traditional Australian manner. The materials from the dance hall were utilised in the construction of a weatherboard house in Plimsoll Street, Sans Souci, whilst Matthew Barnidge secured materials from the hotel to build a house in which to live, the first to be constructed on the subdivision of the hotel estate. It is passing strange that Matthew Barnidge's residence was acquired from demolition when the James Cook Bridge project became implemented about 1958. The former Sans Souci Hotel materials were loaded on to a railway truck, at Mortdale and sent to Nowra for re-erection as a fisherman's cottage near the Shoalhaven River.

A second paper, dealing with the affairs of the Prince of Wales Hotel at Sandringham, is in course of preparation and will be presented to our Society in due course.
