



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

53 Bruce Street,
BEXLEY. 2207.

14th March, 1969.

Dear Friend and Member,

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

Date. Friday Evening Next, 21st March, 1969, at 8 p. m.

Place. Council Chamber, Town Hall, Rockdale.

Guest Speaker. Mr. H. N. Riley who delighted members last year with his talk on old oil lamps, will speak on -

"Antique Domestic Equipment".

Business. General.

Would lady members please bring a plate.

D. H. Sinclair,
PRESIDENT.

R. W. Rathbone,
HON. SECRETARY.
58. 4813.

Supper Roster. Mrs. Eardley and Mrs. Chase, Mrs. Sinclair,
Mrs. Osborne and Miss Austin.

OUTING TO MINNAMURRA.

A full day excursion to Minnamurra Falls and the South Coast has been arranged for Saturday, April 19th, leaving the Rockdale Town Hall at 9 a. m. Tickets are \$1.50 per person. Book your seat NOW by ringing Mr. Sinclair at 58.4555.

MINNAMURRA HOUSE.

Perhaps one of the oldest and loveliest of the colonial homes in the southern inland area of New South Wales is "Minnamurra House".

It was built for Dr. Menzies and his young wife Margaret in the early 1840s. Dr. and Mrs. Menzies left Perth, Scotland, in August 1838 to settle in New South Wales.

The journey, which was made in "Earl Durham" took 107 days to complete, arriving in Sydney - Port Jackson, in January 1839. Dr. Menzies later left Sydney on horseback to inspect properties at Windsor and Mittagong but found them unsuitable, so he rode further afield, finally deciding on "two blocks - each of 300 acres" in the little known valley of Jamberoo.

When settlement of the property had been finalised Dr. Menzies had their personal belongings, livestock, etc. shipped on the Schooner "Alexander McLeay" to Kiama. As there were no wharf facilities for unloading it was necessary to land their goods and chattels in rowing boats, which were used by the local cedar cutters.

Meanwhile, a temporary home was built at Jamberoo, and was occupied by Dr. and Mrs. Menzies while plans were prepared, and put into operation for the residence known as "Minnamurra House".

Stone for the 2 feet thick walls was obtained from a nearby quarry, most of the materials required for the house were also obtained from local sources; namely timber, grit for plastering inside and out, and also roof shingles, which, due to the elements, unfortunately have had to be replaced with iron sheets.

"Minnamurra House" is situated on the banks of the Minnamurra River, in the heart of the rain forest.

Dr. Menzies died in 1860, a comparatively young man.

The old home is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Ross Stewart, and these people are most interested in conserving Australia's heritage.

E. Eardley.

THE FOREST ROAD. ARNCLIFFE SECTION.

... Gifford and Eileen Eardley.

One of the most pleasant things to accomplish in Arncliffe is to take a stroll along the length of Forest Road, from its junction with Princes Highway at the crest of Arncliffe Hill to its convergence with the Old Wollongong Road in the vicinity of Villiers Street, Rockdale. The journey will be found to be rich in scenic beauty with a wide panoramic landscape to the south, embracing the waters of Botany Bay, the hills and sand dunes beyond, together with the closer environs of Kogarah, Rockdale, and Brighton le Sands. To the north can be seen a great part of the City of

Sydney with numerous sky-scrappers predominating the skyline, together with the curvature of the splendid arch of the famous Harbour Bridge. Further along the road a view unfolds to the west where a land of deep valleys and sandstone escarpments is now covered with the red-tiled homes occupying the suburbs of West Arncliffe, North Bexley, and Earlwood. There is witchery in any one of these directional scenes to captivate one's mind, particularly when viewed under the atmospheric conditions as portrayed by the rising, or the setting of the sun.

The Forest Road came into being about the mid-eighteen-sixties to provide a connection to Gannon's Forest (now represented by Hurstville), and Kings Grove, which would be free from the traffic evils of the tidal marsh which encompassed the lower northern section of the Old Wollongong Road in the vicinity of the premises occupied today by Messrs. Stevens and Co. It should be mentioned that the former course of the Old Wollongong Road was far from being the straight highway known under present day conditions, this straight alignment being mostly the result of the subdivision of neighbouring large estates.

For the purpose of our journey into the past it is well to revert to the period marked by the beginning of the present century, in order to give a description of the buildings, particularly the mansions of the wealthy, established along the crest of the dividing ridge known as Arncliffe Hill. It is more than passing strange to note that the majority of houses ranged along the Forest Road have continued to keep their outward architectural appearance more or less intact, displaying numerous features in gable design, chimneys of divers sorts and shapes, windows, doorways, and other external features all representing the arts and traditions of building in vogue at the time of construction. The individuality of each house was emphasised by its name-plate, and it was not until in comparatively recent years that they were designated by numbers, a system certainly convenient if not so attractive.

It is appropriate for descriptive purposes to commence our journey westwards along Forest Road from its junction with the Princes Highway at the crest of Arncliffe Hill. At the southern side of this intersection there once stood a low Destination Stone, let into the gutter kerbing, which was chiselled to read "TO THE RIVER, TO THE FOREST, TO KINGS GROVE". The river route followed Rocky Point Road (later designated as Princes Highway) and Kogarah Road and onwards to the punt crossing at Tom Ugly's Point, whilst the Forest route led along Forest Road to what is now known as Hurstville and onwards to Lugarno Ferry, while access to the ancient settlement of Kings Grove followed Forest Road to Stoney Creek Road. It is unfortunate that this historic Destination Stone was removed, about 1940, by some municipal employee, obviously unaware of its background, and all attempts to trace its whereabouts have proved unsuccessful.

Also located on the southern corner of the intersection was the Botany View Hotel which was established in the early eighteen-eighties by Mr. John Clune. This hostelry was noted for its hitching bars along the verandah frontages where patrons could leave their horses in safety whilst they attended to matters of moment. Several huge pepperina, or pepper-trees flourished against the hotel precincts, affording cool to both man and

beast on the hot summer days. The original hotel was subsequently demolished and replaced by a two-storied structure built on the street alignment, a circumstance which brought about the destruction of the pepper-trees. This second building, in turn, was demolished about 1957 and in its stead was erected the present modern structure, known as the Arncliffe Hotel. It is of interest to note that during the reconstruction period temporary weatherboard premises to carry on the bar trade were erected at the northern side of the intersection, on portion of the "Wickham" property, formerly owned by the Richardson family, which had been acquired by the New South Wales Housing Commission. This corner, before being taken over by the hotel proprietors, was most attractive as it was overshadowed by a magnificent Moreton Bay figtree, a circumstance not fully appreciated by some one in authority as the once so beautiful tree was butchered down to a pitiful stump, which has since been removed. About 1958 the temporary hotel accommodation premises were vacated and the Rockdale Municipal Council kindly co-operated with the Arncliffe-Turrella Senior Citizens' organisation in acquiring the property as a community centre, a gesture greatly appreciated by the older folk of the immediate district after the official opening which took place on March 7th, 1959.

The cottage next door, on the western side, No. 7, with a nice row of young poplar trees at the rear, would possibly date back to the period of the nineteen-twenties. It has a high front gable and full length tiled roof verandah. A pair of attached cottages, Nos. 9 and 11, are of much older vintage, one being occupied in its earlier days by Mr. Hagen Cook. The end rooms of both residences were extended to enclose the separate front verandahs, which were centrally divided by a brick wall which protrudes through and above the curved galvanised iron roof of the verandah for flashing purposes. A centrally placed "Party" chimney serves the inner rooms whilst the outer each have a single chimney placed against the hallways. Ornamentation, apart from a drip edge over the front windows, has been kept to a minimum.

Allotments numbered 13 to 17, odd numbers only, are occupied by the modern premises of an Auto Radiator Specialist, and a fish and chip shop sends out tantalising and appetising aromas. Formerly a dispensing chemist, Mr. Boucher, occupied one of these shops, likewise Mr. L. Langston, who managed a flourishing produce business and sold and delivered great quantities of wood, coal, and coke. The adjacent row of shops terminate at No. 25, a fine two-storied shop of brick construction was formerly occupied by a general storekeeper but now is in the hands of an Auto Electrician. The private entrance to this building is afforded by a tiled roofed side annexe which, with a width of about ten feet, is set well back between the walls of the adjacent shops, a circumstance adding to its tiny appearance. We have now reached the intersection of Eden Street, the southernmost section of which is formed by the diversion of the Old Rocky Point Road (now Eden Street) to permit the construction of the first section of the Illawarra Railway.

The southern frontage of Forest Road, between the Arncliffe Hotel and the intersection of Wardell Street, is occupied by the Roman Catholic Church authorities. The foundation stone of the beautiful brick church, dedicated to St. Francis Xavier, with its fascinating "Irish Round Tower",

was laid by the Most Reverend Dr. Kelly, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, on August 16th, 1931, the rector at the time being the Reverend J. P. Rafferty. Next door and west of the church is the convent, a large and somewhat lengthy two storied building which, prior to its religious occupation, was inhabited by Mr. Hird, Headmaster of the Marrickville Public School. Built of brick with a slate roof, the edifice is a fine specimen of the 1890 period of domestic architecture, with a two-storied bay window in front and elaborate cast-iron fringes and balcony balustrade.

A fine wide bridge now carries the Forest Road westwards across the four tracks forming this section of the Illawarra Railway. When the line was built the two original tracks passed through a tunnel excavated through the sandstone ridge, deep cuttings being made at each side of the aperture. The Old Rocky Point Road originally came to the western side of this bridge, reaching to the vicinity of the present Somerville Street where, by a precipitous descent to the south-east, known locally as Cobbler's Pinch, the ancient road reached the alignment of the present Princes Highway in the vicinity of Terry Street, Banksia. Apart from its lower fence alignment all trace of Cobbler's Pinch has been obliterated, although a slight levelling of the top surface of the land, near the western side of the railway cutting would appear to mark the upper location of the former road, which was superseded by the present route of Princes Highway during the mid-eighteen sixties. Cobbler's Pinch, according to repute was haunted by the ghost of a woman who glided across the road to the consternation of both man and beast. Who the lady was, or why her restless spirit should haunt this particular spot on dark and windy nights has never been satisfactorily explained.

Opposite the entrance of Somerville Street lies the intersection of Firth Street, so named after the engineer of the Illawarra Railway, where a row of eight two-storied shops marks the north-western corner. The shops were built, so it is understood, by Messrs. Doust and Martin about the 1900 period. Nearby, on the northern side of Forest Road, is the two-storied double fronted brick building erected in 1928 for the Arncliffe United Friendly Society Dispensary, the upper floor of these premises being let on occasion as a Public Hall. Then the former Congregational Church property, at No. 43, is reached. The church building extended the length of the frontage and appears to have been a temporary building erected about the early part of this century, as it was placed at the rear of the property in the vicinity of the back, or "Sanitary" laneway. In recent years, presumably for lack of adherents, the Church closed its doors and the building and land came into the possession of the Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucies, Sydney Lodge, an organisation which refurbished the edifice in glowing colours and planted an attractive shrubbery around its precincts, the whole being overshadowed by a fine jacaranda tree and masses of oleanders. A new entrance porch has been added to the building after the Egyptian manner, with decorated columns in colour flanking the entrance, sentinel guard being in the capable hands of a pair of dark foliated cypress trees. A most attractive ensemble indeed. According to their notice board this organisation is "A non-sectarian fraternal body of men and women devoted to the investigational study and spiritual laws, the purpose of the organisation is to enable all to live in harmony with the creative constructional cosmic forces for the attainment of health, happiness, and peace".

Next door, at Nos. 45 and 47, are the premises of the Golden Sheaf Bakeries, from which the aromatic odours of baking bread often assail the nostrils. Mr. Henville occupied these premises and its corner retail shop for many years. The two storied building, with its bakehouse extending along the adjacent Barden Street, is of plain construction but maintained in excellent order and condition.

At this juncture it is convenient to revert to the southern side of Forest Road, commencing from the Roman Catholic Presbytery at the south-western corner of Somerville Street. This two-storied building of white brick has its upper floor and surrounding ornate verandah abutting on to Forest Road, whilst multi-paned dormer window extensions protrude from the steeply sloping slate roof. The Forest Road frontage is lined with Box Trees and a huge small-leaved fig shades the back yard. Also at the front, flanking the entrance steps, are several tall spindly cypress trees, their upper branches wind-blown and awry, jutting out in various intriguing shapes. It is understood that the previous ownership of this old established property was in the hands of Mr. William Robinson, an engineer, and that the priests formerly lived in a cottage at the south-western corner of Bellevue Street and Wickham Street, Arncliffe.

The large double-fronted two-storied house named "ROSLYN" formerly had its internal arrangements centrally divided to serve two separate housing establishments. The slate roof was graced by a large rectangular shaped "Captain's Walk" from which a panoramic view of the whole of the Botany Bay can be obtained. It would appear that the house was built by Mr. Butchart and so named because of his relationship to the Earl of Roslyn. In later years both houses were taken over by Dr. Hearne and converted into the Roslyn Private Hospital. Dr. Hearne was succeeded by Dr. Potts, a clever physician and surgeon, who possessed a sparkling wit and was held in high repute by the local community. A splendid garden surrounds the precincts of the hospital, but one deplors the destruction of the fine and shapely spruce-tree, which was always graced at Christmas-time by a profusion of coloured lights. This tree was removed to make way for a featureless out-stair leading from the first floor level of the building.

Opposite to the intersection of Barden Street, on the southern side of Forest Road, there once stood a single-fronted weatherboard cottage of low appearance, the front portion of which was utilised as a general store, reputed to have been the second such emporium associated with the early days of the village of Arncliffe. Here was to be obtained all the everyday necessities of life from hair-pins to kerosene, together with groceries and such-like goods. Several wind-swept pepper-corn trees flanked the front and side verandahs of the little shop, which in later years became a residence until such time as it was demolished to make way for modern housing. Its site today is occupied by beautifully kept flower-gardens.

The cottage numbered 52 served as the first rectory attached to the immediately adjacent St. David's Church of England, inhabited for many years by the Rev. Pitt-Owen. A fine camphor-laurel tree overshadows these premises whilst a sweet-smelling frangi-pangi ornaments the small front garden. St. David's Church has rather a chequered history after its foundation stone was laid with due ceremony on January 22nd, 1910, by the

Archbishop of Sydney, the Reverend John Charles Wright, D. D. The edifice was partially destroyed by a terrific gale which occurred on July 18th 1910, and the Archbishop was called upon to lay a memorial stone on August 15th, 1914, to mark the second effort in building the Church. As first constructed the Church lacked a chancel, but this important adjunct, together with a tower, were added during the early nineteen-thirties under the leadership of the Reverend Pitt-Owen. To mark the completion of the Church a commemoration stone was laid by His Excellency Sir Phillip Game, Governor of New South Wales, on St. David's Day, March 1st, 1934.

(To be continued).