



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

81 Watkin Street,
BEXLEY. 2207.

12th June, 1970.

Dear Friend and Member,

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

Date. Friday Evening next, 19th June, 1970, at 8 p.m.

Place. Council Chambers, Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale.

At the conclusion of the Business, Alderman R. W. Rathbone by courtesy of Rockdale Council, will show 2 feature films of the Rockdale Municipality. A silent one entitled "In the Days of Captain Cook" filmed at Brighton 40 years ago and the Council's latest film "Our Changing Community".

Business. General.

Would lady members please bring a plate.

D.H. Sinclair.

(Miss) J. Noble.

President.

Hon. Secretary.

Supper Roster. Miss McCartney (Capt.) Mrs. Chase, Miss Russell,
Miss Gillard and Mrs. O'Meara.

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DATES TO REMEMBER FOR FUTURE OUTINGS.

Please ring Mrs. Eardley, Asst. Secretary, for the following bookings. Phone 59.8078.

JULY 25 - SATURDAY AFTERNOON. INSPECTION OF FORT DENISON.

Meeting at No. 2 Jetty, Circular Quay, at 1.15 p.m. SHARP.

Cost - Adults 20 cents. Children 10 cents on Ferry.
Afternoon Tea - 45 cents.

Booklet available on History of Fort Denison. 20 cents.

AUGUST 15 - SATURDAY AFTERNOON. VISIT TO INSPECT BURNSIDE
PRESBYTERIAN HOMES, PARRAMATTA.

Details to be published later.

SEPTEMBER 12 - SATURDAY. FULL DAY HARBOUR CRUISE. Lunch
on Clark Island.

Details to be published later.

OCTOBER 3, 4 & 5th - LONG WEEKEND OUTING TO GULGONG.

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On Friday Evening - 26th June, 1970, 7.30 p.m. - there will be a Film Evening at the home of Mr. & Mrs. W. Piper, 26 Stoney Creek Road, BEXLEY, (next door to the Bexley R.S.L.). Miss M. Cheetham will be showing a collection of Slides. Members are assured of an enjoyable evening. Donation 50 cents.

Ladies please bring a plate.

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The following letter was received by the Secretary in April, and it would be appreciated for any information regarding this letter.

"In the Bi-centenary issue of the 'Leader', reference is made to a whaling master Captain James Birnie who gave up the sea to settle in Sydney about 1890 and in the edition of March 18th mention is made of the whereabouts of his headstone.

I have lived in Bexley for nearly eighty years. In my young days we used to pass through a bushland now occupied by Bexley's main shopping centre known as Birnie's Bush. It was bounded by what is now Oriental Street, Forest Road, Kingsland Road and Godwin Street.

Two tracks led from the top of Abercorn Street, one to the left coming out at the top of Oriental Street and the other to the right coming out opposite the present post office.

Beyond Oriental Street, Mrs. Birnie lived in the big house later occupied by Dr. Laverty with the land running back to Godwin Street (only a track in those days). The house was known as "Oaklands" and two large oaks stood at the gateway. A smithy's forge was next under another oak tree.

We seldom saw Mrs. Birnie but I understand a relative named Smalley lived in a house afterwards demolished to make Bexley Road.

Do you think this was the same Birnie? I would like to know.

P.S. We came here in 1892.

Yours faithfully,
(Miss) Bessie F. Hill.

THE HISTORY OF TEMPE HOUSE, TEMPE.

... May Hook.

The historic "Tempe House" was built for Alexander Brodie Spark, who owned a large area of land at Cooks River in the early 1800's, and became a director of the Bank of New South Wales in 1826.

"Tempe House" is a stately home of Georgian style set in a number of large gardens, trees, and sloping well kept lawns. According to a yellowed clipping in the possession of Miss Madeline Spark, of Roseville, a grand-daughter of Alexander Spark, the name of Tempe was suggested to the latter by its resemblance to the landscape of the Vale of Tempe in Thessaly, Greece.

The clipping says "Mr. Spark, a gentleman of means, arrived in the Colony while he was touring the world, and, being struck by the possibilities of the country he decided to remain at least for a time, but subsequently became a permanent resident". He also was given a grant of land in Darlinghurst, by Governor Darling, where he built "Tusculum", whose first tenant was Bishop Broughton.

Miss Spark said "Tempe House" was a show place of the era. Conrad Martens, the artist (1801-1878) painted the landscape three years after he arrived in Australia from London. His views of early Sydney are collector's items.

"This delightful residence, the seat of A.B. SPARK, Esq., is situated on the western bank of the river named after the immortal martyr of "OWHIEE", Captain Cook, and was selected originally as a retreat from the cares of business, yet within easy distance of the town. The spot formerly displayed all the wild features of the unbroken interior, which yielded indescribable charms to the seeker after the tranquility of romantic retirement. The "Avenger", has, however, broken through the once apparently impenetrable serenity which prevailed, a massive dam protruding its rude masonry to the briny waves of far-famed Botany Bay, now supplies the place of "Old Willie and his skiff", and in lieu of the plashing of the paddle, or the joyous carol of "sweet sounds" sent forth along the moonlit waters by a cargo of returning visitors, the echoes of "TEMPE" are now degraded to the reverberations of woodmen's slang, and lime-burner's orgies.

Alas, alas, truly hath the Poet written -
 "Like the gale that sighs along"
 "Beds of Oriental flowers"
 Is the grateful breath of song
 That once was heard in happier hours".

"But these are not days of sentiment and pathos - plodding matter of fact men are in the ascendancy and taste succumbs to Mammon.

The bath, the lodge, and the garden with its fruits and its flowers still remain, but the privacy of the one hath been invaded, and the grand-

eur of the other, impaired, aye, and the oyster-growing mangroves temptingly inviting one to partake of their juicy dainties - where are they? Torn down by the ruthless hand of time, destroyed, and almost forgotten - yet "Tempe" thou sittest still in beauty on thy mound, and even could the vibrating chord of recollection cease to awaken in me the most pleasing reminiscences which connect thy past history with mine own, I, enraptured with thy simple stateliness could ever in sincerity exclaim "With all thy faults I love thee still".

"Tempe House" is now part of a convent conducted by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, and is now in an excellent state of preservation.

There is a 128 year old painting by Conrad Martens showing "Tempe House" and Cooks River, which was purchased by Mr. Stanley Lipscombe for the low price of ninety guineas. The house is situated behind rising ground a short distance from the Princes Highway. It faces the river on the north and a few hundred feet west is the main Illawarra Railway line. The house is situated between the turbulent traffic airlines. That is not all as the sky-way above is busy with air traffic coming into, and going out of Kingsford Smith Airport, one of the world's busiest. All this is far removed from the days of "Old Willie and his skiff".

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that Mr. Spark had a good deal to do with the establishing of the historic Church of St. Peter on the Cooks River Road, now Princes Highway, and he was buried there. He died at his Tempe residence on October 21st, 1856, aged 65 years.

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COOKS RIVER - THE HISTORY OF ITS EARLY HOMES AND BRIDGES.

Cooks River has always played a part in the history of our Municipality therefore, Mrs. I.E. Currey, of the Canterbury and District Historical Society thinks its story should be told in this the year of the probable sighting of the river by Captain James Cook.

Captain Cook, after whom the river was named, apparently rowed up the stream as far as where the Princes Highway now crosses it. Cook spoke of the area as being banked by lovely meadows where many hundreds of cattle could browse. The foreshores were at this time lined densely with mangroves and other trees.

Exploration of the River.

In September 1789, Captain John Hunter (later Governor Hunter) probably entered Cooks River after exploring Georges River. However he was not greatly impressed, as he described one journey of about five miles up the river to have been mostly through shoal waters.

In December of the same year, Lieutenant Bradley was sent to explore the north-west branch of Botany Bay. There he found a creek about eight miles in length. The description of this stream was "winding shoal channel, ending in drain to a swamp, all shoal water".

The name Cooks River does not seem to have been given the stream until 1798, for in this year Governor Hunter sent home a map to England of the area around Sydney Cove. On this map Cooks River is named, but on a previous map in 1796, it was not mentioned.

After the first land grants in the district, the river came to play an increasingly more important part in the lives of the people affected by it.

Some of the leading citizens of the young colony began to build homes in this, then outer area of Sydney. In 1831, on the Arncliffe side of the river, Alexander Brodie Spark built a fine mansion which he called 'Tempe'. This lovely home is still in existence, beautifully preserved and is owned by a Roman Catholic order of nuns. It can be seen from the road bridge over the Princes Highway at Tempe.

The Unwin family built their pleasant home on the river at Undercliffe and called it "Wanstead". It was later occupied by Edward Campbell, merchant, and was still kept on by his widow after his death.

There was also "Undercliffe House", in which at one time, Mr. P.A. Thompson, a solicitor, lived. It was a neat cottage made of stone and contained 9 rooms. It was built on that part of the river where the cliffs are steep and so gave the residence its name.

A little further up the river on the right bank, during the 1860's, Mr. Thomas Holt built a mansion of 'noble proportions'. This home was on the hills overlooking Marrickville, and could be seen for miles. Mr. Holt called his home "The Warren".

Two stone pillars, all that are left of this one time lovely building, have been erected at Richardson's Lookout by interested citizens of Marrickville, can be seen from the train before entering Sydenham Station on the left hand side going from Marrickville Station.

The River Crossings.

To get to the various residences, farms and grazing lands along the river banks, the owners had to construct fords, punts or bridges. Thus many of the early bridges were frail affairs.

We have a record from James Meehan, an early surveyor, in which he mentions Laycock's Bridge. This is probably the same 'slender bridge' mentioned in 1810 by Governor Macquarie, near Hannah Laycock's farm, Kingsgrove.

A dam was constructed across the river near 'Tempe', by convict labour, in 1835. This, for many years was used as a ford as well. There is of course a very busy road bridge across the river on the Princes Highway now.

An article in the Sydney Gazette of the 1st August, 1883, says, "We understand that Mr. Prout finished a large, substantial punt at his residence, Cooks River". This punt was used until 1839, when the same Cornelius Prout built a bridge over the river. For many years this bridge was known in the district of Canterbury as Prout's Bridge. There was also a smaller bridge across the river up towards Enfield. This was called Miller Bridge, after the farm nearby.

At a later date, a punt was established about half way down river, between Prout's Bridge and Tempe Dam. This was known as Thorpe's Punt. It was still in existence in 1854, when a bill was passed in the Legislative Council to give Mr. Fisher and Mr. Thompson power to build a bridge over the river. About 1835, a second road to Illawarra was opened and a punt used to cross the river. This was later succeeded by a bridge built about 1840 by Mr. F. T. Unwin of "Wanstead". It was known as Unwin's Bridge. This bridge was still in use until 1889, when it was replaced by an iron and concrete span.

A bridge over the river at Undercliffe was built about 1870. It too, was replaced by a new structure in 1880. The present bridge over the river at this point is still known as Undercliffe Bridge.

After many suggestions by both the Canterbury and Marrickville Councils, a bridge over the river at Wardell Road was commenced in 1898 and was completed in the following year.

Many of these bridges have now been replaced and new bridges constructed in areas where expansion in the districts made river crossings necessary.

The older folk of our Municipality, no doubt remember Cooks River as a pleasant stream, lined with trees and flowing through a timbered countryside. Erosion, silt and commerce have all played their part in despoiling the rivulet in past years.

However, there is a resurgence of effort and will among many of our citizens to once again see the river banks as public parklands, and beautiful with trees. We have an association in the district dedicated to this scheme. Our Council too, seems to have in mind ideas for better usage of the small stream called after our great discoverer, Captain Cook, and perhaps one day we will see the banks along the river looking as he described them, 'lovely meadows and lined with trees'.

My appreciation to James Jervis and his 'History of the Canterbury Municipality' and to the Canterbury and District Historical Society for the use of their journals. From these two sources came much of the material for this short history.

(By courtesy "The Campsie News & Lakemba Advance" 25.2.70.,
and written by Mrs. I. E. Currey, member of the
Canterbury & District Historical Society.)