



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

81 Watkin Street,
Bexley. 2207.

12th March, 1971.

Dear Friend and Member,

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

Date: Friday Evening next, 19th March, 1971, at 8 p.m.
Place: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale.

At the conclusion of the business, Mr. J.P. Lundie, County Clerk of St. George County Council, will address the Society. This illustrated address will be entitled "THE HISTORY OF ELECTRICITY".

Business: General.

Would lady members please bring a plate and gentlemen kindly donate 20¢ towards the "Lydham Hall Restoration Fund".

D.H. Sinclair.
President.

(Miss) J. Noble.
Hon. Secretary.
Phone. 599.4884.

Supper Roster. Mrs. Waddington (Capt.), Mrs. Monk, Mrs. Coote,
Mrs. Bushell and Mrs. McMillan.

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The Executive wish to thank those members of the Society who have co-operated and supported us with functions that have been held to celebrate the Rockdale Centenary.

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY FUTURE OUTINGS & SOCIAL EVENTS.

Please ring Mrs. Eardley, Asst. Secretary, for bookings. PHONE 58.8078.

We would like the support of all members and their friends on our various Outings and Social Functions.

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APRIL - 4th. SUNDAY. ST. JOHNS CHURCH, PARRAMATTA.

The Bus will be leaving Rockdale Town Hall at 8.30 A.M. SHARP, to attend the "LANCER SERVICE" in this historic Church.

Hot water will be available at Parish Hall for Lunch.

A visit to "Australiana Folk Village" at Wilberforce in the afternoon.

Returning to Rockdale approx. 5.30 p.m.

Bring your Morning, Afternoon Teas and Lunch. COST: \$2.00 inclusive.

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"LYDHAM HALL FUND RAISING COMMITTEE"

The Ladies Fund Raising Committee hope you will keep in mind the following events:

Stall: A Stall will be held in Bexley Shopping Centre, Saturday, 3rd April, 1971. Donations of jams, pickles, cakes etc. will be appreciated.

Cooking Demonstration: A Cooking Demonstration will be held at St. George County Council Wednesday, 28th April, 1971. Donation 50¢.

Cavalcade of Fashions: Remember the Cavalcade of Fashions, Tuesday, 1st June, 1971. Tickets will be available soon. Cost \$1.50.

Anniversary Dinner: To be held at "Ainslee" Lodge, Bexley, Tuesday, 13th July, 1971. Cost \$4.00.

Lydham Hall is now open for inspection Saturday and Sunday Afternoons 2 p.m. till 4 p.m. Donations. Adults 20¢, Children 5¢.

Mrs. E. Wright.
599.4884.

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Raffles Xmas Party. Christmas Cake donated by Mrs. Hitchcock, won by Miss J. Noble. Tea Cosy, won by Mr. V. Smith.

Historical Exhibition. 1st Prize donated by Mrs. Dunsmore, won by Mrs. Crombie, Jannali. 2nd Prize donated by Mrs. Lyall-Scott, won by Mrs. Doherty, Bexley.

Prize donated by Mrs. Chase, won by Mrs. Chase. Raffle drawn again and Orange Ticket No. F.45 was the winner (not claimed).



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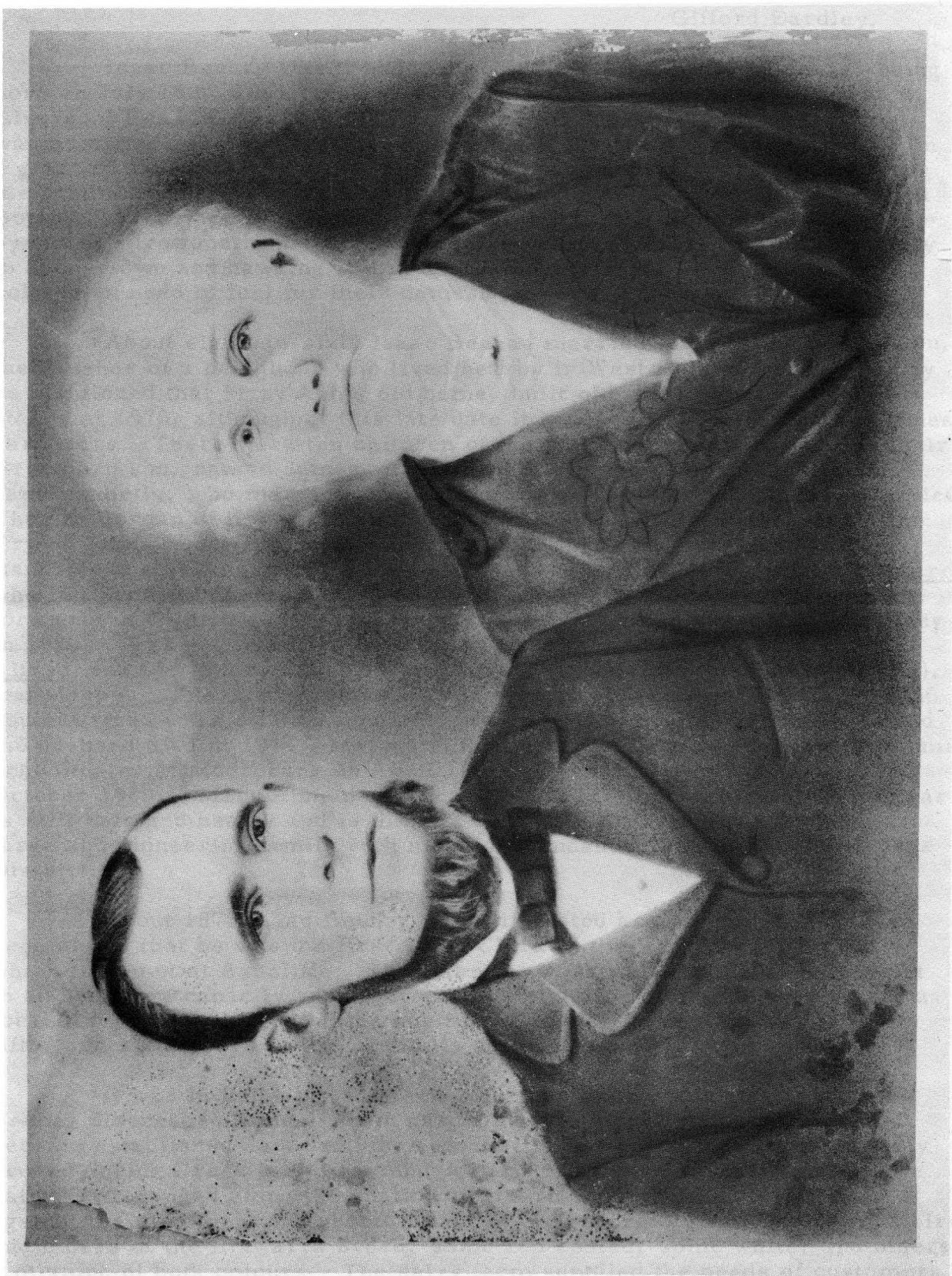
THE AFFAIRS OF ISAAC BEEHAG, DAIRYMAN, ROCKDALE.

..... Gifford Eardley.

THE AFFAIRS OF JAMES WILSON, AN EARLY SETTLER OF ROCKDALE.

..... Gifford and Eileen Eardley.

ROCKDALE PIONEERS



THE AFFAIRS OF ISAAC BEEHAG, DAIRYMAN, ROCKDALE.

Gifford Eardley.

Isaac Beehag was the eldest son of James and Mary Beehag, being born on July 18th, 1841, the address of his parents then being listed at Liverpool Road, Canterbury. In 1852 the farm property at Canterbury was sold and Isaac, together with the rest of the family, came to reside on a grant of seventy-nine acres, made to James Beehag, which ranged along the southern side of the present Bay Street, Rockdale, then known as West Botany. At the age of eighteen Isaac augmented the limited family income by cutting firewood in the Black Forest (now Hurstville), carting it by dray to Sydneytown and hawking it through the back streets for sale to householders in need of fuel for their domestic fires.

About eighteen-sixty Isaac Beehag married Miss Mary Ann Wilson, the daughter of a neighbour who lived nearby in West Botany Street. It may be mentioned that Mary Ann's old home, built of ashlar sandstone, still stands at 1970, although at this late date it appears to be occupied by Chinese gardeners. There were ten children of the marriage but unfortunately their first-born son, named James, died at the early age of five years. Then came Isabella, who married James Godfrey in August 1890. Ellen, married Thomas Jordan of Kogarah on March 17th, 1886. William, married Alice Fry of Sofala about 1891 or 1892. Maria, married Frank Fletcher Bancroft (a messenger at the Rockdale post-office) in March 1904. Margaret, who left Sydney in September 1904 for South Africa to marry Alec Burden, formerly of Climpton Street, Rockdale. Elizabeth, married Elias Godfrey in 1890. George, married Katherine Clissold of Arncliffe about 1894-5. Alfred, married Mary Jane Cary of Bexley, (related to the Parkes family), and Mary Ann married Francis Walter Worthington on April 14th, 1914, in South Africa. This latter couple returned to New South Wales in 1924 and the husband died in 1944. Mary Ann then married Thomas Beaman, a former schoolmate, at Moorebank on April 14th, 1958. This gentleman died in October 1960. Mary Ann, now a charming lady, approaching her 90th year, is still hale and hearty and is the last of the children of Isaac Beehag, a large and pioneering family with many descendants living in the St. George District.

About 1878 Isaac Beehag was still listed as a carter, and it has been stated that he was the first Town Clerk of the West Botany Council, which then met at Arncliffe. This clerical work was evidently carried out in an honorary capacity, possibly at the instigation of his father who was a local Alderman and fulfilled the position of Mayor for the second, third, fifth, and sixth years of the Council's activities.

It was in the early eighteen-eighties, or thereabouts, that Isaac Beehag disengaged himself from gardening and wood carting pursuits and became established as a dairyman on his Uncle William Beehag's property around Spring Creek in the eastern portion of present day Banksia. The dairy farm ranged along the shallow northern slopes of Rockdale Hill against the alignment of Tabrett Street where a herd of cows, some Ayrshire, and others of the Illawarra breed, some red coated, some white, and others a mixture of both colours. The dairy farm supplied the needs of customers living throughout the Kogarah, Rockdale, Bexley, and Arncliffe suburbs.

One particularly white cow, named "Lily", was a favourite of the milking personnel, but another animal, known by the distinctive name of "Ironbark", proved tough to milk and was far from popular. A good cow gave upwards of thirty quarts of milk per day (seven and a half gallons) which is a remarkable output. As cows do not recognise Sunday as a day of rest the milking team had no sabbath rest from their everyday chores, although the roundsmen had the afternoon off. To feed the cows it required the energy of two men, one to turn the handle of the chaff-cutter, and the other to feed hay into the machine. The chaff thus gained, together with a mixture of bran and corn-meal, had to be cooked on two occasions each day and formed the staple diet of the dairy herd. The cooking process was carried out in a huge iron cauldron, about four and a half feet in diameter, heated by a wood fire placed beneath.

Isaac Beehag is reputed to have been the first local dairyman serving the then somewhat scattered community, per medium of two milk-carts and three cart-horses. In between whiles he also indulged, so it has been said, in a little market-gardening as a sideline. A weekly load of vegetables were taken by dray to the city markets for sale, and when there was a surfeit of green foodstuffs it was occasionally necessary to bring the load back to the garden, a heart-breaking journey as no money had been obtained to offset the hardwork involved, the digging, planting, watering, and the gathering, washing, and bundling, all a dead loss, apart from providing luscious tit-bits to the ever hungry cows. It may be mentioned that Spring Creek, a clear pellucid stream of those days, bordered the garden property and its waters were dammed by a sluice gate, to conserve the necessary water for distribution by watering cans amongst the various growing beds. The banks of the creek were lined with quince-trees, the fruit of which proved saleable for jam-making. The crops grown comprised beans, cabbages, carrots, peas, turnips, and such like, whilst the bed of the creek proved ideal for water-cress, then in great demand for salads.

The Beehag family at this time lived in a small cottage with slab walls located near Tabrett Street, Banksia, on the higher and dryer portion of the land. The double-fronted facade was not provided with a verandah, the door opening from the outside path, whilst each of the front rooms had its small paned glass windows. The living room was at the north-eastern corner of the house and had an outside brick fireplace, broad based at the lower end, with its small rectangular shaped flue projecting above the roof ridge. A narrow verandah, flagged with sandstone slabs, led past the window of the living room to give access from the rear door to a single width separate kitchen which had its chimney (fitted with a "Colonial Oven") placed outside the slab walls. The cottage, free from any adornment, was purely functional in its character.

The four interior rooms intercommunicated with each other and were each lined with hessian, this rough woven material being nailed direct to the inside face of the slab walls. The hessian was well papered to prevent draughts and the entry of the dreaded night air. Candles and oil lamps provided lighting at night, being carried from room to room as required. Large circular shaped tubs, and a clothes boiler were provided for the weekly washing programme, the water being obtained from either one of the

three wells which were close handy to the rear of the premises. The buckets, dangling at the end of a rope, were raised and lowered hand over hand at the well-head and carried to the house. The water supply for the cattle was also handled in this manner, although further supplies were obtained from the neighbouring Spring Creek and its sluice dam.

It has been stated that Mary Ann Beehag, the good housewife, found a cool place for the butter at the base of the living room chimney, where the circulating breeze passing up the flue had the definite advantage of keeping down the temperature. An exploring snake wriggling in from the neighbouring market garden also found the chimney hearth to its liking, and was not above having a snack from the butter container. Great was the excitement amongst the household when the presence of the snake was discovered. Isaac raced for his shot-gun whilst a daughter was sent to play suitable music on the parlour harmonium, music calculated to inspire the snake to get a wriggle on. One would appreciate a knowledge of the tune played on this momentous occasion, apparently it was alluring enough to bring the snake from its hiding place into the living room, where Isaac gave it a blast from his shot-gun, causing injuries from which it did not recover.

For reasons which are now obscure it became necessary for Isaac Beehag to vacate the dairy farm at Tabrett Street as from about 1887, and take his cow bails and milking sheds etc. together with "Lily" and "Ironbark" and the rest of the herd of cows to a small wind-swept paddock at the crest of Arncliffe Hill. Little if any agistment was available at the new site and it was necessary to seek pasture land elsewhere, the animals being driven out and returned daily under the custody of a herdsman. A sufficient supply of fresh water was a big problem and daily trips had to be made to the unnamed creek flowing into Cooks River in the vicinity of the Cooks River Dam at Tempe. The family lived in a large two-storied weatherboard house, which, it is presumed, still stands adjacent to the present day Pitt Owen Avenue, a poplar-tree lined cul-de-sac once aptly known as Cliff Street, Arncliffe. The large house is now converted to a series of residential flats. Nearby and facing Forest Road was a small weatherboard building, flanked by pepper-trees, said to have been Arncliffe's first general store, an emporium which has long vanished from the scene. The stay of the Beehag menage off Forest Road only lasted about eighteen months, as the site proved most unsuitable in every way, and a move was made in 1888 to the orchard property of Mr. Ferrier, located in the Upper Spring Creek valley, on the lower northern slopes of Bexley Hill, where grazing and living conditions were more to the liking of the large family.

The Ferrier's house was a single-storied place, with perhaps six main rooms, situated at the then eastern terminal of Herbert Street. Beneath the wooden floor of a large verandah was a deep well, its trap-door covered by a long table, the water being raised by means of a hand-operated pump for household purposes and then carried in buckets to the section of the house where the previous liquid was required.

The orchard ground was spread over eighteen acres of which some eight acres were devoted to fruit growing. There were seven varieties of apple-trees, plums, peaches, nectarines, apricots, orange-trees, mandarin

trees, medlars, figs, mulberries, cape-gooseberries, grapes, damson plums, and also a flattish variety of Japanese plum. Guavas of both the small red and the large yellow varieties flourished and it is believed that an attempt had been made, without success, to grow pineapples.

In these shall we say fruitful surroundings the cows, some thirty in all, led a contented life, although, sad to relate, a couple died through the inroads of a particularly wet winter. These beasts, in good condition, each having a sale price of about thirty pounds cash. Evidently the place was unhealthy as Isaac Beehag also took a sickness and about 1891 he moved, with his family and cow sheds and other paraphernalia, to Mr. Stapleton's old home, known as Pembroke Park, at Kingsgrove. Here they occupied a weatherboard cottage, with two attic rooms, which was located opposite Smithson's famous wine-bar on Stoney Creek Road.

The family lived in these quarters until 1893 when Isaac Beehag decided to return to his earlier haunts at Tabrett Street. During his absence from this scene the old slab hutment had been demolished and a new cottage, built by the then owner of the "Belmont" property, Mr. Samuel Beehag, was ready for occupation. Isaac brought his now almost portable cow-sheds and bails from Kingsgrove and re-erected them on their original site. The cows were driven overland to their former pasture ground and everybody was happy. It is unfortunate that Isaac died in June 1894, leaving his good wife to carry on the dairy business until about 1901 when, her health having failed, the business as a going concern was sold to an Englishman named Joseph Moreton. It may be mentioned that the entrance gate to the new dairy farm was opposite to the intersection of Gibbes Street with Tabrett Street.

It has been related that Isaac Beehag was either the first, or the second, person to be buried in the then newly opened Woronora Cemetery at Sutherland, Mr. Charles Fripps being the registrar. In due course his beloved and industrious wife was laid to rest beside him. The Tabrett Street farm has long departed, and its place is now occupied by rows of modern bungalows, a housing estate served by Chestnut Drive and a pair of cul-de-sacs.

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THE AFFAIRS OF JAMES WILSON. AN EARLY SETTLER OF ROCKDALE.

Gifford and Eileen Eardley.

Nestling against a background of scarlet-flowered coral-trees in West Botany Street, Rockdale, is the former home of James Wilson, a four-roomed single-storied building built of cut ashlar stone, which once had a shingled roof, and still retains its small separate kitchen at the rear. It is possible that this old house, which is still occupied, may have a claim to be the oldest cottage in the immediate district which was once known as the West Botany Farms.

It is understood that James Wilson came to New South Wales about 1850, accompanied by his wife and a family of eight children, four boys and four girls, aboard the good ship "THETIS". James Wilson found employment as an overseer with Colonel Johnson, a somewhat irascible old gentleman who owned the large estate known as "ANNANDALE", an extensive grant which is nowadays incorporated within the precincts of the present day suburb of Annandale. The men employed under Wilson came from all walks of life, and included Chinese amongst other eastern races, all working hard for a meagre pittance. There was a certain amount of sadistic cruelty about the actions of the top management regarding these men, a circumstance which did not make for harmony amongst the personnel, consequently when the "gold-rush" for the Sofala occurred most of the men left "Annandale" to make their fortunes, if possible, amidst the diggings and alluvial wash of the various creek beds at the Central West. After serving Colonel Johnson for some three years or so James Wilson came to live at West Botany Street, then little more than a bush track which ran northwards to dodge the rocky ramparts of Arncliffe Hill and to reach Rocky Point Road in the vicinity of Cooks River.

Here a block of heavily timbered land, bisected by Black (or Muddy) Creek was farmed as a vegetable garden, the four sons helping with the clearing, and preparation of the rich bottom land bordering the stream. It is surmised that the stone cottage was built at this early period to adequately house the large family.

The eldest son, John, married a widow named Isabella Grant, who had two sons by her first marriage, named John and Robert Grant. Two daughters arrived with her second marriage who bore the names Jeannie and Mary Wilson. John Wilson went to the gold fields to try his luck, like countless other people, but never returned and to this day his fate is unknown. His wife, Isabella, stayed at the home in West Botany Street until 1880, when she went to live at a cottage in Farr Street, Rockdale (then known as West Botany) for a couple of years. After this period she entered the household of Isaac Beehag where she remained until her death on October 20th, 1890. She was buried in the Wesleyan Cemetery in Bay Street, Rockdale. Her son, John Grant, became an Inspector of Fisheries, whilst the younger son, Robert Grant, became a skilled boat-builder in the employ of Harry Wicks of Botany.

Reverting to the family of James Wilson we find that the second eldest child was named Isabella, and eventually married Thomas Carruthers. The third child, Janet, married Oswald Harley, and then came David who was interested in horse breaking and horse dealing as a means of making a livelihood. In due course he married Sarah Brown, and the couple had a son who was also named David. Later this lad followed in his father's footsteps as a horse dealer. There was also a daughter, Jeannie, of this marriage who wedded Jim Deed of Wollongong. The fifth child of James Wilson was a boy, named Francis, and at the age of maturity he married Lucy Gentle, whose father operated Gentle's Brickworks in the Newtown area. The sixth child bore the lovely name of Ellen and she married Alfred Kebblewhite. Then came another James Wilson who, after his marriage, went to live in

the country. It is believed that both Francis and James the younger were employed by the Railways Department. The eighth child was named Mary Ann, who later shared her life and fortunes with Isaac Beehag, a young man who lived with his gardening family on the south side of Bay Street, Rockdale.

James Wilson (senior) died on April 20th, 1869 at the age of 70 years and was buried in the Wesleyan Cemetery Bay Street, Rockdale. After his father's death the house and property at West Botany Street was taken over by son David, who was listed as a horse-dealer in 1887 and again in 1900. His son, David, in turn, eventually took over the same property. Trouble with the end gabled walls of the old stone cottage was experienced about 1910, and to overcome their spreading apart Mr. Albert Mathieson installed internal bracing rodding, with screwed ends, running the full width of the building, the outer ends passing through large "Ess" shaped iron braces which, clamped against the outside of both end walls, held them firmly in position.

At this time the horse paddock belonging to the property was located at the rear of the cottage, whilst the extensive market garden, lying southwards towards the creek, was cultivated by Chinese gardeners. These industrious gentlemen occupied a small galvanised-iron shanty on higher ground in the vicinity of the cottage.

The more recent events of the Wilson Household are unknown to the writers, but on March 7th, 1958, the property of $3\frac{3}{4}$ acres was acquired by the Cumberland County Council from the Estate of Lily Maud Loveday for town planning purposes. When this latter Council was dissolved the land and its ancient cottage were destined, so it is believed, to come into the possession of the Rockdale Municipal Council. The gardens, under leasehold conditions, are still operated by Chinese people and are a pleasant picture of neat husbandry. At June 1970, the small stone cottage, then about one hundred and twenty years of age, was in occupation and its fabric maintained in fairly good condition. However, its future seems to be uncertain as the "developers" are casting eyes on the valuable land, and the production of the so essential green foodstuffs for the community at large is, and always has been, the least of their worries. One can only hope that should the former property of James Wilson be developed it will be possible to find a new resting place, perhaps under museum conditions, of, perhaps, Rockdale's oldest settler's home, a true relic of the past.

The authors are indebted to Mrs. Beaman, Mr. C.W. Napper, and Mr. A. Matheson for kindly supplying much of the information contained in this article dealing with the affairs of James Wilson, a farmer of West Botany in the days of yore.

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