



# ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

81 Watkin Street,  
BEXLEY. 2207.

11th June, 1971.

Dear Friend and Member,

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

Date: Friday Evening next, 18th June, 1971, at 8 p.m.

Place: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale.

Guest Speaker: Mr. W. Foster, MA., FRAH., will speak on -  
"Early Sydney and Plans for Development".

Business: General.

Supper Roster: Miss Lambert (Capt.), Mrs. McNamara, Miss White,  
Mrs. Marsden and Mrs. Nelson.

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

D.H. Sinclair.

Miss J. Noble.

President.

Hon. Secretary.

Phone 599.4884.

Please Note ! Membership fees are now due. Fees \$1.00 for the first  
member of each family and 50¢ for each additional member.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY - FUTURE OUTINGS AND SOCIAL EVENINGS.

Please ring Mrs. Eardley, Asst. Secretary, Ph. 59.8078, for outing bookings or Mrs. E. Wright, President, Ladies Committee, Ph. 599.4884, for social bookings.

### July 10th - Saturday. Inspection of Fort Denison.

Ferry leaves No. 2 Jetty at 12.45 p.m. Sharp. Returns approx. 3 p.m. Afternoon tea may be had in the Botanical Gardens - Bring your own. Cost. 50¢ Adults. 20¢ Children. Please book early.

### August - Visit to Nugal Hall - Randwick.

Details later.

## "LYDHAM HALL FUND RAISING COMMITTEE"

### July 13th - Tuesday Evening.

Anniversary Dinner - will be held at "Ainslee Lodge", Seaforth Street, Bexley. Cost \$4.00 per person.

Your invitation is included with this Bulletin and we look forward to your attendance to celebrate this anniversary. Please make cheques payable to "St. George Historical Society" and either hand or post to Mrs. E. Wright, 81 Watkin Street, Bexley, as soon as possible. Transport is available by the Government Bus 472, Rodd Point or Carlton Bus leaving Rockdale Station and setting down at "Ainslee Lodge", Cnr. Caledonian and Seaforth Streets, Bexley.

## CAVALCADE OF FASHION.

As Secretary of this Society I would sincerely thank those members of the Society and especially the members of the "Ladies Fund Raising Committee" for their co-operation and support in making this a most successful and financial evening, with profits to "Lydham Hall Fund Raising Committee" and the Mayoress' Fund.

The attendance figures were 355 and although the attendance of Society members was a little disappointing it was heartening to see the response of outside organisations who supported this function very strongly.

It was pleasing to note the response of the return of raffle books.  
Results of prizes: 1st. Miss B. Helmrich, C/- St. George County Council.  
2nd Matron Longmore, Hurstville.  
3rd Mrs. Martin.

This Society is most grateful to the "North Shore Cavalcade Group" for their excellent presentation of fashion through the years, and to Rockdale Municipal Council for co-operating and supporting our Society in allowing us to present this function to celebrate Rockdale Municipal Council's Centenary.

J. Noble.  
Hon. Secretary.  
11/6/71.



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## MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Would you kindly complete the following form, detach and either post or hand to the Secretary.

As members of this Society, we all have the responsibility of availing ourselves for Roster Duty at "Lydham Hall" and we appeal to you for your support in this matter.

We sincerely appreciate those members who have given of their time and support over the past months.

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## ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please find enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ being my/our membership subscription for  
19 \_\_\_\_ /19

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No. \_\_\_\_\_

Receipt No. \_\_\_\_\_

\$1.00 for the first member of each family and 50¢ for each additional member.

Please indicate if you are available for Roster Duty and which days would be suitable.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Saturday ..... Sunday: .....

Post to:- Miss J. Noble,  
81 Watkin Street,  
BEXLEY. NSW. 2207.

THE BLACK, OR MUDDY CREEK WATERSHED.

.... Gifford and Eileen Eardley.

The name of Black, or Muddy, was far too often bestowed on pellucid streams by unimaginative first settlers in a particular area, and it is somewhat unfortunate that both of these names were conferred on the waterway, now only a brick-sided stormwater channel, which wends its silent way from the crest of the dividing clay ridge immediately west of Allawah Railway Station, to ultimately enter Cooks River at Kyeemagh. Unfortunately we must accept this nomenclature but to trace the course of any stream is always a fascinating procedure. We can picture in our minds eye this stream, in its pristine state, flowing gently through the undisturbed gum-tree forest, its fern-covered banks lined with Sydney Wattle and masses of Native Fuschia.

The hill slopes at the Black Forest (now Hurstville) are gentle around the upper source of the stream and its waters spring largely from such rainwater which percolated slowly through the undergrowth and surface soil, the bed being little more than a depressed runnel. All this tree-clad beauty was ruthlessly swept away by the developers and "well cleared land" was thrown open in small allotments to suburban homebuilders, when the railway came to the area in 1883. The upper portion of the creek is now largely confined within pipes and conduits which drain the numerous street gutters at their lowest level.

About the early nineteen-hundreds the creek, although completely de-forested insofar as its surroundings were concerned and completely suburban in character, still flowed through its own now grass and weed covered banks, forming little pools of no great depth here and there, and, in wet weather, racing over shallows of sand and iron-stone gravel wash. This was open paddock country before the houses appeared, and pipes were sufficient to carry the normal flow beneath Short Street at Carlton, and Webber's Road, which is now named Willison Road. Running northward the first bridge was met at the intersection of Guinea Street, Kogarah, a timber structure supported on timber abutments about six feet in height. Swallows nested underneath the floor timbers, oblivious to the occasional rumble of horse-drawn traffic overhead. Quite a deep pool was located at the southern side of the bridge, which supported a wriggling throng of tad-poles, whirligig beetles, and awful looking but interesting aquatic insects which were called "Toe-biters" and considered a menace by bare-legged schoolboys. It was against this particular pool that a solitary Native Rose (*Boronia serulata*) plant flourished, the last local specimen of its kind, together with a fine clump of Dog Rose (*Bauera rubioides*), each plant being a survival of the native flora through which the stream flowed so merrily.

Between the bridge at Guinea Street and a similar structure downstream at Paine Street, the neighbouring hillsides descended steeply to the creekbed which hereabouts was little more than a grassy hollow. Several properties fronting Railway Street, Kogarah, had their depth extended across the creek to abutt on to the alignment of Taylor Street. One property in particular had its short isolated western section fenced all round, being separated from its eastern section by the creek hollow which was occasionally flooded in stormy weather. This enclosed western section was planted

with a few exotic trees, one of which was a large Lombardy Poplar, quite a novelty in the St. George district at large. The grassy hollow along the banks of the creek was a great browsing place for straying horses and cattle, the beasts being let loose on the landscape to feed on such agistment that came their way.

Continuing northwards from Paine Street, the stream passed against the back fence of a pair of quaint "Mansard" roofed cottages which still exist in Paine Street, and followed a northern course between earth banks some four feet in depth. A narrow width footbridge gave pedestrian access from Station Street westwards to Queen Victoria Street. North of the bridge the deep and now murky channel continued, the home of bewhiskered water-rats, charming furtive creatures who somehow or other managed to keep their glossy fur coats free from the sticky black mire in which they eked out a living. One had to be very cautious in approaching this place in order to see the little animals sporting in the shallows, as at the least warning of danger they scampered to their burrows hidden beneath the dense masses of over-hanging grass.

At the intersection of the present day Robertson Street a rocky knoll was skirted, after which the stream, now about five feet in width, changed its direction to the north-east, following along the alignment afforded by the back fences of a row of brick cottages facing on to Warialda Street. A solitary willow tree graced this section, whilst numerous plank footbridges led from back gates to ensure the inhabitants reasonably safe but direct access to Kogarah Railway Station and its nearby shopping area. A herd of goats was associated with one particular family, and their straying and eating habits caused great concern amongst neighbouring gardeners. They also fed on the offal and household rubbish thrown over the various back fences on an "out of sight out of mind" basis, a regular practice everywhere until such time as municipal garbage collecting services were introduced. Local schoolboys, generally three in number, have been known to round up an unsuspecting but friendly "Nanny-goat" and, whilst two boys held her, one by the horns and the other steadying the rear, the third, who knew the ropes, milked her into a not too clean but discarded jam tin. The milk was very rich to drink but it is believed that the old lady who owned the goat was far from amused at this clandestine practice. A "paddling" of red-faced Muscovy ducks were always a joy to behold as they swam and dabbled in the stream, keeping a wary eye open for roving dogs and stone-pelting schoolboys.

Clear of the easternmost cottage in Warialda Street the creek reverted to its northerly course and passed beneath a long low white painted footbridge leading from Station Street to Cadia Street.

The banks of the stream were now level and well grassed and in this fashion the confluence of Kogarah Creek was met, the latter being a small stream which flowed down from the southern heights of what may be termed the Bexley Ridge, and one that became famous, and quickly infamous, as the scene of a "planted" gold rush in days of yore.

North of the junction of the two creeks the united stream entered Fry's Paddock, now a grassy well kept sward known as Fry's Reserve, where a small water hole was met, out of which rose a solitary boulder, about three feet in height, the only stone met with in the complete course of Muddy Creek.

Above the western bank of the waterhole, perched on a rocky escarpment, there was once a large hoarding fashioned in flat sheet iron after the manner of an old-time "High-flier" "D" class express steam locomotive, a lovely sight to small boys, which advertised to train passengers, on the other side of the creek, the merits of Pearson's Sandsoap and Winkworth's pianos and organs. A short distance beyond the waterhole the stream turned eastward to pass beneath the Illawarra Railway. It is understood that in the first instance the railway tracks were carried across the waterway by means of a three span wooden trestle bridge. This structure was later replaced by a large diameter brick-lined culvert covered by an earthen embankment, an arrangement which eliminated all maintenance requirements.

Clear of the culvert the stream, now a tranquil eight foot in width, its waters discoloured to a clayey yellow hue, passed through Mr. Fry's orchard of overhanging water-loving quince trees, of which the authors have happy thoughts of ripe fruit and unpleasant memories of unripe fruit and its consequent disorders. This particular spot was covered with dense foliage, the home of numerous tribes of tiny Zebra Finches and Red-headed Finches, whilst underneath could be observed, at times, long sinuous eels and the snouts of tortoises. The stream was becoming inhabited by its rightful occupants.

It should be mentioned that the name of FRY'S CREEK was in general use for that portion of the main stream flowing through Fry's property on either side of the railway. The next section, east of the intersection of Harrow Road, eastwards to Rocky Point Road, became known as SKIDMORE'S CREEK as it passed through the grazing and gardening property of Mr. Skidmore.

Clear of the Fry property at Harrow Road, Kogarah, another white-painted footbridge was reached, beyond which an entanglement of fencing wire marked the entry to Skidmore's Farm. Hard by, on the southern side of the stream is the long low double-fronted farm-house which is still occupied, although the farmland has long been subdivided. At the period under review the creek flowed through cleared grazing land where horses browsed at leisure, together with many fowls and supervising roosters who resided in a motley assemblage of hen hutments and wired fowl runs nearby. Then came the confluence of another creek which descended from the wilds of Bexley as exemplified by the eastern slopes served by Frederick Street. The main stream was now greatly increased in both width and depth, the incoming tributary being lined on its eastern bank, which bordered a Chinese market garden, by a row of tall *Pinus Insignis* trees of great age. A dense hedge of prickly pink-flowered lantana, the habitat of a numerous colony of Silver-eyes, divided the northern bank of the main stream from the same well kept Chinese garden, once, so we have been told, in the possession of the Skidmore family. The eastern alignment of the same garden, bordering Rocky Point Road (now Princes Highway) was formed by a hedge of orange and yellow flowered honey-scented *Buddleia* shrubs, which provided nectar for a multitude of honey-eating birds, of diver's sorts, and honey-bees.

A very tall Blackbutt gum tree flourished on the Skidmore property until about 1914, near the southern bank of the stream, which bore a placard nailed to its upper trunk stating "WOODMEN. SPARE THIS TREE IN MEMORY OF POOR OLD CHARLIE BARSBY". We have often been puzzled as to why this particular tree was thus singled out, but reasons have not been forthcoming, the people concerned having long passed on. It may be mentioned that



Charlie Barsby was a retail draper with premises both at Kogarah and Rockdale shopping centres. Near the memorial tree was a dense lantana thicket beneath which, in due season, one could gather a fine crop of large and tasty mushrooms. Also on the southern bank of the stream was a collection of three tiny brick buildings, marking the original home of the Skidmore family, which, unfortunately have long been demolished. The kitchen was entered through half doors, the lower half keeping the pigs out, the upper half, when opened let in light, fresh air, and flying fowls. A large wide-open fireplace was located at the western end of the tiny gabled roofed structure, where the cooking needs were accomplished by the old time methods of suspending the pots by chains above the flames, an interesting but hot and somewhat messy business. It is said that this group of buildings were the second to be erected in the eastern St. George land district, the first being downstream of which more anon.

The crossing of the Rocky Point Road over Skidmore's Creek was originally effected by means of a water-splash, which sorely tried both man and beast during the flood periods. The ford was perhaps the major hazard to be met along the length of this now ancient highway. With the construction of the new road to the South Coast, via Tom Ugly's Point, in the early eighteen-sixties, a bridge of logs was built across the waterway and from henceforth the crossing was made without incident.

Leaving the bridge the gently sloping hillsides on either side of the creek were both formerly under cultivation, that on the northern side being in the hands of John Lister, whilst that on the south was cultivated as a market garden by Samuel Schofield, and later by the German family of Reuter. The stream continued to flow eastwards through a wilderness of fennel and castor-oil trees on what may be regarded as its own right-of-way. Under its overhanging grass-grown banks lived another coterie of water-rats who prospered exceedingly on a diet of insect and other pickings lurking in the dense vegetation of the now rectangular-shaped stream bed. In succession came Thomas Mascord's property, immediately east of that of Samuel Schofield, from which a small drain entered, passing through reed-beds and a small casuarina tree fringed lake, once the pug pit of the local brickworks.

The northern bank bordered the market garden of James Beehag, another pioneer of the district of West Botany. Skirting the latter property the stream now turned to the north, passing under Bay Street, and the trestle bridge carrying the former Saywell's Tramway over the waterway. The immediate area is low-lying and still subject to flooding, up to four feet in depth, when Muddy Creek rises in spate.

North of the Bay Street bridges the creek entered the market gardening property of Mr. Quirk, later cultivated by the industrious Chinese, and followed along the western side of the alignment of West Botany Street for a short distance. Hereabouts, according to an old map of the area, a small and narrow island, no doubt covered with drooping casuarina trees, divided the stream. This island was later removed and the stream course straightened to lessen the effect of periodical floodings. Leaving Quirk's garden the stream turned to the north-east to pass through the old water-splash once associated with the crossing of West Botany Street, the ford being later supplanted by a log and sawn timber bridge, much to the edification of the local farming community.

The long established market garden of James Wilson, later devoted by David Wilson to horse-breaking, and at present occupied by Chinese gardeners, has its original brick homestead maintained in good order and condition. This cottage was claimed by the late Thomas Mascord to be the first house built in Rockdale and as such is of historic importance. It would date, perhaps, to the early eighteen-fifties. The creek widened in this vicinity and deep swimming holes, lined with casuarina trees, became a feature. It has been related that in the early days of the local settlement a youth dived into the stream and was almost disembowelled when he struck the rusty lid of a submerged kerosene tin. He was quickly hauled ashore and bandaged by a Chinese gardener, a chaff bag being used for the purpose. The injured lad was then placed on a horse dray and taken over the indifferent roads to Sydney Hospital.

The market garden property of Charles Napper lay slightly to the south of the stream, its site marked today by the Elizabethan Bowling Club. According to report there is a jam-jar full of golden sovereigns, hidden at the time of the Bank failures of the early eighteen-nineties, buried on the old Napper estate. Then came the market garden of John Bowmer, bisected by the waterway, the two sections being joined by a log bridge. The Bowmer homestead, named BURTON COTTAGE, was placed at the crest of a low hillock abutting on to the northern side of the stream, well above flood level. The original building dated back to 1872 and it is surmised that this building still stands and that it has long been used as a barn or cart shed and, in more modern times, as a garage.

Beyond the fence line of the Bowmer property the stream veers to the north and enters a wide depression with the slopes of a clay hill on the western flank, and about a half mile width of sand dunes on the eastern flank, reaching to the shore of Botany Bay. The bottom of the depression is covered by a dense mass of reeds, the haunt of snakes and water-fowl such as Bald Coots and the showy Purple-breasted Gallinules. Herons and egrets are regular visitants, seeking, like the snakes, a diet of frogs. Also on occasions are to be seen Spur-winged plover and the stately Black and White Ibis, whilst Black Crows are not unknown. In this vicinity, towards West Botany Street, was the Boiling Down and Bone-dust plant associated with the abattoirs of Mr. Foulkes, the residuals from these activities were tipped into the now smelly waters of Muddy Creek, creating an aroma which was not appreciated by the local residents. Langdon's poultry farm was nearby, the cottage being placed on the crest of the hill and surrounded by a group of trees which still flourish, although the house and its hen hutments have long vanished.

Following its northward course the stream reached the intersection of Bestic Street, formerly known as Goode Street, a one time bush thoroughfare which originally passed through the water on a corduroy mat of rough logs until such time as a bridge was built. From this crossing onwards Muddy Creek becomes tidal and its estuary widens amidst mud-flats covered with mangrove trees, the abode of multitudes of small crabs, cockles, mud-oysters, and whelks. A rich feeding ground for the aboriginal tribes of yesteryear. Salt swamp lands extended westwards to the alignment of the now untrafficable Eve Street, which skirted the watery margin, and on the east are the luxuriant vegetable farms associated with the Goode family, very early settlers in this interesting corner of the land district of St. George.



To students of the past this area, not a village but collectively known as the West Botany Farms, is classic ground for the cottagers round about may be included as being amongst the pioneers of the easternmost section of St. George. The early cottages call for no special architectural admiration as they were simply built of bricks obtained from the local kiln and purely functional in design.

Muddy, or Black Creek, after passing through a wilderness of mangroves once inhabited by droves of wild pigs, at length reached Cooks River at the "Bonnie Doon" property near Tempe, the house being located in a surround of Moreton Bay figtrees at the rear of the salt marsh on the western side of the stream. A plot of dry land on the east bank is quaintly named "GUM-AN-NAM", why? No one seems to know.

In the early days of the settlement known as West Botany one could catch the horse-drawn omnibus at Sydneytown, and make the journey via George Street and the Cooks River Road to the Tempe Dam. Here a waterman could be engaged who, by means of his rowing skiff, gave further transit either up stream towards Canterbury, or the tidal limit of Wolli Creek, or downstream along the Muddy Creek as far as the Goode Street (now Bestic Street) water-splash. It must have been a tranquil journey amongst the surroundings of the quiet bush, and the equally quiet waterways.

It is not particularly pleasant to follow the course of Muddy (or Black) Creek in this year of grace. Its course from its upper regions to the vicinity of West Botany Street is contained within the sad brick walls of a stormwater channel, more of interest to bricklayers and civil engineers than the nature lover. The only trees along this section are a lovely group of Chinese Weeping Willows immediately east of the conduit beneath the Illawarra Railway. It is understood that the Rockdale Municipal Council made representations to the Metropolitan Water and Sewerage Board for permission to plant a similar row of Willow-trees along the banks of the section between Princes Highway and Bay Street. Their reply was the usual "Automatic No", which saves the bureaucratic mind a lot of trouble and, perhaps, slight expense. In a suburb not noted for the wealth of its tree growth the contemplated row of trees would have been of inestimable value from a picturesque point of view.

The tidal section of Muddy Creek, north of the present concrete bridge at Bestic Street, still retains its mangrove tree fringe on its eastern bank, intermixed with numerous little jetties associated with the adjoining Fisherman's Clubhouse. A great conglomeration of motor boats lie at anchor in the sheltered stream making a pretty sight amidst an otherwise drab landscape. The western bank of the stream, now called the Kyeemagh Canal, is undergoing the throes of a dredging and deepening programme, the mud thus obtained being cast into great unsightly heaps in the best engineering manner. The lower northern portion of the former Muddy Creek has been incorporated into the new channel of Cooks River, a diversion brought about by the extension of the landing ground of the neighbouring Kingsford Smith Airport. The banks of the stream, flowing between low-level banks, have been battered with small stones, the cavities between each stone being of particular interest to small crabs, which, in turn, are of particular culinary interest to certain Southern European families. One cannot claim that the present course of Muddy Creek has any pretensions to beauty, it has suffered sadly in being treated as a drain, and no attempt, unfortunately, has been made to recapture its former charm.