



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

24 Duff Street,
ARNCLIFFE. 2205.

March, 1972.

Dear Friend and Member,

The regular monthly meeting will be held as follows:-

Date: Friday Evening March 17th, 1972, at 8 p.m.

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

Business: General.

Syllabus Item: An Illustrated Address by Station Officer Hearne,
Subject: "Early Fire Service in the St. George District".
Questions invited on Address at conclusion.

Supper Roster: Mrs. McNamara, Capt., Mesdames Lambert, O'Shea,
Longhurst, McMillan, Waddington.

Ladies Bring a Plate.

Mr. J. Stead,
President.
Phone 59.5341.

Mrs. E. Eardley,
Hon. Secretary.
Phone 59.8078.

Mr. A. Ellis,
Research Officer.
Phone 587.1159.

Dates of Interest.

April 15th, 1972.

A Street Stall will be held in the Bexley Shopping Centre on April 15th, Saturday Morning, proceeds from which will help with the restoration of Lydham Hall.

Can we rely on the generosity of our Members to help stock this stall? Cakes, Scones, Pikelets, Jams, Pickles or Edibles of any kind, also inexpensive bits and pieces suitable for the stall will be greatly appreciated.

May 6th, 1972.

A Film Evening, featuring Part 2 of the Centenary Celebrations, together with films from the National Trust will constitute what we hope will prove to be a very happy evening. The cost will be 45¢ each, and a light supper will be provided at the conclusion of the film.

Alderman Rathbone has again kindly offered to be projectionist for the occasion, and this we greatly appreciate. Tickets available at next meeting.

Suggestions for outings.

As these outings are planned for the pleasure of our Members and their friends, suggestions and ideas will be welcome. Do please take an interest in the welfare and progress of your Society, and come forward with any ideas you think will be interesting and helpful.

There has been a suggestion that we, as a group, note the old Inns along the Great Western Highway for photographic purposes and interest. This would be an interesting outing, and if it could be arranged for late April, or early May, the beauty of the Autumn Colours would be an added attraction. Please ring if you are interested. Phone 59.8078. Bookings are requested.

We would like to say "Thankyou" for the following recent acquisitions to "Lydham Hall".

Mrs. Williams,
East Street,
Arncliffe.

"Loo". Folding table, Rosewood, centre panel inset,
(Embossed) Early to Mid Victorian.
Blue Bowl (details later)
Whatnot, " "

All on Loan.

Mr. & Mrs. W. Foster,
Hillpine Avenue,
Kogarah.

Shaving Mug, 1880-1890 used by Mr. Samuel Oakes.
1 pair tiny oval shaped spectacles - gold frames.
1 pair tiny "Glare-proof" spectacles, silver frames.
Examples of hairpin work done with wire beads, one
also with pumpkin seeds. Late 1880's. These
belonged to Mrs. Caroline Foster (nee Oakes)
Grandparents of Mr. Bill Foster.

Alderman J. E. Burke,
11 Carrisbrook Avenue,
Bexley North.

Old Newspapers dated -

- (1) 8th February, 1794.
Morning Advertiser - London.
(price three halfpence).
- (2) 7th November, 1805.
22nd June, 1815.
The Times - London.
(price sixpence).
- (3) 23rd June, 1897.
El Correo Militar - Madrid, Spain.

We would like to thank: Misses G. Frost, L. White, F. Lambert, and
Mesdames McNamara & Nelson for their generous
donations towards the Street Stall, and also any
other Members who have been equally generous,
but whose names are not to hand.

THE OLD ROADS OF THE WOLLI CREEK VALLEY, WEST ARNCLIFFE.

..... Gifford and Eileen Eardley.

Darley Road, and its western extension known as Slade Road, are exceptionally busy thoroughfares in this year of grace, 1972, but it was not always thus, there was a time when they were rural tracks of the rutted variety, leading around the northern ramparts of Mount Bardwell, to serve a few isolated farmhouses in the outer parts of West Arncliffe. It may be of interest to follow these erstwhile bush roads in the time of their pristine loneliness, when traffic mostly consisted of two-wheeled drays loaded with squealing pigs, or piled with vegetables or stacked with fruit cases. Sulkies harnessed to sleek ponies plied from the farmhouses to the few general stores then established at Arncliffe, or, perhaps, the busier shopping centre at Rockdale.

At random, say, we choose the year 1910 for the purpose of our journey into the past, when we would arrive, via the devious narrow back streets of old-time Arncliffe, at the intersection of John Street and Arncliffe Road, now known as Bardwell Road. We are in the midst of orchard country with the isolated sandstone-girt Wilcox Hill at our eastern side, a precipitous mass with the late Tom Booth's quarry located on its lower northern slopes. Walking along in a westerly direction, our path along Arncliffe Road descended steeply to the water-splash over the then glittering Stoney Creek, the name of which has been changed to Bardwell Creek. The banks were low and flat, covered with sedge and rank grass a great prospecting ground for white-plumaged egrets and Blue Herons, who kept watch by day for frogs, snails, tadpoles, and anything else of an edible nature which came their way. The night shift of food searching marsh birds was taken over by the beautiful wide-eyed Nankeen Night Herons, who spent their daylight hours sleeping in the huge pine trees at the rear of the Farleigh residence, "MIMOSA", in Dowling Street, and also in the grove of pine trees planted by Mr. Judd at "ATHELSTANE", located at the corner of Dowling Street and Wollongong Road. Unfortunately these splendid birds have now left the district consequent on the indiscriminate destruction of the trees at "MIMOSA".

Stoney Creek at the watersplash, or ford, spread itself into a wide and shallow pool, where all manner of tiny Butterfish, Zambusias, and Sydney Minnows, with the sight of an occasional eel, were to be seen swimming amongst the dense growth of water-weeds. Tortoises were not unknown, although somewhat rare. An enchanting pool for one with naturalist tendencies to speculate upon.

Clear of the stream the track ascended a low hill slope to gain the intersection of Darley Road, which led our cartway in a northerly direction, skirting the western boundary of the Blackwell orchard, which came into being as far back as 1861. This area, now a grassed grazing plot, known as Shepherd's Paddock, due to its later ownership of a dairyman of that name, is of interest at present as, surprisingly enough, an assorted herd of small Shetland ponies and long-eared donkeys nibble at leisure thereon.

Standing awhile at the intersection and gazing northwards an exquisite view unfolds beyond the post and rail fence of the orchard land. Here a dense grove of willow trees fringe both the Stoney Creek and the adjacent broader

waters of Wolli Creek, the roof lines of the squat old cottage named "HILLSIDE" project above the surround of exotic trees brought into prominence by a line of sombre-hued she-oaks bordering the junction of the two streams. We once saw a gaggle of geese, in single file, swimming along the course of the narrow waterway, honking to rout possible avian swimmers in the opposite direction, a pretty sight to witness beneath the overhanging tresses of the verdant willows. The rock-bound escarpment of Nanny-goat Hill, dotted with the fascinating shapes of golden-flowered Banksia trees and fringed with a matted growth of high Tea-Trees, made then and still makes a prominent sky-line.

Still standing at the intersection and gazing westwards, over a wild prickly hedge of blackberries, the luscious fruit which, hanging in green, red, and black clusters, were greatly appreciated by a host of silver-eyes, sparrows and other species of small finches, we espied a small weatherboard cottage surrounded by hen hutments of pleasing styles of architecture, none of which would have appealed to a designing architect. There was a great collection of hens, of diverse sorts and sizes, lorded over by their crowing lords and masters. Several dogs were chained up at suitable positions to give yapping and yelping notice of any intruders. It was quite obvious that the hens knew to a fraction of an inch how close they could venture to the dogs and the perimeter of their holding chains. The cottage was at one time owned by a Mr. Shipway, and eventually came into the hands of Mr. Jackson. After being unoccupied for a year or so the building was demolished in March 1957, the surrounding hedges destroyed, likewise the hen hutments, and the once so active site is now marked by a modern cottage. It may be of interest to note that the former tea-tree covered rocky slopes of Mount Bardwell were once the haunt of Black Snakes, with red bellies, and some large specimens were seen at various times in the nineteen-thirties, prior to the spate of housing which now spreads itself over the hillsides.

The short northward course of Darley Road was lined, on its eastern side, by a grove of gaunt stringy-bark gum-trees, after which came a grove of Acacia-trees which, in spring time, were a mass of clusters of white flowers similar in shape to those of the wisteria vines, and found great favour amongst the local bee population. The western side of the roadway was given over to vertical rock faces, the crevices supporting a wealth of bracken ferns, and the base slopes a mass of small native shrubs. The Blackwell homestead lay directly ahead of the road, and was built on the four-square principle. In recent years the single-storied cottage has had a facial up-lift, and now is a very attractive modern "Cape Cod" home.

Darley road now swings to the west, skirting the lower rock-bound slopes of Mount Bardwell on its southern flank. Before reaching May Street, in an enclosed property, there was a huge gum tree, a real monarch of the old time forest, a landmark of the Wolli Creek Valley. Such a beautiful tree could not be suffered to remain and its place is now taken by the front garden of a modern home.

The intersection of May Street is now reached, a short dead-end thoroughfare which finished its northward course abruptly at the bank of Wolli Creek. This trackway gave the early residents of the area access to the creek

water when their household tanks ran dry. The pig farm belonging to Mr. Otto Smith lay between Darley Road and the neighbouring creek, and was dominated by a large single-storied cottage, literally surrounded by all manner of out-houses, stables, wired fowl-runs, and rickety pig-pens, the latter being occupied by a motley collection of swine of all shapes and sizes, who specialised in a series of grunts, squeals, and "snozzling" noises at the approach of an admirer, and more so at feeding time when the swill was being carried about in iron buckets. They smelt to high heaven. The grounds of the farm were enmassed in scarlet-flowered coral trees, planted for shade. Several of these beautiful trees remain against the fence line of the East Hills Railway. After the closure of the pig farm the northern section of the land was dug to supply large quantities of moulding loam, which was in great demand for foundry work, and in due course a deep rectangular shaped hole appeared. This excavation lay semi-water-logged and useless until such time it was filled with household rubbish by the Rockdale Municipal Council, and the surface restored to its former level. The area is now a well grassed and nicely kept playing field.

The frontage to Darley Road of the erstwhile pig farm was lined by a truly magnificent avenue of giant *Pinis-insignus* trees, the single row being about one quarter mile in length, which gave an air of distinction to the narrow grass verged roadway. Beneath the shade of the trees were to be seen numerous members of the porcine family reclining at their ease, undisturbed by the also numerous flies. Apart from grunts from pigs and the crowing of roosters there was little else to break the great silence of the narrow bush enclosed Wolli Creek Valley.

When the pig farm property was subdivided the row of lovely pine trees was slaughtered in great style, not a stump remaining. The former avenue is now marked by a row of featureless bungalows, each at a fixed distance from its frontage alignment, in strict accord with prosaic and fixed municipal regulations. If the lovely avenue of pine trees had been spared, and the houses set back a little, Darley Road would have been one of the most picturesque thoroughfares in Arncliffe.

Our way now reached the end of the pig farm at the aptly named Water Street where Darley Road swerved to the south-west to avoid a slight gum tree covered depression, bottomed by an oftentimes dry runnel, and also to climb a hillside declivity and to reach, at the crest, the old established villa named "LAMBERT HEIGHTS", a stone building of great age which was demolished in recent years to make way for a public school. Strangely enough its site today is still marked by a huge fig tree which survived the demolition on-slaught. At the rear of "LAMBERT HEIGHTS" was a small separate kitchen, an intriguing little stone building with a bow window and gaunt chimney stacks. When first seen by the authors the place was of delightful aspect, a jacaranda tree enmasked the southern wall, the previously mentioned fig tree, together with other trees, formed a wind shelter on the northern side, whilst the flower garden at the rear was a joy, with its various blooms bordering the narrow stone-paved paths, and its creepers covered the picket and paling fences.

Around the kitchen, obviously under loving care, was a motley collection of pots, pans, collanders, and other containers given over to individual plants of various kinds. One well remembers the numerous varieties of geraniums, evidently grown from slips, taken after the manner of gardeners the world over, one imagines, from over somebody's front fence. It is believed that a solicitor, known locally as "Cocky" Lambert, resided for many years in this charming residence, living as far as neighbours were concerned, on his hilltop in complete solitude. He died here, and the authors have seen a picture of the horsedrawn funeral hearse standing in Darley Road, surrounded by a solemn growth of gum trees.

Reverting to the flat expanse of Water Street, at the base of the hill, we find the intersection of Slade Road, which led westwards at the base of the hill, its northern alignment being an agistment paddock dotted with stringy-bark gum trees which reached to the willow-fringed banks of Wolli Creek. The southern alignment of the roadway bordered a bushland of heath-covered slopes where, in 1926, an occasional Christmas Bell was to be seen. A small creek trickled through this naturalists' wonderland and formed a small pool at the roadside, evidently used for the watering of horses and cattle. The pool was formed by the excavation of a large quantity of white pipe-clay, the imperious nature of this material holding the water to brim level. There was a bank coverage of ferns and a multitude of tadpoles found the swimming to their liking. The water was sweet to drink and its frog chorus, at times suitable for the lovemaking of these green and gold coloured amphibians, was pleasant to hear, particularly the chirping sounds uttered by small specimens of the family which were in size similar to one's finger nail. The gum tree growth of the hillside had long been cut out for firewood supplies and only in recent years, strangely enough under housing conditions, is it being re-established.

The agistment paddock, at its western end, merged into the enclosed grass paddock surrounding the low weatherboard cottage of the pig farm in the possession of Mr. Knight, and later of Mr. Grives. This cottage, of small dimensions, was placed well above flood-level of the neighbouring Wolli Creek, and, apart from household water tanks collecting the roof drainage, had a deep brick lined well at the western side of and at a little distance from the house. This well had an open top and was a serious menace to people unaware of its existence. By all accounts the pigs roamed more or less at will, enjoying a mud bath and wallow at the creek side when they felt like it, or to bask in the pleasant shade of the willow trees. About the nineteen-thirty period the pig farm was on its last legs, still being used as a residence and the home of a few poultry, but the pigs had departed for that bourne from which no porker returns. The house was subsequently pulled down and its land devoted to housing allotments grouped around another Water Street, and also Powys Avenue, close to the present Bardwell Park Railway Station.

Continuing westward the next house, built of local sandstone, is now listed as No. 112 Slade Road. This natty edifice is still maintained in excellent condition and was occupied at one time by Mr. Hilsdon who conducted an orchard and a nursery on the property. Mrs. Hilsdon was an apiarist of no mean order and from her numerous beehives often gave slabs of luscious

honey-comb to young folk who happened to call with their fathers and mothers. The orchard extended northwards to the banks of Wolli Creek where, as was their want, the water-loving quince trees flourished to perfection. This fruit was in great demand for preserves and jam-making, hence nearly every backyard at the period under review held at least one quince tree.

To all intents and purposes Slade Road terminated at the Hilsdon's nursery, beyond, more or less as a primitive cart track through the scrubland, it surmounted a low hillock as it wended its way westward to finally link with the Flat Rock Road, just clear of the Flat Rock Crossing (a water-splash over Wolli Creek) and also making a link with the New Illawarra Road at the present Bexley North Railway Station. Although now closely settled the Mount Bardwell hill slopes, once so studiously avoided by the rutted cart tracks of yesteryear, are pleasant to look upon, with their modern housing sited at all levels, each with a worthwhile garden, its cottages inhabited by people wise enough to plant trees.

Although possibly out of text it is thought desirable to mention a small double-fronted weatherboard cottage, facing the Flat Rock Road, on the northern side of Wolli Creek. This was obviously a very ancient habitation as it possessed a kitchen with a hard-packed earth floor. Its roof, in its last days, was of rusty galvanised iron, and overshadowed by some fine specimens of coral trees. A collection of fowl runs fore-gathered near the banks of a small tributary stream of Wolli Creek, descending from the grazing lands of Clemton Park, which nowadays runs its unsuspected course within the confines of a stormwater pipe.

The area embraced by the farm boundaries extended along the western side of the present Bexley Road between Wolli Creek and, perhaps, to Homer Street, the Flat Rock Road forming the western border line. One would like to know more about the antecedents of this little cottage as it occupied ground originally granted to James Chandler where, it is surmised, his homestead was placed, the homestead of a vast cattle-grazing area which extended southwards and eastwards towards Carlton, Kogarah, Bexley, and Rockdale, and an area known as the Bexley Estate. However, this is difficult to prove as far as the cottage is concerned, although the extent of the land area is well documented.

In the nineteen-thirties the cottage, and its immediate surround of fenced paddock, was occupied by a gentleman locally known as "Pop" Martin, although it is questioned that he was christened as such. Mr. Martin was a jovial gentleman of stocky build and short stature, who at some time in his career injured his ankle, or broke his leg, and thus developed a decided limp. He had the misfortune of losing his first wife and, strangely enough, married another lady in due time who also possessed a decided limp. We believe there were several sons of the first marriage, and a beautiful daughter, Lurline, blossomed from the second marriage.

Apart from the community of white-leghorn fowls, Mr. Martin kept a horse for sulky transport purposes, and also several cows for both milk and butter making. He sold eggs and butter to local residents, and to those particularly favoured the milk was on the free list. With the subdivision of the property about the 1945 period the house was dismantled and the

lovely trees felled, their usual fate in unimaginative hands. Portion of the property was allocated to housing allotments and the northern section adapted as a well grassed playing field.

The authors trust that their description of the ancient roads of portion of the Wolli Creek Valley and their once rural surroundings has proved of interest. Great changes have come over the area with the coming of the East Hills Railway, a circumstance which, to a large extent, has brought a wealth of modern homes to grace the rocky hillsides of Mount Bardwell. Many trees have been planted to adorn these homes and lend an air of brightness and well being to the landscape as only trees can do. It is of interest to compare the present suburban prospect with that of the rural past, one period is just as interesting as the other.
