



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

24 Duff Street,
ARNCLIFFE. 2205.

September 1973.

Dear Friend and Member.

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

Date: Friday evening. September 21st, 1973, at 8 p.m.

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

Business: General. Election of Social Secretary.

.....

Syllabus Item: Mr. Paul Gottschalk, from the Audio Visual Society, has kindly consented to give an Illustrated Address on "The Rocks".

Supper Roster: Captain - Mrs. Waddington, and Miss Wilding, Mrs. Tournay
Mrs. I. Smith, Miss Callister, Miss Russell.

Ladies please bring a plate.

Mr. D. Sinclair,

President.

Phone 587.4555.

Mr. A. Ellis,

Research Officer.

Phone. 587.1159.

Mrs. E. Eardley,

Secretary & Editor.

Phone 59.8078.

"Many receive advice, only the wise profit by it."

.... Syrus.

Items donated to "Lydham Hall".

Mrs. M. Smith,
Durham Street,
Carlton.

Silver Pencil, belonged to the late David Smith,
who came from England aboard a "Windjammer"
in the 1800's.

China Ash Tray with China Pipe attached,
belonged to the late Chas. Smith, Carlton.

Egg Cup carved from piece of Cedar from
the "Dunbar".

Genuine Tortoise Shell - Match holder?
No details.

Mr. A. Field,
Bellevue Street,
Arncliffe.

Book - 1895, Old Photographs, Pewter
Teapot.

Mr. C. Kelly,
52 Chapel Street,
Kogarah.

Copy of "Euclid" (Geometry) 1891.
Copy of "Via Latina" 1890.
Hot Point Iron, 1900. (First ever made,
and still in good order).
Two Men's Neckties, made from very fine
black silk.

Mr. & Mrs. Munday,
Napoleon Street,
Sans Souci.

Stone Ink Bottle with pouring spout, about
4" high.

OCTOBER LONG WEEK-END VISIT TO HISTORIC PORT MACQUARIE.

Leaving Rockdale Saturday, September 29th, 1973.

Spending Saturday & Sunday Nights at Port Macquarie,

Returning Monday October 1st, 1973. (Morning in Taree)

Phone Mrs. E. Wright, 599.4884, for further information.

NOTE: All monies to be paid on or before our September Meeting.

SPECIAL NOTE.

For our Syllabus Item at the October Meeting, Mr. Peter Sage has kindly
offered to present "Historic Tasmania", with commentary. Do come along
and enjoy the evening with us.

.....

ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Income & Expenditure Account for period 1/7/72 to 30/6/73.

<u>Income</u>		<u>Expenditure</u>	
Refund, Bus Deposits	\$60.00	Deposits on Buses	\$60.00
Proceeds, Glass Co. trip	5.20	Secretary's Petty Cash	160.00
Subscriptions	166.00	Envelopes	20.09
Donations	15.50	National Trust (Affiliation)	6.30
Sale of Books	150.89	Purchase of Books for re-sale	16.00
Sale of Badges	3.90	Presentations	12.40
Raffle Proceeds	14.00	Xmas Party Expenses	6.60
Grant from R.A.H. Society	50.00	Delegate's fee (R.A.H.S. Conf.)	6.00
Bank Interest	14.41		
			<hr/>
			\$287.39
		Excess Income over Expenditure	192.51
			<hr/>
			\$479.90
			<hr/> <hr/>

Balance as at 1.7.72	\$276.60
Income as above	<u>479.90</u>
	756.50
Expenses as above.	<u>287.39</u>
Balance as at 30.6.73.	<u>\$469.11</u>

AN OLD-TIME JOURNEY TO THE COOK'S RIVER SETTLEMENT.Gifford and Eileen Eardley.

Under the guidance of the "New South Wales Calender and General Post Office Directory", published in the year 1833, we may commence our journey into the past at the George Street, Sydney, turnpike, proceeding along Parramatta Road in a south-westerly direction to gain the bridge over Black-Wattle Swamp Creek, in the vicinity of the present day Abercrombie Street at Chippendale. A certain amount of urban settlement was encroaching on this area of gentle hills and pasture lands. Judging by the evidence afforded by early maps the Black-Wattle Swamp Creek, then clear and bright, flowed through reeds and rush beds, the stream obviously being dammed in places to form horse and cattle ponds. One can imagine the original marginal banks being lined with sombre-hued casuarina trees, backed by Black Wattles on the alluvial flats, and the remnants of the primeval forest as a hillside background, its trees at the mercy of both domestic and professional wood-cutters.

Beyond the bridge the road to Parramatta ascended the hill slope to reach the junction of the bush-lined track, which led at first southwards to the settlement at Cooks River, the route being incorporated in the present day City Road. Immediately adjacent to and off the western side of the track lay the Government reservation known as Grose Farm, comprising some one hundred and seventy-five acres devoted to agricultural experiments and such-like activities. This land has since been allocated to the vast University complex, apart from fifteen acres set aside for the purpose of establishing Victoria Park. The ornamental lake, with its willow-fringed islet, was once a water-hole which served the liquid needs of horses and other animals used to have the wheeled transport of the day. The pond also came into use for sluicing down the coach-horses after they came off their heavy haulage duty, a job carried out by the grooms by means of a bucket. Fresh-water supplies for this particular purpose were rather difficult to obtain during this period of the development of Sydney-town and its environs.

Skirting the northern boundary of Grose Farm the bush-track, mentioned in 1833 as giving "fair travelling for a gig as far as Cooks River", wended its way through the trees to the south-west, climbing slightly and keeping to the crest of its rounded hill as it passed through the then incipient suburbs of Darlington and Golden Grove. Here the track eventually gained the grandiose title of King Street as it reached Newtown, a suburb which once bore the name of O'Connelltown, where the summit was reached, likewise the watershed height dividing the Parramatta River from that of Cooks River. The meanderings of this divide is a source of great interest to those people interested in topography and its geological background. This section of the track skirted the highlands above the spacious natural amphitheatre, now a densely populated residential suburb, so noticeable from the train when proceeding between Erskineville and St. Peters Railway Stations. This flat-floored valley, which drains eastwards into Shea's Creek, a northern tributary of Cooks River was, prior to its suburban subdivision, a rural area devoted to orchards, market gardens, dairy-farms, and other arcadian pursuits. The place was also noted for the number and magnitude of its brick-making establishments.

As the erstwhile bush-track reached the hill saddle, now marked by the location of St. Peter's Railway Station, it turned southwards and this section onwards later became known as Cooks River Road. Still keeping to the crest of the long isthmus, forming the watershed between Shea's Creek on the east and Gumbramorra Swamp on the west, once a lonely forlorn wilderness whose margin followed the lowest contours of the hillside. This salt swamp had sufficient depth in its sinuous tidal channels to permit the use of small rowing boats upstream, from the Cook's River at Tempe to the vicinity of St. Peters Railway Station. The area was covered in parts with a dense growth of mangroves which were felled and burnt to supply lye ash for the soapmakers of Sydney-town. About the eighteen-nineties a system of brick-lined drainage channels was constructed, which have been instrumental in reclaiming the former marshland and making it available for occupation as residential or factory sites. The Illawarra Railway, in the early eighteen-eighties, followed the eastern border of the Gumbramorra Swamp where, no doubt, the lack of a grade was most satisfactory for the small steam locomotives then in use, and the purchase price for the right-of-way pleasing to the Government authorities. It is not generally appreciated that the near-by presence of the reclaimed Gumbramorra Swampland is responsible for Sydenham Railway Station being rated as having an elevation of 13 feet above sea level, whilst Tempe Station is one foot higher at 14 feet.

Largely at the instigation of Mr. A.B. Spark, a leading businessman of Sydney and also a local resident of the Cooks River area, the foundation stone of St. Peter's Church of England was laid with due ceremony on July 13th, 1838, by Sir George Gipps, the Governor of the Crown Colony of New South Wales. There was a temporary church on the property donated by Robert Campbell, an edifice built with rough slab-timber walls and roofed with shingles split from she-oak trees growing in the neighbouring swamp lands. This typical bush church was opened against the western side of the Cooks River Road in 1835 on a grant of 470 acres made by the Crown to Thomas Smyth on October 8th, 1799.

The new church was consecrated by the Lord Bishop of Australia on November 20th, 1839, and is claimed to be the first example of Gothic architecture to be erected in the Sydney metropolitan area. The work was carried out by Free labour under the supervision of John Bibb, the Architect. It is evident that normal Christian charity was sadly lacking at the opening ceremony and banquet as John Bibb does not appear to have been invited, at least amongst the official guests, although his workmen were regaled in the manner to which they were accustomed. At this time the vast region laying between Cooks River and the Parramatta River, as far west as Concord, was known as Bullanaming, and incorporated for the most part, within the Civil Parish of Petersham on May 27th, 1835. St. Peters Church, a daughter church of the original St. Phillips Church in York Street, Sydney, is now some 134 years old and, apart from the unfortunate loss of its steeple within recent years, is maintained in first class order.

Continuing along the higher eastern summit of the dividing isthmus, from which excellent views of the once so fertile country known as the Botany Downs could be had, the course of the Cooks River, or New Town Road, descended to a saddle between succeeding hills, from the lowest level of which

it was convenient to send a branch track eastwards to link with the adjoining rural district of Botany as represented in part by present-day Mascot. At first access by pedestrians was gained by a series of stepping stones embedded in the mud and sluggish waters of Shea's Creek (once known as Chaise's Creek), but later a low level timber structure, permitting a single cart to cross at a time was constructed which, when the tides were high, had its decking submerged. East of the Ricketty Street Bridge, as it was named, connection was given with the aptly titled Gardener's Road which led through a series of now level sand-hills and lesser dunes to gain the Botany Road. This old-time by-way is now a modern highway serving a dense factory complex spread over the terrain formerly devoted along its fertile bottom lands to the cultivation of market produce.

A list of the principal residents whose homes were scattered along the length of Cooks River Road, some with extensive grounds, made about 1871, shows that Thomas Calder resided at "HEATHCOTE"; Edward Lance at "LANCEFIELD"; Mr. Church at "GROVE HOUSE"; Dr. Tucker at "BAY VIEW"; William Yates at "ROSEBANK"; Mr. G. Talbot at "BELLEVUE HOUSE"; Mr. R. Reilly at "TIVOLI HOUSE"; Mr. Michael Metcalfe at "PETERSLEIGH"; Mr. Bond at "FINNINGHAM"; and Mr. Moore at "BARWON PARK HOUSE", the latter edifice being erected about 1815. Some of these historic homes have been demolished over the years and their sites utilised for factory installations. The house "BAYVIEW" became a Collegiate School, and later was adapted as a private hospital catering largely for mental patients, its grounds being set amidst gardens and groves of beautiful trees. Clusters of small cottages were grouped around the Church of St. Peters and, with the coming of the Illawarra Railway, the area became known as the suburb of St. Peters. There was another close settlement on the low hill, lying to the immediate east of the present Sydenham Railway Station (once known as Marrickville), which gained the local name of TEMPE PARK. This old established village was bisected, in an east-west direction, by the Marrickville Road, the section of which to the east of the Sydenham Railway Station now being known as Railway Road.

The Cooks River Road, south of the latter intersection, crossed a narrow causeway at the head of a funnel-shaped valley, the shallow western flats of which, bordering the Gumbramorra Swamp, were intensively cultivated as market gardens, an activity later carried on by members of the industrious Chinese fraternity. The Botany Goods Railway runs on an embankment through this valley in an east-west direction, and passes beneath an overbridge, carrying the main road, to gain the flats of Shea's Creek and the extensive nest of sidings associated with the Cooks River Goods Sidings and other industrial concerns ranged along the route. From the overbridge the Cooks River Road curves to the south-west for a short distance to avoid the boundary of the former "BAYVIEW" mansion, the way climbing the shallow slopes of a sandstone hill which marks the end of the dividing isthmus which has been traversed from the vicinity of St. Peters Railway Station. At the crest of the terminal hill the old road veers slightly southwards and descends a gentle slope to reach the original rocky northern bank of the then beauteous Cooks River, which at this point was comparatively shallow, and little difficulty would have been encountered in constructing a ford or water-splash through the stream to connect with the southern shore. This work was completed prior

to 1833, the submerged roadway being paved with large rectangular-shaped dressed slabs of sandstone about four or five feet square embedded in the mud, which gave the road a width of about twelve feet. The joints were not sealed as far as could be ascertained in recent years, and the mud filling the interstices gave sustenance to a host of periwinkles and other tiny mollusks. The depth of water over the ford at low tide would have averaged eighteen inches, whilst the normal high tide covering would have been about fifty inches, just about flush with the flooring of a farmer's two-wheeled dray. It is obvious that the huge paving stones were quarried from the face of the sandstone outcrop bordering the northern bank of Cooks River to the west of the old road terminal, the quarry area now being marked by the green sward of Tempe Park.

It is difficult in this day and age to envisage the northern bank of the river, at the then termination of the Cooks River Road, as a busy industrial port where all manner of sailing and rowing craft brought small cargoes of dredged sea-shells to the nearby lime-burning kilns operated by David Caincross, together with vast quantities of firewood necessary for the firing process. The firewood was obtained from the dense forest which skirted the sand dune country against the western shoreline of Botany Bay, being brought in horse-drawn drays to Cooks River, or the navigable portion of Muddy or Black Creek as far south as the present day Bestic Street, Rockdale. The picturesque assembly of boats engaged in the shell-gathering industry were moored in positions immediately adjacent to the ford at Tempe and gang-planks and wheel-barrows brought the wet and muddy cargo ashore where, after its worth was assessed, the shells were dumped in heaps ready for burning. The collection of shells was a mucky business to say the least and involved men working at times waist deep in slush and salt-water. Supplies were also obtained from the large "Kitchen-middens" formed by the residual heaps of shells cast aside over the centuries by aboriginal tribes who once frequented the estuarial area for the means of their livelihood.

Prior to extensive low-level reclamation and the confinement of the river banks within revetment walls of packed stone-work, a work carried out in the early eighteen-eighties to provide unemployment relief, the estuary of Cooks River, eastwards from the ford, was about one mile in width and about the same distance in length. This shallow watery expanse of shoals and tidal mudflats was interspersed with equally shallow channels fringed with a dense growth of mangroves, through which the main course of the river wound its way in wide sweeping curves to gain its embouchure into the north-western shore of Botany Bay. The wind-swept tidal flats provided ideal feeding grounds for a vast number of aquatic birds such as black swans, pelicans, stilts, snipe, godwits, spoonbills, herons, and snowy-white egrets, amongst others, and was also the habitat of silver-gulls and terns, the latter still breeding on the sandy portion of the Tempe flats.

Reverting to the shipping fleet we quote from the "Wind in the Willows" that "Rat said to Mole - There is nothing like messing about the boats", and the study of ships both great and small is a fascinating interest. In those now far-off days, it is pleasing to note that the hoary-handed boatmen were sentimental, bestowing Christian names associated with their mothers, wives, or girl-friends, upon the various vessels under their command. We are aware

that swinging at anchor, or moored to a convenient sea-worn post at the bankside, could be seen the "ROVER'S BRIDE", or the "HELEN", "SARAH", "MARY ANN", amongst numerous others awaiting sailing time, intermingled with "CREEPING TOM" and "CREEPING JANE", evidently a pair of craft not particularly noted for their sailing speed, and "FLEA" and "MOSQUITO", who may have been.

The original lime-burning kiln at Tempe was bottle-shaped, its circular body and chimney being constructed of local brick. This appurtenance was housed within a building which was truly amazing in appearance and had been erected on the north bank of the river adjacent to the western side of the ford. The choice of this position points to the kiln having been installed prior to the construction of the ford as the latter river obstruction would tend to prevent, except at high tides, the heavily laden shell and firewood boats berthing alongside the premises, making it necessary for unloading to take place to the east of the ford and trundling the cargo across the roadway, presumably contained in wheel-barrows. Rough timber slabs were used to form the walls of the kiln-house and the high-pitched roof was covered with shingles, the roof being fashioned with all manner of gables, attics, and dormers, the latter evidently being used for ventilation purposes as the burning process was both hot and dusty and somewhat soul-searing. The kiln-house was surrounded by lean-to's and out-shuts to give the heaps of firewood and shells a measure of protection against theft, likewise the finished quick-lime product which was stored in wooden casks. The manufacturing process was relatively simple and consisted of placing a bed of fire on the brick hearth of the kiln, covering same with a thick layer of shells and topping up with a large quantity of firewood to generate further heat. The resulting ash and calcined shells were eventually raked out and sieved. The lime was taken to Sydney, either by ketch to Port Jackson, or by dray along Cooks River Road, where it was used extensively to make lime-mortar so necessary for building projects.

On the eastern side of the Cooks River Road with its back premises jutting on to the riverbank, was the Cooks River Inn, a place of resort well known to the local inhabitants which, at one period in the eighteen-fifties was in the capable hands of mine host Mr. J.S. Henry, the man who was publicly thanked "For the pains he took to make everyone comfortable". This gentleman was responsible for the establishment of the "COOKS RIVER REGATTA", a notable event which took place on Boxing Day, December 26th, 1855, the main features of which were detailed in the St. George Historical Society's Bulletin issue of December 8th, 1967. It is pleasant to note the use of the old English word "INN" as against the "Frenchified" HOTEL which was then coming into general use to describe a hostelry irrespective of its cuisine, size, or degree of importance. Another building, which was not so popular in public esteem was the toll house and its moveable bar across the roadway, set against the entrance to the river crossing, to levy a charge against all vehicles and animals passing to and from the district south of the river, fortunately human beings could pass, or wade, without restriction.

One of the perennial drought periods which beset the Sydney metropolitan area occurred in 1838 when the city's domestic water supply was seriously depleted. At this time, it was based on the Tank Stream and Busby's Bore,

an underground tunnel leading from the Lachlan Swamp Reservoirs at Randwick, established within the present confines of Centennial Park. Further city water distribution was made by barrels mounted on horsedrawn carts at a charge payable to the carter. To overcome the problem the authorities, as a matter of urgency, decided to construct a stone-faced dam, backed by a twenty-foot wide wall of rubble set in clay across Cooks River at Tempe, the site chosen being on the eastern side of, and adjacent to the ford. This erection would form a natural fresh-water reservoir confining both the headwaters of Cooks River and those of Wollli Creek, its principal tributary. The Governor of New South Wales, Sir George Gipps, authorised the implementation of the proposal and in due course a stockade to house upwards of one hundred convicts was erected on the north bank of the river at Tempe, together with quarters for their guards and overseers. Work commenced in the early months of 1839 and took about one year to complete.

It was a herculean task set for the convicts as it meant thousands of toilsome hours being spent in the adjacent sandstone quarry in side and under-cutting the huge rectangular-shaped blocks, which would weigh between three and four tons each, and were necessary for facing the upstream wall. From a civil engineering point of view it was a wasted effort as it proved a shoddy job, puddled clay being used as jointing material, a substance which dissolved with the action of water currents, thus permitting the tidal salt water to trickle through the wall and permeate the fresh water, making it brackish and unsuitable for domestic use. The dam wall had a width of some fifty feet and was constructed on the so-called "pudding" basis whereby random-shaped lumps of stone were dumped into a bed of puddled clay. The intention was to cut a channel to convey the water to the metropolis but this part of the scheme did not eventuate.

Although the leaks through the dam wall were more than sufficient to defeat its purpose the top surface of the earthwork proved ideal as a ready means of access across the river for road traffic, thereby serving to consolidate the mass of clay and stone to advantage. However, the dam was responsible for considerable siltation on both the upstream and the downstream portions of the now divided river system and it eventually became necessary to remove portions of the wall at the northern and the southern end and replace these sections with timber bridges to permit the egress of floodwaters. This arrangement lasted until about 1893 when the remaining central portion of the dam was removed and replaced by a strong lengthy timber bridge. This structure had swinging flood-gates on the downstream side. Within recent years a new concrete bridge has been constructed to carry the increased traffic of the Princes Highway.

It is convenient to conclude this narrative at the dam site. The country immediately south, now known as Arncliffe, but formerly as Tempe, will form the nucleus of the second portion of this essay.

* * * * *