



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

24 Duff Street,
ARNCLIFFE. 2205.
March, 1974.

Dear Friend and Member,

The regular Meeting will be held as follows:

Date: Friday Evening, March 15th, 1974, at 8 p.m.

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

Business: General.

Syllabus Item: Mr. & Mrs. Day will take us to different parts of Australia to see "Historical Places".

Supper Roster: Mrs. Lee, Captain, Mesdames: Greenlees, Johnson, Prebble, I. Smith & M. Smith.

Ladies please bring a plate.

Mr. D. Sinclair,

President.

Phone 587.4555.

Mrs. E. Eardley,

Secretary.

Phone 59.8078.

Mrs. E. Wright,

Treasurer & Social Sec.

Phone 599.4884.

Mr. A. Ellis,

Research Officer.

Phone 587.1159.

"Most people look about them, a few see in detail what they are looking at, and even fewer understand what they see."

Morton Herman.

SPECIAL: "DATE TO REMEMBER"

DATE: Saturday, March 30th, 1974, at 8 p.m.

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

PETER SAGE PRESENTS: "SONGS OF AUSTRALIA" SLIDES OF AUSTRALIA

accompanied by such Singers as: Rolf Harris, Lionel Long, Slim Dusty,
and others.

Do come along and bring your Friends.

Admission: Adults 50¢. Children 30¢. Light Supper.

Tickets available at next Meeting.

Historic Lancer Service:

Date: Sunday, March 31st, 1974.

Time: 8.30 a.m. Sharp.

Place: Bus will leave Rockdale Town Hall.

Cost: \$1.50 per person. (Adult) Children: 80¢.

Lunch at Prospect Dam: Bring your own Lunch, Cuppa Etc.

Do support this outing, weather permitting, we should have a pleasant day.

For bookings: Ring Mrs. Wright, 599.4884 or 59.8078.

Special Note:

Dr. Morton Herman has kindly consented to address Members and their
Friends at our April Meeting. Subject: Very Early Colonial Architecture,
dealing with Slab and Bark houses and their Fitments (as fully Illustrated
as possible).

An invitation has been extended to Kogarah, Hurstville and Sutherland Shire
Historical Societies. It will be a wonderful opportunity to hear this
eminent Speaker.

THE ENVIRONS AND ECOLOGY OF "NANNY GOAT HILL" AT TURRELLA.

.... Gifford and Eileen Eardley.

It is really surprising to find, in this year of grace, a small section of countryside in a more or less natural condition, within five miles of the Sydney General Post Office. The area in question lies immediately west of Turrella Railway Station and its low-lying flats are subject to the occasional floodings of Wolli Creek, hence its comparative isolation from industrial and housing schemes. In days of yore the flat lands were intensively cultivated by groups of hard-working and hard-living Chinese gardeners, and on the higher levels by flower-farmers and gentlemen who made a livelihood breeding and raising pigs. All trace of their habitations, each of distinctive style and primitive appearance, have long since vanished from the scene, their passing marked by an occasional red-flowered coral tree, a growth of spindly alianthus trees, or a group of beautiful acacia trees, which drip with white wisteria-like clusters of flowers in spring time.

For those people who have more than a fragmentary interest in the flora and fauna of the St. George District this tract of semi-marsh land, dominated on the west by the slopes and rock outcrops of Nanny Goat Hill, is most attractive. The so-called "Nanny Goat Hill" is a pointed sandstone outlier jutting eastward from the sprawling mass of houses covering "Campbell's Hill", which forms the greater part of the suburb of Earlwood. To the north the valley floor boundary is formed by the escarpment of "Unwin's Hill", whilst southwards, across the grassed flats beyond Wolli Creek, lies the quarry face of "Wilcox's Hill", the lower levels of which have been recently subdivided into modern housing clusters.

This essay covers a short walk from the environs of Turrella Railway Station, commencing at its southern side at the northern end of Hannam Street. Gazing over the railway fence we espy several fine specimens of Mexican Poppies, their delicate light-yellow flowers surmounting a mass of variegated yellow and green prickly foliage with a maximum growth of about two feet. Then, across a drainage gutter, was a solitary if weedy specimen of an opium poppy, its mauve and deep red centered flower nodding in the breeze. This species, forbidden to be grown by law, is generally seen flourishing on or near land once occupied by Chinese people. There was also a single poor specimen of the famous "Red Poppy of Flanders", which grows profusely all over Europe, but just how did this little scarlet bloom come to flourish at Turrella is a question we would like to ask.

Crossing the road bridge over the railway and heading westward down the sloping embankment one notices a profuse growth of loganberry vines, escapees from the former Bucknell Homestead, of which more anon. These plants are a mass of small five petalled flowers, a delicate shade of pink in colour, during the month of October. As summer advances the fruit appears in clusters displaying numbers of green, red, and black loganberries, the colour range depicting the ripening process, and, when ripe, they are very succulent and savoury to taste. There are clusters of yellow-fringed daisy-like flowers with black centres, known as Cape-weed which was once a cultivated garden flower imported from South Africa, growing inside the railway fence. The brilliant cadmium-yellow button-like flowers of the

European dandelion are also to be seen, the colour of the sun. Although classed as a common weed with no great merit the plant is greatly appreciated in England and Swiss pastures, in the latter country artificial dandelion flowers can be purchased for decorative purposes.

Proceeding along the course of Henderson Street (formerly a portion of the old Arncliffe Road) we pass by the site of the long vanished stone cottage, of pleasing design, named "VALENCIA", which was admirably shadowed by a magnificent cedar tree and flanked at the rear by several pepperina, or pepper trees. The beauty of it all has been replaced by non-descript industrial premises.

Before the coming of the Tempe to East Hills Railway the old Arncliffe Road descended to the normal level of Wolli Creek, passing through an earth-walled cutting, bordered on its northern side by a continuous row of age-old pine-trees which once marked the fence line of the Hannam property, later owned by the Bucknell family under the pretty name of "WILLOWDENE". Adjacent to the northern side of the road and against the eastern side of the creek was a small Chinese market garden, the occupants living in a double-fronted weatherboard cottage, devoid of paint and following the design of the old-time "Hudson's Ready-cut Homes" which were once so popular with home-builders of the St. George District at the turn of the present century.

The reed-fringed bed of Wolli Creek is now reached, the stream being crossed nowadays by an extremely narrow footbridge but beneath this structure can be observed traces of the former "water-splash", or ford, where the horse-drawn vehicles of yesteryear crossed through the running stream. A series of wobbly stepping stones catered for the needs of pedestrians in this then outlandish "neck of the woods". The spot is marked today by a conglomeration of rock debris through which the now murky water gurgles on its way to mingle with the salt water section of Wolli Creek. Until recently the footbridge was flanked on the Turrella side by a large bushy Basket-Willow, or Osier-Willow, something of a rarity in the St. George District, but this specimen has been hacked out of existence. Some years back the reed-warblers sang in a clump of reed-mace against the footbridge, but their particular covert has been eliminated by the dumping of large quantities of metallic trade waste. The banks of the creek against the footbridge approach are lined with a forest of Weeping Willows, which species hail from China. The trees form excellent perching places during the winter months for a colony of small pied cormorants and in the springtime the English Blackbirds now frequent the area, providing musical entertainment to those with ears to hear.

When the first flush of spring appears the green catkins of caterpillar like appearance, drop from the willows in countless numbers to float on the surface of the water, banking up against the water weeds, or swirling in the eddying currents, or lapping against bent overhanging grasses. Up stream are numerous little islets, about three square feet in area and raised a few inches above normal water level, from each of which protrudes the solid silver-grey trunk of the casuarina tree (or Swamp Oak) with its masses of grey-green needle-like foliage. The tiny landspots are covered by a layer of discarded leaves from the branches above and form ideal snoozing spots for coteries of white-capped waterhens and red-capped purple-breasted gallinules.

These birds swim and flick their sheer white tail feathers in and out of the trailing tresses of the willows and seek their food from the base of clumps of feathery-crested bull-rushes (Cumbunga) which line the banks of the stream. Apart from the seemingly out-raged squark of the coots from time to time, there is a hushed silence over the adjacent marshlands. In spring and summer the melody of the reed-warblers, and the plaintive two-note song of the tiny grass-birds, a shy denison of the thickets, is often heard but the bird itself is seldom seen. Where the water races through the stones of the old-time ford there are multitudes of small fish, about one inch in length, named zambusias. These face into the outflow to seek minute edible morsels, whilst in the deeper reaches of the stream are to be found large slothful tortoises and fast moving carp, both the rich red and deep gold varieties, while Sydney Minnows, known to the local lads as Butterfish, are often caught with a length of twine, a bent pine, and a bait of dough.

Clear of the willow trees we follow the raised footpath along the crest of a narrow causeway, built above the former roadway, across the reed-covered semi-marshland, a place of frogs and also of black and tiger snakes, reptiles never found very far from the frog population. However, the snakes, as is their wont, kindly keep out of the way of humans as far as possible and only the prying naturalist is aware of their furtive presence. On the left or south side of the footpath there were until recently several fine clumps of New Zealand flax plants, the leaves of which, after being torn apart to form long strips, were used by the former Chinese gardeners to tie up the bunches of root vegetables and spinach for marketing purposes. The largest of these flax plants had been removed bodily, evidently by some home gardener for his rockery, whilst the other plants of the same species have succumbed to the overt attention of the municipal weed poisoner as the dead leaves would imply.

On the northern side of the footpath there was, once upon a time, a thick and rambling boundary hedge of blackberries, intermixed with pink and yellow flowered lantana, and also by the wandering canes of pink flowered "Dorothy Perkins" roses. This dense hedge growth was the habitat of families of blue wrens, bul-buls, silver-eyes, redheads, and tiny zebra finches, a most charming colony of small birds. The grass-clustered nests of field mice were also in evidence, their bewhiskered owners running ever so lightly and sprightly to and fro amongst the grass stems seeking edible seeds and tit-bits of insects which came their way, much to the pleasure of an interested observer. They are fascinating bright-eyed hairy little creatures, most entertaining to watch, particularly so when sitting upright on their haunches carefully grooming their long whiskers, or painstakingly chewing some delicate morsel of food. The weed poisoner knew not these dainty inhabitants of the hedge, he sprayed the rank growth, after which it collapsed and died, leaving an untidy mass devoid of all interest to both man and bird.

Northwards from the boundary hedge, and occupying the once so neatly kept rectangular shaped vegetable beds of the erstwhile Chinese gardeners, is a great expanse of reeds and prickly stemmed foliage, intermixed with drainage channels and patches of lush grass. This unkept wilderness provided, at times, excellent feeding grounds for clatter-voiced Spur-

winged Plovers, whilst the prospecting long curved beaks of flocks of black and white plumaged ibis, some fifty to sixty birds in number, have been noted probing the vegetation for their edible contents. Starlings in their winter assemblies and get-to-gethers wheel in flight over the flats, giving an acrobatic display of aerial motion before coming noisily to roost for the night amongst the upper branches of the stream-side willow trees. On occasion snowy white egrets put in an appearance, each pair having their own appointed territory beyond the bounds of which other egrets forbid them to stray. The blue heron is another visitor, but prefers to fossick for his or her food in the more swampy and muddy terrain. Stilts and dotterals also visit the area.

Returning to the footpath and the western edge of the boundary hedge we find a large Dipping Well used in bygone days by the Chinese Gardeners to fill their huge watering cans. We have never seen this well dried out, even in the driest of summers. The water is deep and almost choked with *Canadina Pondweed*, amongst the tendrils of which may be seen any number of mosquito eating fish and also the predatory nymphs of the turquoise-winged dragon flies. On the bank and overhanging the pond is a grove of scarlet flowered coral trees, perfect beauties in late winter. At this point the former Arncliffe Road turned sharply northwards to surmount a low rise, after which it crossed a small creek (another water-splash) and then resumed its westward course, passing through a gated horse paddock to link with the street in Lower Earlwood which is still known as Arncliffe Road. It is very pleasing to see that the old name is thus perpetuated.

A little to the north of the forementioned Dipping Well a grove of acacia trees marks the position of the former group of Chinese hutments which were once overshadowed by two tall Norfolk Pine trees, landmarks for miles around. The position of the long defunct flower farm and its wooden cottage of tiny dimensions is located on the rise by its splendid coral trees, greatly favoured by the local bird population, particularly by the pee-wits.

Immediately adjacent to the last mentioned cottage and on its southern side near the former Arncliffe Road there once stood a slab-walled shanty, with a low-pitched galvanised iron roof, inhabited by several Chinese market gardeners, living a presumably celibate life under most primitive conditions. When last seen parts of the northern wall of the residence was beginning to disintegrate, a circumstance calling for considerable ingenuity on the part of the occupants to preserve their privacy and keep at bay the cold north-easterly winds. A stout gum tree bough was propped against the upper portion of the outward leaning wall, thus pushing it back into its normal vertical position. This stay-prop, in the course of time, began to slip sideways, thus needing a similar prop, with a forked upper end to keep the first prop in position. Then the second prop began to move sideways, calling for a third forked prop, before the desired stability was attained. These arrangements, of a strictly engineering nature, were good to look upon. The shanty was over-shadowed by a fine coral tree with flowers of a deeper red hue than those possessed

by other similar trees near by. It is pleasing to note that although the shanty has long been dismembered the old tree remains to mark its position. At the rear of the shanty was the usual collection of castor-oil trees set amidst an overgrown wilderness of weeds, and a huge evil smelling manure heap set against a ramshackle stable in which dwelt, in his off moments, a magnificent well kept draught horse. The adjacent "loo" was a joy to behold from an architectural point of view, being fashioned from three up-right sheets of corrugated iron. The three sides were held together by means not apparent to an outsider, whilst the absence of a roof was noticeable it was seen from a respectful distance that the entrance was tastefully draped by a long hessian chaff bag, cut lengthways and hung from a top cross-bar to give the so necessary degree of privacy.

This group of Chinese people farmed the area extending from the southern side of the embanked footpath to the Wolli Creek, the eastern and southern sides being bordered by a dense growth of lantana, intermixed with blackberry brambles, gum trees, and strangely enough, a solitary pine tree, the lower limbs of which were sadly hacked about and foreshortened. All this matted growth, ranged along the banks of the creek, effectually prevented access to those people who were not above stealing vegetables from the carefully tended beds thus enclosed. The bordering hedge formed a secure haven for all manner of nesting birds. The coots in particular inhabited this unkept hedge and were often to be seen precariously perched on an out-jutting blackberry cane, swaying gently in the east wind. It was unfortunate that the well maintained market garden was overwhelmed by three or four floodings in succession, a calamity which eventually forced the gardeners out of business and brought about the subsequent removal of their so distinctive living quarters and the remains of the cranky-shaped post and rail fence flanking the Arncliffe Road and its side ditches. The, shall we say, home area, is marked insofar as its location is concerned, by a little plot of yellow coreopsis and, at times in October, a solitary tender-flowered opium poppy spreads its bloom for a single day, a fitting emblem, perhaps, of the once so happy nights enjoyed within the earth-floored precincts of the old tumble-down shanty.

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