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ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL



PRICE 5 c .

ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

24 Duff Street,
ARNCLIFFE. 2205.
May 1974.

Dear Friend and Member.

The regular meeting will be held as follows:

Date: Friday Evening, May 17th, 1974, at 8 p. m.

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

Business: General.

Syllabus Item: Mr. Phillip Geeves, F. R. A. H. S. will present:

"The Early District Through the Eyes of a Pioneer". Illustrated
with Slides

Supper Roster: Mrs. McNamara Captain. Mrs. Marsden. Misses Frost,
Lambert. White.

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.

For what "Act or Achievement" would you most like to be remembered?

DATES TO REMEMBER.

The following Social Outings are being arranged for your pleasure, do please give your support.

Date: Saturday May 25th, 1974 (due to Elections on May 18th the date has been changed).

Time: 1.15 p m Sharp.

Place: Town Hall, Rockdale.

Cost: \$1.00 per person. (Children 50¢).

On the above date, Sat. May 25th, an Inspection of Vaucluse House, (each pay their own entry fee). Afternoon Tea in the grounds, after which the Driver will return via the Beaches. Bring your own "Cuppa & Eats".

Special Note.

A Harbour Cruise September 20th, 1974, landing at Clark Island for lunch, has been suggested. Are you interested? or would you like something else? Please contact Mrs. Wright, Phone 599 4884.

Canberra Weekend October 5th, 6th, 7th. Deposits now please, details of weekend later.

Will Members notify Secretary of Change of Address please?

Some Members have overlooked payment of Annual Dues. Will you contact Secretary or Treasurer please.

Society Books Number 5 & 6 are still available, also Badges.

OUR APRIL MEETING

We were very pleased when Dr. Morton Herman accepted an invitation to speak at the April meeting of our Society.

Most people know Dr. Herman as an author and in this capacity he has written five historical books:-

- . The Early Australian Architects and their Work.
- . The Blackets.
- . Francis Greenway.
- . Early Colonial Architecture.
- . The Architecture of Victorian Sydney.

Members will be interested to learn of some of Dr. Herman's other achievements. A Bachelor of Architecture with honours, Master of Architecture and Doctor of Literature he was awarded the Australian Medallion in Architecture and the Travelling Scholarship of the N. S. W. Board of Architects.

He has been President of the Modern Architectural Research Society, Chairman of Sir John Sulman Architectural Award Committee, Member of the Building Advisory Committee to the City of Sydney, member of Federal Council of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects and Chairman of the Institute's Publications Board.

As an historian, he has been a Councillor of the Royal Australian Historical Society and a member of the Society of Architectural Historians of U.S.A.

We understood the title of Dr. Herman's address was to be "Very Early Colonial Architecture" but this was changed to "Primitive Australian Architecture".

Before proceeding with his subject Dr. Herman gave some interesting and little known facts about convicts, the different grades into which they were divided, the fact that each was paid £10 per year (the wage of an English domestic servant at that time) and the ticket-of-leave and conditional pardon system.

Dr. Herman then gave an account of the construction of houses in the early days of the colony, detailing the method of construction of slab, wattle and daub and bark dwellings. These buildings all had dirt floors and bark roofs and were the first homes in Australia.

As the colony prospered pise (rammed mud) and also timber houses appeared and they now had wooden floors and ceilings - both unknown in earlier days. Deposits of clay had been unearthed by this time and brick homes began to appear marking the end of the primitive era in our architecture, although some of the primitive dwellings may still be found in outback N.S.W., drawings of which are on record.

The method used in the preparation of bark sheeting is mentioned in the Society Bulletin October 1972. It is understood that the Aborigines also prepared bark sheeting for use by white settlers, which they traded for a consideration.

Dr. Herman illustrated his address with slides, including some from the Holtermann Collection, which depicted early (and certainly primitive) houses on the goldfields.

The vote of thanks to Dr. Herman was moved by Mr. Lee and supported by the 70 members and visitors present.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS OF HISTORIC SYDNEY.

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Gifford and Eileen Eardley.

A most interested group of members of the St. George Historical Society had the privilege, through the organising ability of their Social Secretary Essie Wright, of visiting two of the older churches of the Sydney area, to wit St. Patrick's on Church Hill, and St. John's at Darlinghurst, both being of considerable historic and architectural attraction.

At St. Patrick's the party was welcomed into the lecture room of the Presbytery by Reverend Father Ferguson, a genial Priest of the Marist Order, who gave a most interesting discourse on the early history of Roman Catholicism in New South Wales. We have taken the liberty of paraphrasing his address and also the information contained from brochures dealing with the same subject.

It has been claimed that William Davis, "a five feet six black-haired Irishman", evidently a "broth of a boy" who hied from County Wexford, was unfortunate in being connected politically with the unrest and troubles of 1798. He was sentenced to transportation to Sydneytown and made the long sea journey, with other Irish prisoners, aboard the "FRIENDSHIP", a sadly misnamed sailing vessel which left the lovely harbour of Cork in 1799. Included in the ship's company was "another felon" in the person of Father Dixon.

At Sydneytown William Davis became engaged as a blacksmith, following this trade a little later at Parramatta where he had no trouble in falling foul of the Reverend Samuel Marsden, known as "The Flogging Parson", who, in addition to his clerical duties was also the magistrate for the district at large.

On November 13th, 1807, William Davis purchased a block of land located at the western corner of the intersection of Grosvenor and Harrington Streets and thereon erected his cottage. Two years later he married Catherine (her surname seems to have escaped record) at Parramatta, the ceremony being conducted by the Reverend Father Dixon. It is surmised that about this period the latter gentleman left the penal colony of New South Wales and his priestly office remained unfulfilled until the unofficial arrival of Father O'Flynn during the reign of Governor Macquarie in 1817. The clerical gentleman made his headquarters at the Davis Cottage and was enforced to carry out his ministerial duties in a clandestine manner. He was deported hurriedly in 1818 and had no time to remove the Blessed Sacrament, the vessels of which were hidden out of sight inside a small cedar cupboard for the next two years.

It is of historic interest to note that this cupboard, thus hallowed, was dismembered and a portion made into a small tabernacle. Another portion was shaped as an antependium (frontal piece to an altar) for St. Patrick's College at Manly N. S. W., and a section of the shelf of the cedar cupboard was incorporated in the structure of the pulpit which is now in St. Patrick's Church on Church Hill, Sydney. The overhead cedar beam of the small room in which the Blessed Sacrament was preserved at the Davis cottage was of sufficient value to be refashioned into an episcopal throne by a former Bishop of Adelaide, Dr. Murphy, who had the honour of being the first priest of St. Patrick's, Sydney.

The Davis cottage, apart from its underground cellars, has long been demolished, and is considered to have been the first Roman Catholic chapel in Australia. The present Convent of Mercy stands on its site, its walls raised above the maze of sandstone walled cellars of the former cottage. Our members, guided by a very pleasant Sister James, had the opportunity of descending into these underground regions, fraught with the atmosphere of the past 167 years, via numerous walkways and narrow thoroughfares, interconnected with many short stairways, some of wood, some of stone, and others of metal, necessary to overcome the irregularity of the sloping hillside on which the cottage was formerly built. The doorways were wide but their lintels were low, some being about five feet in clearance height. The several tiny rooms were evidently adapted for storage of victuals and other commodities, whilst judging from a highly placed fireplace recess, together with another separate aperture which obviously may have accommodated an oven, the largest stone-floored room could have been in use as a kitchen. Apart from a very small ventilation gap in the stonework against the ceiling there was no

other form of natural lighting and without the glow of the fire the place must have been as dark as pitch. One could sense the use of rush-lights or guttering candles in the days of yore. Of course nowadays the place is fully lit with fluorescent tubes when in occupation by girl students learning the mysteries of, or an appreciation for, the graphic arts.

The Sisters of Mercy maintain these underground cellars in spotless condition and have placed narrow work benches around portion of the sandstone walls for the convenience of the young and enthusiastic artists. Coloured prints were pinned up in diverse places, all of pictorial interest, and it was noticeable that the modern contemporary work was conspicuous by its absence. In reference to this latter form of daubing one recalls the cynical comment of Emile Mercier to the effect "that anybody can do it".

After our inspection of the ancient cellars of Davis cottage we emerged into pouring rain to pay a hast visit to the neighbouring St. Patrick's Church, where under the guidance of Father Ferguson, we were shown much of historic interest, including the High Altar, said to be of a later period and one that, in all the glory of brass and marble, was a prize winner at the French Exhibition held in Paris during 1889.

The foundation stone of St. Patrick's Church was laid with due ceremony by Dr. J B. Polding on August 25th. 1840. on land donated by William Davis at the western side of his cottage. It was a great day for the Irish on this occasion and a procession estimated to have been some 14,000 strong, wended its way from St. Mary's Cathedral in College Street to Church Hill. The crowd gathered to witness the historic event was so great that the foundation stone had to be hoisted aloft so that all could see the stone prior to it being laid in position. William Davis, a very proud man, occupied a place in the fork of a nearby tree, thus having what may be regarded as a birds-eye view of the proceedings. Unfortunately he died in 1843, a year before the opening of the church on March 18th. 1844. It is thought that more recent modifications to the levels of Grosvenor Street have probably covered the original foundation stone.

The church, dedicated by Dr. Polding to the honour of Ireland's apostle St. Patrick, is now regarded as being the second oldest Roman Catholic Church in the Australian Commonwealth, the pride of place being held by the little architectural gem situated at Richmond in Tasmania. St. Patrick's, or St. Pats as it is affectionately known, is most popular with the Roman Catholic community of the metropolis and is frequented by great numbers of people throughout every day of the week, who seek the solace afforded by their ancient faith. It may be mentioned that the present chancel and the side confessionals are later additions to the edifice.

From the ancient fane of St. Patrick's the coach took our party to Woolloomooloo Hill, now known as Darlinghurst, to gain our next focal point as represented by the beauteous Church of St. John the Evangelist, situated on Darlinghurst Road, a curvacious and busy thoroughfare once known as Woolloomooloo Road, which gives access from the Old South Head Road to the one time hamlet of Darlinghurst.

It would appear that in the first instance St. John's was a denominational school building of sandstone construction, erected in 1849, in which regular Sunday services were held from about 1852. This building was demolished about 1902 and replaced by a brick building in which strangely enough, a parochial school still functions. Then came the local desire for a separate church building and accordingly an order was placed with the architectural firm of Messrs. John Goold and Hilling. On the score of economy the structure was restricted to the nave and its side aisles, and erected at a cost of some £7,000, the edifice being dedicated on Easter Sunday, April 4th, 1858, by Bishop Barker. The first incumbent was the Rev. Thomas Heydon who officiated between the years 1856 and 1882.

It was during this period that Edmund Blacket, the famous ecclesiastical architect of the mid-Victorian era, was commissioned to design and supervise the erection of the splendid tower and spire, some 140 feet in height which, together with at least three adjacent windmills (known in the picturesque slang of the day as "Whirl-about-thing-unbobs"), formed a landmark for pilots and shipmasters negotiating the channels of Port Jackson. Edmund Blacket was also responsible for further additions to the church fabric in the way of chancel and the south transept, work which was completed in 1875. The northern transept was added at a later date.

The famous bells of St. John's, twenty-one in number, of various sizes and sonorities, are tubular in shape and vertically hung. Their installation dates from 1889 and we had the pleasure of hearing them in full swing as they were played at the termination of a fashionable wedding ceremony. These bells chimed every quarter-of-an-hour, through day and night, but their nightly ringing proved detrimental to the slumbers of nearby residents, consequently their chiming has been curtailed within recent years.

It has been said that the seating accommodation of the transepts, facing inwards toward the pulpit, was generally set aside for children and the servants employed at the numerous nearby mansions of the more wealthy citizens, whilst their co-called "betters" composed themselves, for the most part, in their rented pews of the family "box" type, or annually rented "sittings" reserved for their convenience. The nave and its arch bordered side aisles afforded seating capacity for over one thousand worshippers who often foregathered in that strength at Evensong. It was with regret that we learned that choristers no longer occupied the finely designed choir stalls located in the chancel when regular Sunday services were being held, a circumstance attributed to the transient movements of the large flat-dwelling populace of the Darlinghurst and adjacent King's Cross area, together with the demolition of the mansions inhabited by many famous and important citizens, most of whom have left the district.

One cannot but admire the lovely growth of age-old trees which grace the southern side of the churchyard and form such an oasis of greenery which relieves the austerity of the surrounding terrace houses, intermixed with high-rise "Flat" dwellings of no architectural merit, which now form such an undesirable feature of Woolloomooloo Hill and its eastern skyline.

It was a most pleasant journey, apart from the torrential rain conditions of the afternoon, to inspect these two popular churches, both of which are representative of old-time Sydneytown which, to quote Walter Jerrold, is nowadays such a place of "pulling downs & building ups which seem inevitable in the development of an ever-growing city".