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ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL



PRICE 5 c .

# ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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1/46 Oatley Avenue,  
OATLEY. NSW. 2223.  
August 1978.

Dear Friend and Member,

The regular meeting will be held as follows:

Date: Friday Evening, August 18th, 1978, at 8.00 p.m.  
Place: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale.  
Business: General.  
Syllabus Item: An Address: "The Preservation of Architectural Works and Related Subjects". will be presented by Dr. P. Briggs, Architect.  
Supper Roster: Captain: Miss Val Heath, & Mesdames Turton, Roots, Havilah & Moffitt.  
Ladies please bring a plate.

Mr. A. Ellis,  
President.  
Phone 587.1159.

Miss A. Lang,  
Secretary.  
Phone 57.2608

Mrs. E. Wright,  
Treas. & Soc. Sec.  
Phone 599.4884.

Mrs. B. Perkins,  
Publicity Officer.  
Phone 587.9164

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

"In the old days, a man who saved his money was a miser, now he's a wonder."  
Friendship Book,  
1976.

ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY - PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT - 1977-1978.

Serving as your President for the year 1977-1978, has been for me, a pleasure and a privilege, enabled by the confidence and co-operation rendered me, and for this I thank you all.

During the year we have enjoyed the sponsorship of the Rockdale Municipal Council and the Patronage of prominent and influential personages.

Life membership was conferred upon two senior members, Mr Charles Napper and Mrs McMillan.

We have had 12 meetings, which have had an average recorded attendance of 65, with an average meeting time of 1 hour. One meeting lasted 2 hours, whilst another only 15 minutes. Speakers at the meetings included visiting lecturers, as well as our own members, all dealing with a variety of subjects. During the meetings I have been aided by the guiding wisdom and comforting presence of our esteemed Immediate Past President and Senior Vice-President, in the emulation of whom I have approached the duties of this Office.

The minutes and proceedings of these meetings have been faithfully recorded by our Honorary Secretary, preserving a continuity of affairs with quiet, calm efficiency.

Some Management Committee Meetings were held in order to prepare recommendations on a number of time-consuming matters. Not the least of these resulted in the re-printing of four of the seven booklets, written and illustrated by a pst President, the late Gifford Eardley. Copyright of these books was graciously waived, for this occasion, by his widow, Eileen Eardley.

Eleven monthly Bulletins were prepared, with no little effort, by our capable and cheerful Assistant Secretary. They contained all sorts of information concerning activities, including excursions and outings so ably organised by our Social Secretary, who also serves, with credit, as Honorary Treasurer, and whose work meets with the approval of our Honorary Auditor, Arthur Ford. Many and varied interesting historical articles have been contributed to the Bulletin, by some highly regarded contributors.

The state of affairs at Lydham is reported each month by the Curator, appointed to represent us at that place. These reports are indicative of enthusiasm and disclose a healthy financial state.

Many enquiries come to us regarding the history of our district. Most are answered readily by the appropriate officer, whilst others have defied what some have described as a tenacious ferretting propensity.

Near the bottom of the front page of our Bulletin, there appears a line - "Ladies Please Bring a Plate" - and they do!! These plates contain goodies, which, placed in the charge of a rostered group of ladies, emerge as a delightful supper of which we partake to the tune of friendly conversation.

And now, if it would appear that I have not given due mention to any facet of our activities, and your diligence, may I offer an all embracing - "thank you".

21st July 1978.

- *Arthur Ellis*  
President.

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## THE ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY -- INCOME &amp; EXPENDITURE ACCOUNTS

Year ending 30th June 1978.

INCOME

Members - Subscriptions	\$ 411.00
R.A.H.S. Grant	100.00
Members - Donations	30.00
Badge Sales	9.00
Book Sales - Society	108.60
Bus Trips - Raffles	<u>478.75</u>
Total:	\$1,137.05
Bank Interest	6.47
Balance B/fwd from June '77	<u>964.33</u>
TOTAL:	<u>\$2,108.05</u>

EXPENDITURE

Mrs Eardley - Postage	\$ 194.80
Mr Ellis - Postage	31.20
Miss Lang - Postage	32.55
Miss Lang - Petty Cash	60.00
Mrs Eardley - Petty Cash	41.80
Mrs Wright - Petty Cash	30.00
Mr Ellis - Council Dinner etc.	29.03
Mrs Wright - Xmas Cheer, Catering.	53.85
Crockery Purchase	19.20
R.A.S. Delegate	15.00
National Trust	18.00
V.I.P. Tours	465.00
Mr Sinclair - Projector	80.00
Miss Dunsmore, Scy. Books	575.90
Refund Mr Ellis	<u>2.27</u>
TOTAL:	\$1,648.60
Credit Bank Balance	<u>459.45</u>
TOTAL:	<u>\$2,108.05.</u>

Mr President & Members, it is my pleasure to advise, having audited the Books & all relevant statements appertaining to the Society's Accounts, I find them to be correctly recorded & Certify them completed & honestly congratulate Mrs Wright on a job well done. - *Arthur Ford.*

Mrs Eardley \$20.00 float in hand.  
Miss Lang credit in hand - \$1489.00.



LYDHAM HALL FUND RAISING COMMITTEE --- BALANCE SHEET for the year ending 30th June 1978.

<u>INCOME</u>		<u>EXPENDITURE</u>	
Division of Cultural Activities	\$ 500.00	South Side Antiques	\$ 395.00
Lydham Admittances	481.40	Picture Framing	15.00
Cakes, Cash Sales	7.60	Rockdale Century of Progress Bks	150.00
By., Raffles	119.70	Rockdale Century of Progress Bks	37.50
By., Donations	42.05	Petty Cash	30.00
Sales Century of Progress	112.00	Globe Replacement	6.19
Sales History Books	<u>113.00</u>	Picture - S.M.Herald	4.00
Total:	\$1375.75	Payment St.George History Bks	41.40
Bank Interest	36.70	Payment St.George History Bks	52.20
Cash in Bank June 1977	<u>793.79</u>	R.R.Picture Frames	13.00
Full Total:	<u>\$2,206.24</u>	Petty Cash	20.00
		Cash in Bank 30th June 1977	<u>1441.45</u>
		Full Total:	<u>\$2,206.24</u>

Capital Investment, with St. George Bldg. Soc., \$1201.49., the interest for the past year is included in that, which was \$99.93.

My submission on the Accounts of the Fund Raising Lydham Hall Committee for the year ending 30.7.'78. Miss Betty Otton supplied all necessary Statements, Books, etc, and I, hereby Certify that they have been kept in a satisfactory manner, all items being properly accounted for. *Arthur Ford.*

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The following were elected to hold Office for the Year 1978 - 1979.

Patrons:

Mayor of Rockdale, Ald. H. E. Kibbey.

Alderman R. Rathbone

Mr. R. Stark, Town Clerk.

President:

Mr. A. Ellis

Senior Vice President:

Mr. D. Sinclair.

Vice Presidents:

Mr. B. Foster

Miss M. Dunsmore

Hon. Secretary.

Miss A. Lang

Hon. Asst. Secretary,  
& Bulletin Editor.

Mrs. E. Eardley

Hon. Treas. & Social Sec.

Mrs. E. Wright

Hon. Auditor.

Mr. A. Ford

Committee of Management.

President, Secretary, Treasurer, Mr. Kell,  
Mrs. Perkins, Mr. R. Lee, Mrs. Wright,  
Mrs. Eardley, Misses M. Callister &  
M. Dunsmore.

Lydham Hall Local Committee.

Mr. A. Ellis, Miss A. Lang, Miss B. Otton.

Ladies Social Committee.

All Ladies who are able will go on Roster.

Research Officer.

Mr. A. Ellis

Publicity Officer.

Mrs. B. Perkins

Lydham Hall Fund Raising  
Committee.

Miss B. Otton, Mrs. M. Fry, Mrs. Blacksaw  
and Mrs. D. Prebble.

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Historical Records of N.S.W. , 1762 - 1811.

These interesting and valuable books may be purchased from:

Lansdown Slattery & Company,  
First Floor, 12 Park Street,  
Mona Vale. N.S.W. 2103.

For further information, please ring: 99.3098.

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Many of our Members have been, and still are, ill. We are sorry to hear this and trust that you will all be well again soon.

### SOCIAL.

A Bus Trip to Kangaroo Valley has been arranged for your enjoyment by Mrs. Wright, particulars as follows:-

Time: 7.30 a.m. SHARP.

Meeting Place: Corner of Walz & Railway Streets, Rockdale. (on the Bexley side of Rockdale Station.)

Cost: \$4.50 per person.

Date: Saturday, September 9th, 1978.

Book early to avoid disappointment.

Bring your own eats and beverages, and have a lovely day.

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Miss Otton, Curator of 'Lydham Hall', is in need of Ladies and/or Gentlemen to assist with the weekend roster. Visitors come from far and wide to see this lovely old Home, and your presence would greatly facilitate the inspections. Ring Miss Otton, Phone 59.4259, your call will be appreciated.

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### SPECIAL NOTICE.

The St. George Historical Society is pleased to announce that the following books, written and illustrated by the late Gifford H. Eardley, for the Society, have been re-printed and are now available.

Price: \$1.00 per copy (postage extra).

No.2 "Kogarah to Sans Souci Tramway"

No.3 "Saywells Tramway, Rockdale to Lady Robinson's Beach"

No.5 "Our Heritage in Stone"

No.6 "All Stations to Como"

No.7 "Tempe and The Black Creek Valley" is also available, (limited stocks only).

At a later date, Books No.1 - "The Wolli Creek Valley", and No.4 - "Arncliffe to Bexley Steam Tramway", will be re-printed.

For your copy of the above books, please contact one of the following:

Mrs. E. Wright - Phone 599.4884.

Miss A. Lang (Sec.) - Phone 57.2608 (after 8.00 p.m.)

Miss B. Otton - Phone 59.4259 (after 8.00 p.m.)

Mrs. E. Eardley - Phone 59.8078.

Copies of early Bulletins are available.

## THE ROCKS ...

- Presented by Miss Candy Tymson  
Public Relations Officer -  
Sydney Redevelopment Society.  
to the St. George Historical Society  
- Friday 21st April 1978.

On the evening of 25th January, 1778, the First Fleet sailed into Port Jackson and anchored in a quiet cove. Captain Arthur Phillip chose the cove which had, in his own words, "the best spring water and in which the ships can anchor ... close to the shore."

Next morning the long boats rowed ashore and Captain Phillip hoisted the English flag over the infant colony of New South Wales.

The 11 ships which made up the First Fleet disgorged their cargo of human misery comprising 757 convicts and 13 children. The military escort comprised some 200 marines; accompanying the marines were 28 women and 14 children. Records also carefully list that there were 4 cattle, 6 horses, 44 sheep and sundry poultry and pigs.

Working parties of convicts were landed on the rocky peninsula on the western side of the cove, referred to as The Rocks from that time onwards. There they began clearing ground to make way for the erection of a pre-fabricated timber and canvas hospital and the tents and bark shelters that were to be their homes.

Thus was the Australian nation born. The Rocks was to be part of it from that very day.

The chain of events just described had been set in motion some 20 years earlier at the time of Captain James Cook's first voyage to the Pacific. Following his observation of the transit of Venus at Tahiti in June, 1769 he followed secret instructions approved by King George III to search for the southern continent "which may be found to the southward of the tract lately found by Captain Wallis."

After exploration of New Zealand's coasts Cook came further west and upon sighting the Australian mainland sailed northward and entered Botany Bay on 28th April, 1770. After a few days he sailed northward again into history.

It was Cook's famous passenger, Sir Joseph Banks, who eventually was to become responsible for European settlement in New South Wales. Banks, a rich and famous naturalist and a member of the Royal Society, had been largely responsible for the voyage and was greatly impressed by Botany Bay.

In 1776 the American War of Independence came to an end with the loss to Britain of her American colonies. One effect of this event was that convicts could no longer be sent to the New World from English gaols. With British judges continuing to award sentences of transportation as

a more humane alternative to hanging, pressure of numbers in gaols and prison hulks continued to grow. A solution to this problem had to be found and thus it was in 1779 that Banks recommended to a committee of the House of Commons that Botany Bay would be a satisfactory site for a penal colony. His suggestion was accepted and in due course the First Fleet sailed from Spithead, on 13th May, 1787.

After a journey of nearly eight months the fleet arrived at Botany Bay on 18th January 1788. A few days at anchor in the bay revealed poor shelter and lack of sufficient fresh water, causing Captain Phillip to take the decision to move the settlement to Port Jackson, the entrance to which had been noted but not explored by Cook in 1770. Thus it was that the fleet came sailing into Sydney Cove that January afternoon.

Although the settlement at Sydney Cove had been established as a penal colony Captain Phillip clearly saw that he was laying the foundations of something that would be much greater. He pronounced rules calling for wide streets and adequate living areas to allow for the creation and development of a spacious city. Force of circumstances was to frustrate much that he sought.

In the Rocks with its high terrain and steep slopes construction of proper roads and drainage was particularly difficult and the area was soon to become a collection of insanitary hovels and taverns catering for seafarers from all parts of the world.

As Sydney developed into a major port for whaling, sealing and shipping generally, sailors of all nations came ashore after long stints at sea looking for a good time. The Rocks was where they found it. Taverns, brothels and gaming houses sprang up to offer fast and bawdy entertainment in return for the sailor's hard earned cash. Thugs and pressmen lurked in the dark narrow alleys.

In 1810 the Judge Advocate listed some 50 tavern licenses in Sydney, the majority of which were in the Rocks. The colourful names and signs of the taverns evoke the atmosphere of the times; The Mermaid, The Sheer Hulk, The Three Jolly Sailors, The Whalers Arms, The Labour in Vain, and so many, many more. Rum was the universal drink and it was drunk by the sailors, the soldiers, the settlers, the convicts and the ex-convicts. Stringy Bark, as beer was then called, was not in fashion.

One Rocks observer pointed out: "Some of the women were so saturated with rum that when they lit their pipes a blue flame of fire used to come from their lips."

Persons convicted of crimes committed in the colony, as opposed to convicts transported from England, were locked up in Sydney gaol, located at the corner of George and Essex Streets. Flogging was commonplace and the hangman boasted of his gibbet: "Seven can be turned off at one time - six comfortably." Apart from watching hangings another diversion for Sydneysiders in those days was to study the wretches in the stocks which stood in George Street opposite the gaol. The gaol, too small almost from the start, was finally replaced by a much larger installation at Darlinghurst.

Traffic in The Rocks went through narrow alleys and steps barely wide enough for two people to pass.

The arrival of Governor Lachlan Macquarie in 1810 marked the beginning of a new era in the growth of Sydney Town and the colony in general. The "roads and buildings" Governor's rule is to-day still memorialised by dozens of buildings and bridges throughout New South Wales and Tasmania. However, the only survivor of that period to be seen in The Rocks is Cadman's Cottage, built in 1815-16 as a barrack for Government boat crews and a residence for their overseer, the Government Boatswain.

It should be remembered that quite apart from overseas shipping the harbour, and the rivers emptying into it, provided the prime means of communication in those days, and long afterwards with the immediate surrounds, with coastal vessels providing a similar vital service to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), Newcastle, Norfolk Island and other outposts.

Though Cadman's Cottage is the only building remaining from Macquarie's day, his efforts in attempting to bring order to the area are still recorded in the names which he gave to the streets.

Sydney's oldest street had been known as Sergeant Majors Row and this he re-named George Street. Straightening and improving as he could, he gave the streets he created from former alleys such names as Princes, Cumberland, Cambridge and Gloucester after the progeny of George III. In some cases straightening had to be waived to avoid cutting into precious garden plots, for periodic food shortages were to be a problem in the colony for many years.

An elegant landmark in the midst of this squalid setting was Wharf House, the residence of Robert and Sophia Campbell. Robert Campbell came from Scotland by way of Calcutta and arrived in Sydney Town as a young man at the end of the 18th Century. Called the Father of Australian Commerce he established the first commercial wharf in this country at what is now called Campbell's Cove. His home was built on the site of the present Commonwealth offices at the corner of Hickson Road and George Street. Completed in 1802, it was surrounded by ornamental gardens and remained a landmark until demolished to make way for the present building. The Ordnance Store, in 1884.

A friend of Governor Bligh, Campbell fell on hard times with the rebellion which overthrew the famous seaman. Years later with returning prosperity he acquired a property of 30,000 acres at Limestone Plains, some 300 km south-east of Sydney, and there built a second house which he called Duntroon.

To-day that property is the site of the national capital Canberra, whilst the house forms the centrepiece for Australia's Royal Military College.



Another prominent pioneer of that era was Captain Eber Bunker, an American sea captain who traded widely in the South Seas. His house stood in Cumberland Street near where the southern pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge is now located. He gave his name to Bunkers Hill, the high ground where his house stood. Lost for many years, this name has recently been re-applied to that feature.

Throughout the formative years the colony was beset by a wide range of problems. To the predictable difficulties that could expect to be associated with the establishment of a penal colony 12,000 miles from the mother country, multiplied by the internal effects of the rum trade and occasional famine, there was added the almost continual threat of internal rebellion and external attack. Throughout those early years until 1815, war with France was practically continuous. The war of 1812 with the United States and changing situations in Spain and Holland all carried the threat of at least raids on this remote and weak infant colony. Whilst it can perhaps now be seen as a tribute to the power of the Royal Navy that no such attack ever came, as the time the threat had to be taken seriously.

Lt. Dawes of the Marines, who was also an astronomer, was put to work by Phillip in August 1788 constructing a battery which was to stand near the site of the southern bridge pylon for over 140 years. The point upon which it stood was originally called Maskelyne after the Astronomer Royal of that period but was soon known as Dawes Point.

The soldiers who manned Dawes Point Battery were quartered in barracks nearby. They attended the Garrison Church in Argyle Place, completed in 1841, proceeding from there to the battery via Fort Street which in turn gave its name to a famous school.

The Battery was reinforced and enlarged several times before it was finally demolished to make way for the Harbour Bridge, opened in 1932. Another decade was to pass before the first guns were to be heard in anger in Sydney Harbour as they engaged Japanese midget submarines in 1942. With the demolition of the Battery the guns were left in position and may now be seen in Dawes Point Park.

William Davis, who was deported to Australia following the 1798 rebellion in Ireland, purchased in 1809 the land in Grosvenor Street on which St. Patrick's, the oldest surviving Catholic Church in Sydney, was built between 1840 and 1844. There he built his cottage and blacksmith's shop.

His home soon became a centre for the Catholic community, the first Mass being celebrated there in 1817. Davis later donated the land for the church site. His cottage remains to this day, preserved in the basement of St. Patrick's convent which shares the church site.

In the 1820's respectable and fashionable citizens began to build large and expensive mansions on the heights above The Rocks.

The first to do so was the archdeacon, the Rev. Thomas Hobbes Scott, who built an imposing house in Cumberland Street. Others followed including merchants, businessmen, lawyers and Archdeacon William Broughton, the first and only Bishop of Australia.

Another famous Rocks resident was David Scott Mitchell, the army surgeon, whose collection of books formed the basis of the library which now bears his name.

Other important Rocks residents included Edmund Barton, the first Prime Minister of Australia, George Reid, also Henry Kendall the poet, Francis Greenway the convict architect, and William Bede Dalley, lawyer and orator; another to gain fame was Young Griffio, in his case, as a boxer.

The two most fashionable streets were Cumberland and Princes, where the houses were mainly of squared stone of two or three storeys with wide verandahs supported by columns. Houses there were enclosed in well designed and carefully tended gardens. The fine Georgian houses surrounding Argyle Place in the Millers Point neighbourhood date from this period and still survive.

Traffic between Millers point and The Rocks was seriously hampered by the lack of streets running in an eastwest direction, so that in 1843 convict labour began to hack out the Argyle Cut. Despite, or perhaps because of, the brutal whip of the lash, the work proceeded slowly before it was finally completed with the help of explosives and free labour in 1859.

In the 1870s and 1880s the larrikins, known as the Pushes, dominated the area. Gangs sporting colourful names, such as the Cabbage Tree Mob, the Orange or the Green, fought for and dominated their own territories within The Rocks which gave them the right to way-lay and rob anyone who was foolhardy enough to be in the district after dark.

Their dress was as colourful as their names. A slouch hat set at a jaunty angle on the back of the head, tight trousers with bell bottoms, high-heeled boots with toes exaggerated to a needle point, often set with mirrors between the laces and the toe, was the uniform of the late 19th century larrikin.

What the police could not do to the Pushes, the plague did. As the old century ended bubonic plague came to Sydney. Some 313 people died of it. The first to die was a teamster from The Rocks and though the disease was widespread its core lay in the squalid slums and warehouses of this harbourside refuge for rates.

The action taken to overcome the plague was nearly as dramatic as the disease itself. Areas were cordoned off and fumigated. Whole tracts of buildings were burnt or demolished, leaving relatively few behind in The



Rocks. This programme was particularly severe in the area lying to the south of the modern Cahill Expressway and around the waterfront where a new street, Hickson Road, was to emerge.

An area of 53 hectares embracing the modern neighbourhood of The Rocks, Millers Point and Dawes Point was resumed into Government ownership to permit the wholesale demolitions. Following this, a limited redevelopment programme proceeded commencing just before the First World War and continuing into the 1920's.

Then came the Sydney Harbour Bridge, sweeping away Princes Street, Little Essex Street and much of Cumberland Street and cutting the area down the middle,\* thereby effectively separating The Rocks from Millers Point. The construction of the Cahill Expressway in the early 1960s again caused extensive demolition so that by this time over one-third of the area was vacant land, marked only by the stumps of departed buildings. A proposal at that time to sell most of the land north of the Cahill Expressway for virtual demolition and private re-development did not proceed.

Then in 1967, the State Government asked Sir John Overall, Chairman of the National Capital Development Commission in Canberra to make fresh proposals.

He advised that an Authority should be set up by the State to undertake the task of revitalising the area. His advice was accepted and at the end of 1968 an Act to that effect was passed by the Government of New South Wales. This was to be known as the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority Act.

When the Authority was finally formed in 1970 and had taken over the area, the scene was one of decay, avoided by most Sydney-siders. In the years preceding the Authority's formation it had become more and more apparent that the costs of maintaining ageing uneconomic buildings were causing an ever increasing drain on public funds in spite of the inherent value of the area. The previous decade had seen a fall at some 33% in the resident population, while vacant land, derelict buildings and various makeshift land uses such as car parking showed little to remind Australians that this was the spot chosen by Captain Phillip to be their nation's birthplace.

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