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ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

PRICE 5c.

# ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

Registered for Posting as a  
Publication Category 'B'

24 Duff Street,  
Arncliffe. 2205.  
April 1980.

Dear Friend and Member,

The regular meeting will be held as follows:

- Date: Friday Evening, April 18th, 1980, at 8.00 p.m.
- Place: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale.
- Business: General.
- Syllabus Item: Mr. Peter Orlovich, a very knowledgable member of our Society, will give a talk on Sir Joseph Carruthers, a colourful personality, who was associated with this district many years ago, and of whom we hear so little.
- Supper Roster: Mrs. Kalucy, Captain, & Mesdames Thompson, Hunt, Grace and Troughton.

Mr. A. Ellis,  
President.

Phone 587.1159.

Mrs. B. Perkins,  
Publicity Officer.

Phone 587.9164.

Mrs. E. Eardley,  
Sec. & Bulletin Editor.

Phone 59.8078.

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

Phone 599.4884.

Mr. A. Ellis,  
Research Officer.

Phone 587.1159.

The Choir Director was teaching the new Anthem. "Don't forget", he said, "you wait until the tenors reach 'the Gates of Hell' and then you all come in."

.... The United Church Observer, Canada.

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Many of our Members have been and still are ill, remembering Mrs. Faulkner, Mrs. Gash and Mr. Napper. We are sorry to hear this and hope you will be well again soon.

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. No. 8 Book was compiled by Mrs. Bronwyn Perkins.

- No. 1. "The Wolli Creek Valley"
- No. 2. "Kogarah to Sans Souci Tramway"
- No. 3. "Saywells Tramway. Rockdale to Lady Robinson's Beach"
- No. 4. "Arncliffe to Bexley Tramway"
- 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).
- No. 8. "Early Churches of the St. George District."

All books now available at \$1.00 per copy - plus current rate of postage.

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

Mrs. E. Wright - Ph. 599.4884. Miss B. Otton - Ph. 59.4259 (after 8 p.m.)

Mrs. E. Eardley - Secretary. Ph. 59.8078. Mr. A. Ellis - Ph. 587.1159.

Society Badges available from Mrs. Wright, Treasurer, at \$1.00 each.

#### SOCIAL.

Date: 24/5/80. A visit to "Yester Grange" at Wentworth Falls.  
(a very lovely old home)

Meeting Place: Western side of Rockdale Station.

Time: 8.30 a.m. Sharp.

Cost: \$4.00 per person, plus ) \$5.00 Total.  
\$1.00 Inspection of Home.)

Picnic Lunch, or lunch will be available at the Club at a cost of \$2.20 each.  
(Please contact Mrs. Wright if you wish to avail yourself of this facility.)

Notice: Bookings must be finalised not later than May 16th.

#### - Berry-Camelia Show & Market Day -

Date: 2/8/80.

Meeting Place: Western side of Rockdale Station.

Time: 8.30 a.m. Sharp

Cost: \$4.50 per person

..... Further details later.

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Weekend Tour                      Nelsons Bay, Shoal & Fingal Bays.

Date:            19-20/4/80.

Meeting Place:            Western side of Rockdale Station.

Time:            7.30 a.m. Sharp - return approx. 6.30 Sunday.

Cost:            \$60.00 (all inclusive - Coach trip, launch trip & lunch aboard launch).

(Further details from Mrs. Wright).

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Coach Trip to Wagga Wagga & Districts.

October 4, 5 & 6, 1980. (Long Weekend).

See Mrs. Wright for bookings & further details.

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EARLY COLONIAL CRAFT IN NEW SOUTH WALES. (contd.)

... the first twenty-five years. 1788 - 1813.

- Vaughan Evans.

- Presented to the St. George  
Historical Society,  
Friday 18th June, 1976.

In 1801 the *FRANCIS* was reported to be "very weak, & wants great repairs" & all the other, smaller, craft were described as very old & in need of constant repairs. Two new boats were being built, & the *BEE*, a sloop of 11 tons, a long-boat decked, was in service - "a very useful vessel for bringing grain etc. from the different settlements." In that year also the *CUMBERLAND* was finished, while in 1802 a new colonial vessel was being built, the *INTEGRITY*, a sloop of 51 tons, which was finished in only fifteen months by only four carpenters, two of whom had no previous experience on ships or boats. We are told that all necessary timber had been converted by only one pair of sawyers working for only twenty weeks; some of our forbears certainly knew the meaning of the world "work".

One interesting addition to the fleet of official colonial vessels in 1803 was the *RESOURCE*, a 26 ton schooner built out of the wreck of *HMS PORPOISE*, on which Matthew Flinders had hoped to return to England. Flinders chose to take over the *CUMBERLAND* for his return; his sorry experiences with this vessel, and his life as a prisoner of the French on the Isle of Mauritius is another story. It is interesting to note that the *CUMBERLAND* was not the only one of our colonial craft to end her days at Mauritius at this date: Baudin, the French explorer bought a small sealing vessel in 1803, the *CASAURINA*, & employed her on exploration under the command of de Freycinet. She was broken up on her arrival at Mauritius in 1804.

In 1804 King acknowledged the receipt of two plans sent out by the Admiralty for vessels to be built here. One was for a "flatt-bottomed boat" - nothing more nor less than a swim-headed Thames sailing barge, & the other of a 53' long schooner of 60 tons. Neither appear to have been built. This is really not very surprising, for by now private vessels had virtually taken over the carrying trade between the various settlements. This is illustrated also by the fact that it was in 1804 that the government auctioned off their busy little sloop, the *BEE*, to private ownership. There is little to report from this time on; the official colonial craft had already virtually had their day as maids of all work in the fetching & carrying trades.

To return to the private colonial craft. It has not been previously stated in this paper, but every governor since the first days of the settlement had very strict instructions, as follows:

"...every sort of intercourse ... (with) the settlements of (the) East India Company, as well as the coast of China, & the islands in that part of the world, to which any intercourse has been

*established by any European nation, should be prevented by every possible means ... (and you are not to allow) craft of any sort to be built for the use of private individuals which might enable them to effect such intercourse..."* (Phillips instructions Apr 1787).

Because of the severe shortages of skilled labour and of naval stores which I have mentioned, and because of the desperate need of the settlement for transport to keep itself alive, there had been little chance up to the turn of the 19th century that the official orders could be broken. Official concern here had been to survive, and to prevent the escape of convicts. Warnings against the infringement of the powerful monopoly of the East India Company could hardly have been considered for many years other than as a joke in rather bad taste.

Regarding the coasting voyages of our early colonial craft, frankly, we know very little for the first fifteen years of settlement. For one thing, the boats used were small - hardly more than large rowing boats - & the nature of their business humdrum & only worthy of comment in the surviving records if they should come to grief or get themselves stolen by prisoners. There was no shipping register for the first thirteen years. The Hawkesbury was settled from 1794 on, & we know that boats were bringing back cargoes of grain & cedar within a year or so of that date. In fact, we may infer that the trade in cedar grew to be considerable from the fact that in April 1802 a General Order was issued strictly forbidding cedar to be cut without official permission, any unauthorised logs or planks being seized together with the boats or carts containing them. Coal & cedar were also important commodities from the Hunter River, & occupied a number of vessels from within a year or so of the discovery of the river in 1797. The timber must have been magnificent: Isaac Nicholls advertised "*rich cedar*" for sale in 1805, including some samples 2' wide & 6 to 8' long. As early as 1799 Simeon Lord obtained permission to work coal at Hunter's River & within a year was despatching cargoes to the Cape & to India on overseas vessels. This was quite legitimate &, in fact, most ships calling here in the early days were desperate for return cargoes of any sort.

It was the Bass Strait trade, however, that was initially the most successful. The voyages of the *MARTHA* & other small vessels to & from island in Bass Strait were well within the official limits, & a cargo of oil & skins was readily sold to the master of a ship bound for China, India or England.

In March 1804 Governor King wrote a dispatch (HRA 1.4.490) in which he stated: "*... the great success of individuals in procuring oil & skins from Bass Straits & the islands .. (has been) very profitable to those individuals .. & an advantage to the colony in the number of men & small vessels employed.. Several boats larger than originally allowed had been permitted to be built by Governor Hunter & myself provided they did not go beyond the limits of the territory..."*

He added that he had given Mr. Campbell permission to build a vessel

of 130 tons, & he requested permission to extend this privilege to others. Perhaps the time was not quite ripe in 1804 for the building of such large vessels - large, that is, by the standards of the colony - for Campbell did not immediately take advantage of his permit, & his ship, the *PERSEVERANCE*, was not launched until Jan. 1807. The publication of the SG in 1803 gives us our first detailed accounts of early private shipping. It is worthy of mention that from 1807 onwards small private craft voyaged to Tahiti & the Fijis, Tonga & the Marquesas for pork for local consumption & later for sandalwood & beche de mer for re-export to China. Even these ships were small - the *HAWKESBURY*, 18 tons, 4 men - *VENUS*, schooner, 20 tons, 3 men - *ELIZABETH*, cutter, 33 tons - *SPEEDWELL*, schooner, 15 1/2 tons.

The *MERCURY* schooner, 53 tons, made 10 such trips in a space of 4 years - she was probably as long as a small single deck bus, about 40' long overall. During these early years of the century, private colonial craft generally were still very small - as indeed were coastal craft the world over at that time, but gradually a very few slightly larger craft, capable of long deep-water passages, came off the slipways. Kable & Co's *CONTEST* of 44 tons, is really the pioneer, unless this title should go to the sealer *MARTHA*, 30 1/2 tons of 1799, which has been mentioned earlier. The *CONTEST* was the vessel commenced at Underwood's yard in 1798. She was launched at last in May 1804 as a sloop for the sealing trade, & was the largest vessel up to that time, even though she was less than 40' on the keel. In the next year, however, Kable & Co added to their fleet a full-rigged three-masted ship of no less than 185 tons, & sent her whaling; this was the *KING GEORGE*. The brig *PERSEVERANCE* of 136 tons was not launched until January 1807. She sailed to the Fiji & Solomon Islands before specialising in the sealing trade in the far colder & more tempestuous waters of Macquarie Island. This is the ship which was chosen by the designers of Old Sydney Town at Somersby as their representative ship of their period. She is well worth close inspection - & reflection that, small as she is by our standards, she was considerably larger than most of her colonial contemporaries.

I do not propose to submit to you a catalogue of all the private vessels recorded for those early years up to 1813. Suffice it to say that there are at least 80 names. It is very difficult, in any case, to give a complete list, for apart from an occasional list of private colonial vessels in the official returns, we have to rely mainly on reports of ship movements as recorded in the Sydney Gazette. There were also very many vessels of very short life: our coastal waters are not the best for a well-found sailing ship of reasonable size, let alone for small craft of doubtful construction, equipment & manning.

The total number of private craft officially listed in 1804 is only 22, in 1806 only 21, & even in 1813 there were still only 33 of which a mere seven were 100 tons or over. Even at that late date the majority were under 25 tons - in other words, they were hardly more than large boats. That they were modest in size is reflected by their homely names. Many were named after sweethearts or wives: the *ANN*, *BETSEY*, *CHARLOTTE*, *CHARMING SALLY*, *DIANNA*, *ELIZA* & the one I like best, the *YOUNG HALCYON*,

named after my own wife - I forget where she came to grief. There were male names, modest ones like the *BROTHERS*, *EDWIN*, *GEORGE*, *JAMES & JOHN*, or more imposing ones such as the *GOVERNOR BLIGH*. How nice to know that the popular & respected Hawkesbury settler, Andrew Thompson, thought so much of Bligh that he named his largest & best vessel after him. Governors Hunter, King & Macquarie also had vessels named after them. I rather like some of the abstract names, too, such as the *CHANCE*, *CONTEST*, *ENDEAVOUR*, *PERSEVERANCE*, *GOOD INTENT*, *HAPPY RETURN*, *HAZARD*, & *HOPE* - the last was a frequently used name, which makes for much confusion when trying to find out which was which.

However grand some of their names were, the vessels themselves were small, & they were few in number; this must be reiterated. The lists & movements reported in the Sydney Gazette do not include small harbour craft, which we can only presume increased in numbers after 1800. Even in March 1810, at the start of Governor Macquarie's term of office, he reported that "*there was not a single vessel in this harbour...that I could despatch to Governor Bligh, but the first that came from the Coal River I immediately sent off for the Derwent to inform him of my arrival here.*" (HRA. 1.7.219) As I have said before, colonial craft were small, most of them hardly bigger than a ship's boat, & apart from the sealers there were very few indeed that were capable of venturing down to Van Dieman's Land.

Now at the beginning of this talk, I spoke about Robinson Crusow, his garden, & his herd of goats: as you can see, I have tried to thread my way through the wilderness of old records &, I hope you will agree, I have at least come up with mention of a hut - Governor Phillip's pre-fab; a garden - the East Farms at Kissing Point or Ryde; and, if not a herd of goats - at least a fleet of boats.

I have no illusions about the work necessary to fill in the gaps of my story; I really have only skimmed the surface of what is available as fact, & what may be deduced from those facts. I should like to have been able to include some more light-hearted items, but our forefathers were rather too serious-minded in what they thought fit to record for posterity. Apart from Collins' mention of the kangaroo figure-head of *HMS BUFFALO*, & what he said about the *ROSE HILL PACKET*, or *LUMP*, about the only other example I have come across of the humour of those days is from the Sydney Gazette of 1803:

*"... A boat built in the Gaol Yard was launched on Friday. She is the property of the Chief Constable &, from the circumstances of her birth, has already been baptised THE PRISONER AT LARGE..." -*

and what about the group of men who were so keen on getting into the sealing game that they built their first boat without any previous experience, working from an encyclopaedia: she was wrecked in the harbour (fortunately?) but their second boat, built professionally, was the *MARTHA* ... that first of all the named colonial sealers, first mentioned in December 1799: in March 1800 she went to Norfolk Island & back, & then was sent up to Hunter's River for coal, but

entered Lake Macquarie by mistake. I find it rather amusing that when she left for another cargo of coal her destination was announced as Reid's Mistake: poor Reid - he was the master of the *MARTHA*, and Reid's Mistake is still the name of the entrance to Lake Macquarie. Of course, there is the unconscious humour of a society which had far more rigid social barriers than we admit today, when a boatbuilder would regularly advertise that he would undertake to build boats "for gentlemen or others..."

Tonight I have attempted to tell you something of a very small field of nautical research. I have tried to keep away from technicalities as far as possible, because to the layman the distinction between the various types of vessel and their style of rigging is most confusing. Remember what the dictionary said about a hoy.

I hope that you have found something of interest in what I have said, and that when you next see an old painting or print of the harbour in the early days of settlement you may be tempted to identify some of the vessels portrayed - could that vessel be the *ROSE HILL PACKET*..... or that the *FRANCIS*? .... What is that vessel that looks so suspiciously like a Thames spritsail barge doing in the Parramatta River; could it possibly be a vessel built to one of those plans sent out in 1804?

An interest in a subject such as this also adds something to a stroll through the City; to recall the look of the Bridge that gave Bridge Street its name; to think of Underwood's yard when you pass Underwood Street, & to recall the *CONTEST* sitting there half finished for six long years; Reiby Place - to remind you of Thomas Raby or Reiby, an early shipowner - even if his ships were tiddlers of ten tons or so; of Palmer St, Woolloomooloo, to remind us of the enterprise of Mr. Palmer, another pioneer shipbuilder & sealer - and, I am told, of other, later & even more saucy craft of a different kind who frequented that area; and the Overseas Terminal where any one of the modern cruise liners could carry the whole of the private colonial fleet of 1813 from her davits, & still have plenty of room for her own, larger, lifeboats.

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