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ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL



PRICE 5c.

# ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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24 Duff Street,  
Arncliffe. 2205.  
February 1981.

Dear Friend and Member,

The February meeting will be held as follows:-

Date: Friday Evening, February 20th, 1981, at 8.00 p.m.  
Place: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale.  
Business: General.

A general discussion will follow concerning proposed activities during "Heritage Week", which will take place from March 23rd - March 29th inclusive. All members are invited to take part in the discussion, and also to help to make a success of whatever activities are decided upon. We need your help and your enthusiasm.

The above general discussion will take the place of a Syllabus Item.

Supper Roster: Mrs. Lee, Captain, & Mesdames Loring, Teychenne, & Miss Dunsmore.

Ladies please bring a plate.

Mr. R. Lee,  
President.  
Phone 570.1244.

Mrs. B. Perkins,  
Publicity Officer.  
Phone 587.9164.

Mrs. E. Eardley  
Sec. & Bulletin Editor.  
Phone 59.8078.

Mrs. E. Wright,  
Treasurer & Social Sec.  
Phone 599.4884.

Mr. A. Ellis,  
Research Officer.  
Phone 587.1159

"Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday."

.... Old Chinese Proverb.

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Many of our Members have been and still are ill. We are sorry to hear this, and hope they will be well again soon.

### HOLIDAYS.

Saturday, 14th and Sunday, 15th March, 1981. Milton-Ulladulla and District Historical Society invites us to a weekend function. \$45.00.  
Please ring Mrs. Wright 599.4884, for details. Pay this meeting.  
All meet at 7.30 a.m. sharp - Railway Street, Rockdale (western side of Railway Station).

### A Coach Tour of "Historic Homes and Buildings, and Points of Interest"

Date: 25th March, 1981.

Meeting Place: Railway St., Rockdale (Opposite Railway Station)

Time: 2.00 p.m. sharp. return 5.00 p.m.

Cost: \$2.00 per person.

(Mr. Arthur Ellis will be guide on this occasion.)

Saturday 3rd, Sunday 4th and Monday 5th October, 1981 - Weekend historical tour of Dubbo and Districts. \$92.00. Deposit \$10.00 at March meeting.  
Please see Mrs. Wright for details

20th Anniversary Dinner - Ainslee Lodge, Bexley, 13th June, 1981. Details later.

### 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 reprinted 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 \$1.25 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.

Book 9 in our series of books on history, local and thereabouts, is in the process of being researched. Can you help with any information concerning the early Pioneers of the District? If you can, this will be greatly appreciated.

NOTE: MARCH MEETING. 27.3.81. Alderman Ron Rathbone will be Guest Speaker.

KINGSGROVE.

- B J Madden -15.9.1980.

Kingsgrove was the site of a factory for the manufacture of tobacco and snuff for about 20 years from 1854. Thomas Smithson was a native of Leeds, Yorkshire (born c 1814). He and his family are said to have arrived in Sydney on the ship Ascendant in 1852, and resided at Paddington for a couple of years. He had been engaged in tobacco manufacturing in England and it is said that he was associated with Hugh Dixson prior to coming to Kingsgrove. Hugh Dixson had founded the Dixson Tobacco Co Ltd. which eventually became British Tobacco and is now Amatil. His grandson, Sir William Dixson, established the Dixson Collection which is associated with the State Library of New South Wales.

After leasing the land for a year, Thomas Smithson purchased Lot 11 of 25 acres at the corner of Stoney Creek Road and Croydon Road in December 1855, although it was mortgaged back to Michael Gannon at the same time. The tobacco factory was on the southern side of Stoney Creek Road about half way between Caroline St and Kingsgrove Road and most of the Sydney Houses were supplied with snuff and tobacco. The tobacco leaf was said to have been grown on the property. One of his granddaughters was taught by her mother to plait her hair in six strands, which was the way they plaited the tobacco.

After operating the factory for 20 years, Thomas retired. Incidentally, the land was re-possessed by Michael Gannon because of money owing. Thomas died at his residence in Stoney Creek Road on 26th June 1908, but his residence at this time was at the rear of his son's house, which is where the Bexley Golf Clubhouse is now located. The Sydney Morning Herald on 1 July 1908, reported that the funeral, which took place at Moorfield Cemetery on Sunday 28 June 1908 was one of the largest seen in the district, and was attended by many old residents. Thomas Smithson's descendents were said to number 122, and he was 94 years of age at the time of his death. He was one of the first road trustees for the district, a position he held until his death. (This would probably refer to Stoney Creek Road, which was planned 1865 and opened 28th July 1868).

In the item concerning his death in the St. George Call of 4 July 1908, it was said that he could relate many incidents of the early days when the settlers, anxious to make a decent road to Sydney, brought their own saplings and laid the first corduroy track, giving an approach to Cooks River. Smithson's Wine Bar, run by Thomas' son James Edward Smithson, is a separate story.

References: SMH 27 June 1908 p24; 1 July 1908 p10h.

St. George Call 4 July 1908.

Map: Lands Dept. R 475 1603 R (re Stoney Creek Road)

Map showing the country lying between Cooks & Georges Rivers, Higinbotham, Robinson & Harrison, C 1885, M.L.K981.11.

KINGSGROVE GASOMETER DEMOLISHED.

- B J Madden.

Mid-November 1979, saw the demolition and removal of a landmark in Kingsgrove - the Gas Holder in Kingsgrove Road opposite Omnibus Road. The Gas Holder was built during 1926-27 in order to improve the gas supply in that area, which was then undergoing rapid expansion.

The Holder had a diameter of 164 feet and fully inflated was approximately 114 feet in height.

At 6.00a.m. on 15 February 1956, the early morning quiet was shattered by 'a muffled roar', a 'great flame shot into the air' and residents thought that a bomb had exploded. The 'muffled' sound was the roar of flaming gas escaping from a major leak at the top of the container. Four residents suffered superficial burns. The Australian Gas Light Co., explanation of the incident was that it was not an explosion in the true sense of the word but was caused by failure of the crown. A ring of corrosion had formed around the periphery of the crown, causing the metal to part and the crown to open up in much the same fashion as the lid of a jam tin. The escaping gas ignited in the atmosphere causing very little damage. The Holder, without the support of the containing gas, simply fell into the underground tank.

The Company decommissioned the holder early in 1979 when it began to pump processed natural gas into the Kingsgrove area from the Holders at Chullora. There is a photograph of the framework of the Gas Holder being demolished in the St. George and Sutherland Shire Leader of 21 November 1979. I was able to obtain some photographs on 15 November 1979, just after demolition had commenced. The Australian Gas Light Company has been unable to locate old photographs, and I wonder whether there are any photographs of the Gas Holder or of that part of Kingsgrove on the northern side of the Tempe-East Hills railway line, which would give an indication of the size of the Gas Holder. It would be particularly interesting to see photographs taken before World War II and I would appreciate the opportunity to copy any such photographs.

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Address for contacting Mr Madden: 19 Marcella Street, Kingsgrove 2208.



THE GARRISON CHURCH - " HOLY TRINITY " -

- Henry Ginn & Edmund Blackett

- Architects.

The east window in the Garrison Church was given by the father of David Scott Mitchell to the memory of his wife's parents.

At the suggestion of Rev. William Cowper it was called the Church of the Holy Trinity. The Queen's Own Regiment attended morning worship regularly over a period of 40 years.

In 1855 it was decided to enlarge the structure and Edmund Blackett became the Architect. The church would have permanent walls of stone, a gallery, a spire, the latest design in pews; however, the spire did not eventuate.

It has been related that a Sydney business man wished to donate the tower and spire, and a meeting of parishioners was called to consider the proposal. They decided not to accept the offer as they wish to make it a community effort. As usual, under these circumstances, little if any progress was made and the old church still lacks its tower!

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HOTEL NELSON.

This hotel claims to be the oldest hotel in Sydney.

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GLEBE SHOT TOWER.

The process involved the pouring of molten lead into a colander at the top of the tower. Dripping through the holes of the colander the lead fell 200' into water at the base of the tower. Arsenic added to the lead assisted in the preparation of the particles. These set hard and were later dried. Faulty pellets were removed by hand and the finished product, polished in a revolving drum in which black lead was added, was known as "round shot".

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- G.H.Eardley.

OUR ANNUAL OCTOBER WEEK-END TRIP - 1980.

- Ralph Dunsmore.

This is the 10th annual trip made by members of our Society and quite a number of us have attended all the trips. This year we were a little apprehensive as to the state of the country owing to the drought conditions prevailing in most districts, but as events will tell our fears were needless.

On Saturday morning 48 of us assembled at Rockdale Station at 7.30a.m. Our V.I.P coach, driven by Jim Garvey duly arrived, our luggage was stored away and we all took our places and set off. The morning was a little overcast and quite a cold wind was blowing.

We were heading for our first stop Bowral and to Corbett Park to see the display of tulips and other flowers at their annual festival. Although some of the tulips were past their prime, there was a magnificent floral display and the cameras were busy. After having our morning tea we set off for Yass. The countryside was very dry, dusty and under drought conditions to this point. Passing through Bowral and Moss Vale, although there was a green tinge there was little stock feed. After passing Goulburn the country was beginning to look a little better. About 7-8 miles out from Goulburn, near the turn-off to Canberra we crossed the Dividing Range and from here the country started to improve.

At Yass we had a very nice lunch at the R.S.L. Club. Then we travelled via Jugiong and Coolac to Cootamundra. The country, by now, getting progressively greener and the crops and pastures were much heavier and had more body. The stock were looking very well and from this point right through the trip the country is enjoying a very good season. Rain is needed during the next few weeks, which will make or mar the results of the crops.

Crossing the railway line at Cootamundra we made for Junee where we were to inspect an old Historic House - "Monte Christo" - and have afternoon tea. We crossed the railway line at the outskirts of Cootamundra and turned away from the town and quite a number of our party didn't realise that we had passed Cootamundra. "Monte Christo" is a large old two-storey house occupying an impressive position on a hill overlooking the town of Junee. It was built by Christopher William Crawley, who took up a large area of land in the 1870's. When the railway went through in 1880 the township of Junee began and expanded rather rapidly. Junee became a rail junction with the line running out to Narrandera and Hay. It was known as a Railway Town. The line divided Mr Crawley's land from his neighbours and when land was required for the expansion of the town Mr Crawley was very reluctant to part with any of his. The town developed in an arc which is seen quite plainly from the balconies of "Monte Christo" from where some extensive views of the hilly countryside can be seen.

"Monte Christo" has a history of neglect and when Mr and Mrs. Crawley passed on in the early 1930's the house was put in the care of managers and caretakers, which proved to be unsatisfactory. In the early 1950's the furniture was sold and the house more or less deserted. Vandals began to play havoc with the place, which had the reputation of being haunted. In 1963 Mr and Mrs Ryan took over the place and started a restoration programme. They have built several annexes, a large hall in which dances and wedding receptions and functions can be held, also a dining room for refreshments, afternoon teas etc. They have done a good job of restoring the old house and have furnished it with a lot of very expensive period furniture and are beautifully restoring the iron lace on the balconies, which had been badly damaged by vandals. Michelline, the daughter of Mr & Mrs Ryan showed us through the house and told us of the family's ambitions. The Devonshire tea was very acceptable.

It was about 4.45p.m. when we set off for Wagga Wagga. The country was now getting better and better and the crops were much more advanced. The sun was getting lower and the shadows longer and, coming through the trees on to the green crops made a picturesque sight. We passed one fairly large paddock of rape, which was about 18" high and bright yellow, making a lovely contrast to the green wheat. Later we saw a paddock of lupins with their white flowers. Lupins are grown as fodder crop, also for the harvesting of their seed, which is used for stock feed and at the moment is fetching good prices. Being a leguminous plant it is beneficial to the soil, adding nitrogen. It is the New Zealand blue lupin which is grown as a green manure crop and is ploughed in.

Arriving at our Motel at 6.00p.m. we were shown to our rooms to prepare for dinner at 6.30p.m. We had a very nice meal served by willing girls, after which we were all prepared to call it the end of a very enjoyable day.

#### WAGGA WAGGA:

Is a large city called the capital of the Riverina, situated on the Murrumbidgee River about 306 miles from Sydney and 280 from Melbourne. It has a population of 40,000 which is expanding. It is our largest stock-selling centre and has a new and very modern computerised and hygienic saleyard which is reputed to rank with the best in the world.

It has wide tree-lined streets and there are some beautiful avenues of Kurrajong trees. There are numerous parks and gardens of very high standard. It is developing along modern lines and the business and professional people are buying five to twenty acre blocks on the outskirts of the town and building large homes. The main pursuits are: fat lamb raising, cattle, sheep, cereal growing, wheat, oats, etc. The country is undulating to hilly with extensive river flats along the Murrumbidgee. The area was discovered by Charles Sturt in 1829-30.

Sunday morning was bright and sunny but there was quite a cold breeze blowing, the temperature was down to 10°, but everything pointed to a nice day. After a substantial breakfast we set off for the Tourist Bureau. Here we met the folk of the Wagga Wagga Historical Society. They had a Coach hired for the day, and it was arranged that some of us would exchange seats with our hosts, so that we could get to know each other.

We were fortunate to have Mr Keith Swan, President of the Wagga Wagga historical Society in our Coach. He has recently retired as Head of the area of Humanities at Wagga Wagga Teachers' College. He is a keen historian and has written several books and leaflets about Wagga Wagga and the history of the Riverina, and he gave us a wonderful commentary during the day. Being the subject dear to his heart, I am sure he enjoyed the day immensely and so did we.

Leaving Wagga Wagga we headed down the Olympic Highway en route to Henty, following the railway line which was built in 1878-79 and opened to Albury in 1880. Passing the village of Kapooka we could see the Military Camp which is now a training school for officers. It has had a varied existence, being built in 1941 as a military camp. After the 2nd. World War in 1950 it was used as a migrant camp. Later it reverted back to a military camp.

Uranquinty was a fairly large village and there were quite a number of new houses being built. People live there and commute to Wagga Wagga each day. It exists there mainly on account of the silos and trucking facilities for wheat. The district having had two very good seasons in the last two years, the silos were not able to cope with the quantity of wheat which was tipped in great heaps on the ground and covered with plastic sheets.

At Bon Accord were more silos and then we came to the Rock, named after a large rocky hill which at one time had a hanging rock, which has since fallen. The Hill (or Rock) is about 1800 ft. above the surrounding country and is a great landmark. We now followed a range of hills running North and South known as The Range.

Mr Swan told us about a Mr Plunkett who was instrumental in getting the various farmers' unions together and forming the Farmers' and Settlers' Association about the beginning of the century.

Henty, our next stop, is not a very big town, but is a prosperous one and is the home of many people of German descent. They are very religious people and have a very fine Lutheran Church. The German settlers flocked to the Riverina from South Australia in the 1870 - 1880's, especially after the Robertson Land Act of 1861 which enabled settlers to select land from 40 - 320 acres of Crown Land before it had been surveyed.

In the Henty Park, encased in a glass building is the original Header built by H V McKay and Hedley Taylor, the forerunner of the



popular H V McKay "Sunshine" header, which was manufactured in Victoria and won world acclaim.

From Henty we travelled east to Cookardina. A few miles from Henty we passed the place where the Agricultural Machinery Firms and Business Houses hold their annual Field Days, similar to the one held at Orange. It is a big event and they have an attendance of up to 60,000 and sometimes there are 30-35 aeroplanes from as far as Western Australia. The country here was looking better than ever and Mr Swan said that the farmers are growing more oats than wheat and that this area has a slightly better rainfall. There was a good deal of Capeweed in evidence - the weed with yellow flowers low on the ground. The farmers are trying to control it with chemical spray with little success. We now passed through the country of the descendants of H.V.McKay of the header fame. "Jindalee" is the home of H V McKay the 3rd., and there were others.

Reaching Cookardina we came to the junction of the old Albury Road which followed the route taken by Thomas Livingstone Mitchell in 1836. At this junction is the old "Squatters Arms" Hotel which was built by the Post family in 1844. It is still in the hands of the Post family, but no longer in use. The building was in a good state of preservation until a few years ago when vandals started to spoil it.

Travelling on towards Holbrook we came to "Kinross" the home of the Ross family. Here we met Mr David Ross, the present owner of the property who told us some of the history of the place. We saw the old Woolshed where they used to shear up to 90,000 sheep, employing 40 shearers. Later it was cut back to 25 shearers and to-day only 5 shearers are employed. The original Donald Ross came from Scotland and went to South Australia but in 1867 took up 300 acres here. He managed to build this up to a 90,000 acre property. This, of course, has been split up and to-day Mr David Ross owns the property which is run by his son. Cattle and farming with a few sheep is the main pursuit.

Leaving "Kinross" we set off for "Clifton" a property recently purchased by Mr Swan for his sons who wish to go on the land, where we enjoyed a beautiful barbecue lunch - the local steak was very nice and tender. This was cooked and served by the members of the Wagga Wagga Historical Society. Between "Kinross" and "Clifton" the country was more hilly and at one spot on a hill about 2,000 ft. high we had a very fine view of the countryside. Looking across we could see the Victorian Alps, and on a clear day the snow is clearly visible but unfortunately there was a smoke haze from the Victoria fires which spoilt this. After lunch we set off for "Pulletop" Station. The country was hilly and we were following Mitchell's old track. At the top of the Range we came to what is known as the Divide. It is the watershed, where the water flows towards the Murray on the one side, and towards the Murrumbidgee on the other.

We came to a small Railway siding Westby which is on a branch line from Wagga Wagga. It was opened in 1925 but closed in 1952. In this



district several mining companies are looking for deposits of tungsten and wolfram. Gregadoo was the next point of interest and here in the 1860's - 70's quite a good deal of wine was made which developed a high reputation.

We were almost back to Wagga Wagga and drove around Lake Albert which is the aquatic centre for the town. There are some very attractive homes near the lake and a golf course and boat club. From here into town we passed a number of big homes set on five to ten acres. We stopped at Wagga Park which is a beautiful shady place, full of large trees of all varieties. Here we were given a very nice afternoon tea, after which our President, Mr Bob Lee, thanked Mr Swan and the members of the Historical Society for the enjoyable day they had given us. We arrived back at the Motel about 5.30p.m. after a very pleasant and informative day.

Monday morning we met Mr Swan and he gave us a conducted tour of the city, also pointing out the changes that have taken place since the days of early settlement. From the business centre we progressed to what was the old Wagga Wagga Experimental Farm, established in 1897, comprising 3,500 acres. To-day it is still under the Department of Agriculture and houses the Agricultural College, 1947 and the Riverina College of Advanced Education.

The old Wagga Wagga Experimental Farm was the first of its kind and enjoyed a very high reputation. It was responsible for the improvements in farming and pastoral techniques, and in the breeding and crossing of new varieties of cereals etc. It also ran a course of farm management for young men wishing to go on the land. Students from Hawkesbury Agricultural College after gaining their Diplomas went to Wagga to further their practical knowledge and research work. To-day the Research Institute is recognised as one of the leaders in its field.

We entered the farm at the Research station and saw many experimental plots, including lupins. Passing on through the Agricultural College we came to the top of a hill and saw the modern buildings of the Riverina College of Advanced Education which were situated on the slopes and terraced grounds making a pleasant sight, adding to a wonderful view down the extensive valley.

From the farm we proceeded across the Hampden Bridge over the Murrumbidgee, where some very fine red gums were growing and John Brown's Horse Stud with the numerous white railed fences stood out clearly. Passing the site of the first Public School built in 1872 we saw the site of the Bond Store built 1870, and the Gas works, 1881.

We made our way to the Museum, situated on Willan's Hill where they have a very fine collection of items and records of interest, well set out in several buildings, also a big display of agricultural machinery. We had a cup of morning tea (again by courtesy of the Historical Society) after which we said 'good bye' to Mr Swan and his helpers, and set out for home.

We stopped at a Restaurant outside Gundagai for lunch. At Goulburn after afternoon tea our President, Bob Lee, on our behalf, thanked Mrs Wright for organising the trip, the ladies who helped her with raffles etc., and our Coach Driver and expressed our pleasure and satisfaction at having had a very pleasant week-end.

We were held up a good deal, between Moss Vale and Mittagong with the heavy traffic, arriving at Rockdale at 9.45p.m.

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