

SPONSORED BY
ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL



PRICE 5 c.

ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

Registered for Posting as a
Publication Category 'B'

24 Duff Street,
ARNCLIFFE. 2205.

April 1981.

Dear Friend and Member,

The April meeting will be held as follows:-

Date: Friday Evening, April 24th, 1981, at 8.00 p.m. (NOTE DATE)

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

Syllabus Item: Maritime Services Board and Port Botany. An address by a Member of the Board. This subject is topical and should be of interest to all.

Business: General.

Supper Roster: Captain: Mrs. Mendoza. & Mesdames Manser, Armstrong.

Ladies please bring a plate.

Mr. R. Lee,
President.
Phone 570.1244.

Mrs. E. Eardley,
Sec. & Bulletin Ed.
Phone 59.8078.

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

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

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

"A long life may not be good enough, but a good life is long enough."

.... Friendship Book, 1970.

(2)

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

We regret the death of Mr. G. Jolley, of Arncliffe, a long standing and valued member. To his family we offer our deepest sympathy.

20th Anniversary Dinner - Ainslee Lodge, Bexley, Saturday, 18th July, 1981.

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

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.

No. 9 Book 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: APRIL MEETING - 24.4.81. (Date changed due to Easter).

SMITHSON'S WINE BAR -

- B J Madden - 15.9.1980.

Smithson's Wine Bar in Stoney Creek Road was a feature of Kingsgrove's life for about 50 years. (Smithson's Tobacco Factory, run by Thomas Smithson, is a separate story).

James Edward Smithson was a son of Thomas Smithson, and was born on 26 February 1844 at Leeds, Yorkshire. On 7 May 1867, he married, at St. Mary's Cathedral Sydney, Martha Jane Craven, who had been born on 29 March 1849 at Cork, Ireland. She was orphaned at a very young age and was brought to Australia by her foster parents.

After the marriage, the couple went to live at "Pembroke Cottage" in Stoney Creek Road (Now No.9 Bennett Street). J.E. Smithson bought land on the opposite side of Stoney Creek Road and built a stone house there and moved in about 1869. (Land Records indicate that he bought 2 acres 16 p an oblong block, part of lot 12, in 1871. He extended his holdings in subsequent years).

On his marriage certificate, J E Smithson's occupation was given as tobacconist. However, he developed an extensive farm with fruit trees, vegetables, cows, pigs, fowls, horses, bees, lucerne etc. He was also a fine builder, and constructed many buildings in the St. George District and elsewhere, including "Holt House" at Sylvania. Besides his own house, he also designed and built a solid bridge in Stoney Creek Road near Laycock Street, and he built other country bridges. He also added weatherboard additions to the back of his house as the family grew.

In about 1880, they begun to sell wine on the property. At first, the wine was sold from a closed-in section of the verandah at the front of the house. A window announced "Smithson's Wine Bar" to all passing along Stoney Creek Road. Business prospered. Christmas periods were particularly busy and saw horses and carriages lining both sides of Stoney Creek Road. Around the turn of the century, a separate building was erected for the wine bar, but it was attached to the house on the western side and the roof alignment was altered to incorporate this room. The wine bar was about 2 metres forward of the original house, with a verandah in front of that again. The original "Smithson's Wine Bar" window was transferred from the verandah room to the new bar.

The grapes (thought to be about 5 tons in the 1920's) were brought in fruit boxes by train from Mudgee each year. In the early 1920's prices were:

for port and sherry 2/- a pint, 3/0 a quart, 14/- a gallon in stone jars.

Muscat was slightly dearer at 2/3 a pint.

All the wines were naturally fortified - no spirit concentrate was ever added. There were 50 large 100 gallon casks in the cellar and there was a bottling room at the rear of the bar. James Edward Smithson had four sons and three daughters. The eldest son,

Charles, was born in "Pembroke Cottage", and the other children were born in the cottage which was to be associated with the wine bar. Charles became the wine maker. A son-in-law Fred Ball, who had married Ethel, managed the business from about 1920.

J.E. Smithson died in April 1926. The wine bar continued until it was sold by auction on 11 June 1934. The land was acquired by Bexley Municipal Council and became Kingsgrove Park for a time, prior to Bexley Golf Course being established. After Bexley Golf Club built its club house behind the wine bar building, the sturdy old stone house was demolished in the 1950's. The wine press had been sold about 1933 or 1934 to a German wine maker in Orange.

When the Smithson family first built their house in Stoney Creek Road, there was an ironbark forest on the flat. This was later cleared and the timber sold. This area became the holding yards for C J Stone's slaughterhouse, the land being leased from Smithson.

References: Hurstville Propeller, 7 May 1926.

THE GOOD LIFE ON GOAT ISLAND ... THE ISLAND PEOPLE ...

- Margaret Smith
Sydney Morning Herald
24th June 1980.

Few Sydneyiders realise that on Goat Island in Sydney Harbour, children play where last century a convict lived out two years of terrible punishment, chained to a rock.

Two of those children are Adrian, 13, and Michelle, 10, who live with their parents, Marcel and Dianne Cleymans, in a cottage 138 years old, the oldest home on the Island. From their front garden, the family enjoy a rare waterside view of the city's shining towers looming behind Darling Harbour, framed at the moment by scarlet blossoms of flame trees on a path skirting the southern shore.

Marcel Cleymans is one of five Maritime Services Board employees who live with their families on the island. It's the central depot for the Harbour's dredging service, and a shipbuilding and repair yard for the Board's patrol vessels. The commuting workforce to the island is about 300 strong.

Mr Cleymans works as a coxswain, in alternate day and night shifts of 12 hours, seven to seven, on tugs and barges clearing oil and chemical pollution from the Harbour and Botany Bay. If there's a fire on Sydney's waterfront, he's part of a Goat Island force called out to help.

The Aborigines knew the island as Mel Mel, "the eye", and from the air it does seem to have an exotic almond-eyed shape. The present name is thought to come from the goats kept there in the early days of settlement.

In its past 192 years, Goat Island has had several changing functions. It's been a sandstone quarry; a gunpowder and ammunition store; a bacteriological station; and headquarters of Sydney's waterfront fire brigade.

Marcel Cleymans, a Flemish-born seaman from Antwerp, finally settled in Sydney with his Australian wife Dianne, who came from Tweed Heads. Although he has worked on Goat Island for the past eleven years, the family have lived there for just over a year. Before being offered the cottage for rent, Mr Cleymans spent nearly two hours getting to work each morning from Mount Druitt.

Goat Island is the mystery island of Sydney's 10 Harbour islands, with probably the most brutal history of them all. But these days it has a serene and happy atmosphere. The Cleymans enjoy their home both as a place to live and as a place of history.

"You won't find many families in NSW living in a house 138 years old, on an island", said Marcel proudly. Both the house and the former officers' quarters with its columned portico, belong to a group of sandstone buildings and a fortified wall, all quarried from the island. They have a touch of the sturdy grace of the English Regency style that influenced their construction in the 1830s and 1840s. The six roomed house was once the cookhouse for the officers' quarters nearby.

Marcel explained that the grey slate roof tiles came out as ballast in the hull of the prison ship Phoenix.

"My back fence is a rock wall", said Dianne Cleymans, as we all sat in the comfortable kitchen opening from the sitting room, enjoying coffee and cake. "And lying in bed you can hear the sound of the waves lapping below on the beach. When I go shopping in the city, I can't wait to get back to the peace of the island."

Marcel told of the legend that a hoard of gold coins was buried on the island last century after the robber had held up an Army paymaster. Only one has been found.

The children arrived back from school in Balmain. They use the half-hourly launch service from Balmain and West Circular Quay. Adrian, 13, talked enthusiastically of the swimming and snorkelling he enjoys around the island in summer. "We once found a squid, and we're always wary of sharks when we swim." Their only beach is a narrow strip of sand below the house, facing across the water to Balmain. Mr Cleymans has built a small swimming pool outlined in low rock walls formed by small stones and rocks he has laboriously collected along the shore. The family will help him extend it next summer. Michelle, Adrian's 10-year-old sister, prefers beachcombing for old bottles washed up on the rocks.

Not far from the house, around a bend in the path, we came to the pitiful 'convict's couch' that Charles Anderson, or Boney as he was known, had carved from himself from a concave rock. His horrific two year punishment was for being an unmanageable prisoner. He had an unbreakable spirit and a record of constantly escaping. Boney Anderson had been transported for being in a drunken fight and smashing windows early in the 1830s. His fellow convicts would risk a flogging of a hundred lashes to hand him extra food, and even tobacco. They were kept on the island for building and construction work. You can still see the hole that held the bolt of his 8 metre chain. There is a story that Sydney citizens, appalled at his plight, used to bring him food on the end of long poles, held up from boats anchored at the base of the low cliff.

Further along the path you come to yet other reminders of history. A graceful house, built in the Edwardian style in the early 1900s, stands on the island's summit. It looks out over sloping well kept lawns to some of the finest views of any home on the Harbour.

As we wandered through its rooms with red or white marble fireplaces, the sunset filled them with a melancholy light that softened the air of dilapidation. Vandals had burnt the staircase leading up to a romantic lookout room on the second floor. The house was originally built as the harbourmaster's residence. It was last lived in by the island's officer in charge of dredging, and vacated in the early 1970s. By the path, at the front lawn's edge a leg iron is bolted to a stone block engraved 1836.

In three month's time, Goat Island's shuttered existence of the past 147 years will end. Nobody was allowed on the island unless on official business or employed there. In 1833 Governor Bourke's edict had run: "A gang of convicts being about to be employed on Goat Island, no person who is not acting under the orders of the Government will be allowed to land there under any pretense whatsoever."

The last convicts worked on Goat Island about 1868. Yet strangely enough, nobody in power managed to vary that 1833 edict until the N.S.W. Deputy Premier, Mr Jack Ferguson, decided last year it was time for a change.

Soon the old officers' quarters will open as a museum for maritime relics of Sydney's history. School children's tours of the island began last year. Eventually Sydney citizens and tourists will be allowed to join the children in discovering an island that belongs to our history.
