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ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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24 Duff Street,
Arncliffe. 2205.
June 1981.

Dear Friend and Member,

The June meeting will be held as follows:

Date. Friday evening, June 19th, 1981, at 8.00 p.m.

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

Syllabus Item. Mr. Mike Pearson, from the National Parks & Wildlife Service
will entertain us with an illustrated talk titled:
"Some Goldfields in N.S.W., the Physical Evidence".

Business. General.

Supper Roster. Captain: Mrs. Kell, together with Mrs. Welch & Miss Row.

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,
Treasurer & Soc. Sec.
Phone 599.4884.

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

"The thing that goes the farthest toward making life worthwhile,
that costs the least, and does the most, is just a pleasant smile."
Wilbur D. Nesbit.

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.

20th Anniversary Dinner - Ainslee Lodge, Bexley, Saturday, 18th July, 1981.
Pay in full at June meeting.

Saturday 3rd, Sunday 4th, and Monday 5th October, 1981 - Weekend historical tour of Dubbo and Districts. \$92.00. Deposit \$10.00 at meeting.
Final payment - August meeting.

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.

Members please note.

Due to circumstances, it has been found necessary to increase the Annual Subscription as follows:-

<u>Per Member</u>	..	\$3.00)	<u>Due July 1981.</u>
<u>Per Family</u>	..	\$5.00)	

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LYDHAM HALL LOCAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
YEAR ENDED 28th FEBRUARY, 1981.

- Alderman R.W. Rathbone
Hon. Secretary
Lytham Hall Local Committee
11th March 1981.

It is now ten years since Council, as part of its Centenary Celebrations, purchased historic Lytham Hall as a local history museum and handed it over to a Local Committee consisting of representatives of the Council and the St. George Historical Society to restore and administer.

Perhaps in this year's Annual Report, it is timely to look back over those years to see whether the Council's initiative has been justified and what progress, if any, has been made.

Initially, the purchase and early restoration of the building were fraught with difficulties. The previous owners, Mr & Mrs G Long, had a great love of the building and were most reluctant to part with a house they had struggled for years to maintain. Only by granting them a life-tenancy was the Council able to purchase the property at all.

This was a most unhappy arrangement and resulted in serious personality clashes between the previous owners and members of the Local Committee. Another problem was the lack of accommodation as only the two front rooms and the hall could be made available for display and public viewing.

For two and a half years this frustrating situation existed and only the efforts of the late Arthur Ford, Miss Bet Otten from the Historical Society and myself, who placed ourselves on duty every weekend and endured untold provocations enabled the building to remain open and some basic restoration to proceed.

When I returned from a trip overseas in 1973, I discovered that Mr and Mrs Long had vacated the premises and negotiations were immediately entered into which, after protracted legal argument, resulted in the whole building becoming available in September 1974.

The next three years were a time of unprecedented activity. Firstly, the caretaker's quarters, which were in a very poor state, were renovated with Council's assistance and Miss Bet Otten who had been unanimously recommended by the Local Committee, moved in as the Curator.

The Historical Society then arranged for the renovation and redecoration of the bedroom. This was followed by the re-arrangement of the sitting room and the redecoration and papering of the dining room. Then followed restoration of the room adjoining the dining

room as a display room for the unique collection of Willow Pattern China which had been collected. This room was in an incredible state.

As the building had no authentic kitchen, one was created by demolition of the laundry and the toilet and by building an artificial fireplace.

Finally the upstairs gallery was renovated and many of the artefacts previously stored were able to be displayed.

For nearly three years Miss Otton and I worked every Saturday, Sunday and Public Holiday and many evenings until after midnight to restore the interior while Arthur Ford maintained the grounds. Because of the complicated nature of the work, progress was often frustratingly slow but bit by bit it was accomplished.

By early 1978 the whole building was open to the public and the number of visitors per annum had increased from an average of barely 1000 in 1972 to almost 3000. Without exception, they were ecstatic in their praise. In 1978 Lydham Hall was twice featured on T.V.

In 1977, Alderman Phil Lang, a Council representative on the Local Committee, suggested that Council apply for a grant to erect proper accommodation for the Curator. Council's application was successful and work began late in 1978. This enabled the show kitchen to be greatly enlarged and the unsympathetic fibro addition on the back verandah which had formerly housed the Curator's kitchen to be removed.

During 1979 the former storeroom was attractively renovated as a display area for the very extensive collection of clothing the Local Committee had accumulated and during 1980 the gallery was recarpeted and provided with built in show cases. At the same time the slates on the roof were replaced, the verandah rebuilt and the rear garden landscaped.

The renovation and restoration of Lydham Hall to its present high standard of development has been quite a remarkable achievement in the relatively short period of ten years, particularly when it is realised that it was achieved by a handful of people who gave an enormous amount of their time, dug very deeply into their own pockets when funds were not available and endured endless frustrations.

Lydham Hall stands today as an outstanding tribute to the foresight of the Aldermen of Rockdale Council who in 1970, agreed to purchase it; to Miss Otton for the immaculate way in which she maintains it and to that very loyal but again, very small band, of Historical Society members who give up their time to conduct visitors through the building.

Since its opening in February 1971, more than 20,000 people have inspected the building and it has proved one of the Council's most effective public relations outlets.

To complete this report I should mention also the work done by Alderman Reg Whiteoak and Mr Arthur Ellis in the early days of the restoration and Mr Lloyd Deller of the Council's staff in more recent times, but above all I should record the names of three Council Officers, Mr. (now Alderman) Charles Daly, Mr Kevin Casey and Mr John Franklin. Without their sympathetic assistance and their help in so many ways much of what has now been achieved would never have been possible.

At the same time, I should mention those hundreds of people too numerous to detail individually who have given or lent furnishings and artefacts of priceless value to make this home one of the most attractive restored Victorian residences in Sydney.

ALEXANDER BRODIE SPARK 1792 - 1856.

MERCHANT - BANKER - SHIPOWNER - PASTORALIST - GENTLEMAN

- Alderman E. W. Rathbone
April 1981.

Alexander Brodie Spark was born on 9th August, 1792 in Elgin, Morayshire, Scotland, the third child of George Spark, a watchmaker and goldsmith and his wife Mary Gordon. He was educated at the local academy where he showed signs of literary talent and after working for his father for some time, left Scotland at the age of 18 and travelled by sea to London.

There he was employed as a clerk in the counting house of Tod and Spencer and in his spare time, he and another Elgin youth, Isaac Ketchen, founded a weekly Literary Society "for reading, conversation and mutual improvement".

Spark did well in London and became a committeeman of the London Morayshire Club. Despite his serious and somewhat unbending disposition, he led a very full social life. He toured England widely, patronised literary functions, exhibitions of fine arts, art galleries and the like and was a frequent theatre and opera goer. He wrote poetry and prose but his literary style was so stilted that nothing of it now survives. He read extensively.

In 1816, he returned for a time to Scotland. Back in London, he gave lavish dinners, dressed pretentiously and gambled passionately. Letters from his father complained of his wasteful living and by April, 1817 he was heavily in debt. A month later he was dismissed by his employers. He was still unemployed in 1818 when his father died and left him a substantial legacy.

No doubt on the strength of his windfall, he undertook a Grand Tour of Europe which was later to have repercussions in Australia. During this tour he visited Italy and met the poet William Wordsworth. He also toured Greece and visited Mount Olympus and the Vale of Tempe.

In August, 1822 at the age of 30, Spark converted his remaining capital into saleable goods and applied to the Colonial Secretary, Earl Bathurst for passage to Australia under one of Governor Bourke's immigration schemes.

He arrived in Tasmania aboard the "Princess Charlotte" on 21st January, 1823 after a voyage lasting five months but was not

impressed with his prospects there and re-boarded the ship to disembark at Sydney on 17th February.

Ten days later he opened a store in hired premises in George Street, with a bewildering array of domestic articles for sale. Later in 1823 he tendered to supply the government stores with salted pork. These ventures prospered and by 1824 he had moved into larger premises and was receiving regular shipments of goods from England. He was also a partner in a ship sailing between Sydney and Hobart. Two years later he exported his first shipment of wool to London aboard the brig "Macquarie".

By 1826 Spark had acquired a substantial holding in the Bank of N.S.W. and was Secretary of the Sydney Chamber of Commerce. The same year he became a Director of the Bank of Australia rising by 1833 to be its Managing Director, Deputy Chairman and second largest shareholder.

In February 1827 he was elected Secretary of the Agricultural Society and in May was made a Magistrate and a Justice of the Peace. He was most active in the setting up of the Australian Subscription Library, was a member of its committee and donated liberally to its book stocks. He was one of the founders of the Hunter River Steam Packet Company which operated the famous "Sophia Jane" and "William IV".

He was, in short, a man of enterprise, wealth and influence and everything he touched seemed to turn to money.

As well as being a merchant, banker and shipowner, he was also a large landowner. At the time of the 1828 Census, A.B. Spark, Merchant of George Street was the owner of over 6,400 acres of land in various parts of the Colony. Six thousand acres of this was in the Hunter Valley where Spark employed a man named Benjamin Hall, father of the bushranger, Ben Hall, to oversee it.

Another 110 acres of this land was the area formerly known as Packer's Farm on the southern bank of Cook's River. This he had purchased in 1827.

Spark called the estate "Tempe" after the Vale of Tempe in Greece and the rocky prominence on the eastern boundary, he named Mount Olympus. He erected on the land a small sandstone cottage but left the administration of the estate to his overseers Patrick Crannon and Edward Owen and 13 convict assignees.

So much did Spark enjoy his sojourns at "Tempe" that he began to entertain there. The small cottage proved inadequate for his needs and in 1834 he commissioned the architect, John Verge, then working on a much grander house for him at Woolloomooloo (now Potts Point) to design for him an arcadian villa with strong resemblances to

a Greek Temple. This building was completed early in 1836 and Spark decided to make it his permanent home leasing the Woolloomooloo house "Tusculum" to the Anglican Bishop of Australia, Bishop Broughton. In his first year of residence at "Tempe", Spark entertained over 500 visitors.

The traveller, R.G. Jameson, who visited the house in 1839 described it thus -

"In front of the mansion, a lawn, tastefully and ornately laid out sloped gently down to the edge of the river, across which the visitors were ferried in boats. The mansion itself, a large cottage ornée, with an exterior verandah and colonnades and snow white walls, constituted the chief ornament of a very pleasing landscape and presented a lively contrast with the variegated and umbrageous foliage of the garden ... the apartments were richly and elegantly furnished. There was a library and an aviary and the walls were hung with Flemish and Italian paintings".

Many and varied were the guests which Spark received at "Tempe" including on 6th July, 1839, Lady Franklin, wife of the Governor of Tasmania.

In April 1840, Spark, now 48 and often referred to as 'the Old Bachelor' announced his intention of marrying 30 year old Mrs Frances Maria Radford née Biddulph, widow of Surgeon Henry Wyatt Radford. It is reported that his letter of proposal reads more like a business proposition but the widowed lady accepted his overtures the same afternoon and sealed the arrangement by dropping her former husband's wedding ring from the Cook's River Dam into the river.

They were married later that month in St. Peter's Church of England, Cook's River, the erection of which had been largely due to Spark's generosity in 1836. There were six children of the marriage, Alexander, Frances Maria Ann, Mary Gordon, Edith Burnett, Stanley Herbert and Florence Sophia.

Together with the three surviving children of Mrs Spark's first marriage (2 had died of cholera, 2 were drowned at sea and 1 had been burnt to death), they all lived together at "Tempe".

The idyll of the rich merchant family man was to last only a short while. In the late 1830's and early 1840's a property boom had occurred in N.S.W. and Spark had extended his credit to take advantage of it. This bubble burst and together with declining prices for wool and live-stock and prolonged drought conditions, he found himself unable to meet his commitments.

Last in 1841 rumours began to circulate that Spark was in financial difficulties and eighteen months later the Bank of Australia, in

which he was still a large shareholder, crashed. In 1843, on his own petition, he was declared bankrupt although he continued in the shipping business having an interest at this time in no less than 18 ships. He also retained for a time his position as Treasurer of the Australian Gas Light Company.

Throughout 1844 and 1845 he was involved in one court case after another as his creditors tried to recover their debts and he began to suffer chronic ill-health. He never recovered his place in Sydney's business community but remained a prominent Anglican layman and a Patron of the Arts.

In 1852 he received a small legacy of pounds 700.0.0 from the estate of his brother Colonel Robert Spark, but the following year, one of his creditors, the Australian Trust Company, insisted on offering "Tempe" for sale. Although valued at pounds 8,000.0.0. the best offer they could get was pounds 7,000.0.0. and so the sale fell through enabling Spark to remain on as a tenant in the house he loved so much and surrounded by the family to which he was devoted.

But time was running out for the former merchant, banker, broker, company director, pastoralist and shipping magnate and on 21st October, 1856, at "Tempe", Alexander Brodie Spark passed peacefully to his rest. He was 64.

The once prominent member of Sydney's commercial establishment received no obituary notices and lies buried in the overgrown, and neglected graveyard of St. Peter's Church, Cook's River.

- submitted by Miss G H Culbert
of Mortdale.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO ... STORY OF CALDER HOUSE, WHEN REDFERN WAS BUSY.

Calder House at Everleigh is one of the oldest landmarks in Sydney. It dates back just on a hundred years and occupies the high ground overlooking the railway sheds at Everleigh. Passengers can see it as they pass in the trains going in and out of Sydney. Like other old landmarks which have withstood the obliterating finger of time, Calder House, is doomed to go down before the advancing foot of progress and before very long the site it occupies will be required by the Railway Commissioners for extensions of the railway yard at Everleigh.

The old house was built by Mr James Chisolm who came to N.S.W. in 1792 as a non commissioned officer in the N.S.W. Corp, afterwards the 101st Regiment. For some years Mr Chisholm lived in George Street in a house near where Palings is now, next door to which lived Capt. McArthur another name which has become interwoven like a thread of gold in the early history of the State. Mr Chisolm's house in George Street was afterwards let by him to the Bank of N.S.W. for the establishment of its first premises at a yearly rental of pounds 200.0.0. (\$400.00).

It was about the year 1822 that Mr Chisolm set to work to make a home for his young family outside the town proper. He secured a large grant of land in the thick bush, which has since become Redfern and Everleigh and there erected Calder House, a two-storey building. He lived there until his death in 1836. His widow and family remained in the old home for some years when they moved and the house became a school, kept by a Mr. Castle. Mr Castle was succeeded in his scholastic enterprise by Dr Sly, who had for pupils several boys who afterwards came into prominence in the life of Sydney. In the 1880's the house together with 20 or 30 acres of land was acquired by Sir Henry Parkes for railway purposes and the Everleigh yards and shops were built upon the site.

Several members of the well-known Chisolm family were born in the old house and the last of them, Dr Chisolm died at Ashfield at the beginning of 1921. He often related how when a boy he used to be driven from Calder House through the bush to Balmain to school. It was the practice of the family to attend Church at St. Peters (Tempe) to which place they had to walk through bush as thick as that at French's Forest.

The old house has lasted well and has quite a picturesque appearance. In the days when it was occupied by the Chisolms it was provided with

rooms having barred windows like prison cells. In those rooms the assigned servants (convicts) were confined every night after their day's work about the house was done. It is interesting to note that these rooms with their barred windows still exist.

A large number of descendants of the Chisolms are scattered about Australia. Mr J.W.F. Stephens, the Sydney Solicitor is one of them and chiefly through his instrumentality the members of the family decided to preserve the old relic of the past in the shape of a fine etching of Calder House. The Commission was instructed to Syd. Long whose etchings are so popular with collectors and he has just completed a picturesque view of the building. A copy of the etching has been placed in the Mitchell Library. (1922)

March 1979 -

Calder House would have fronted what is now known as Wilson Street, Redfern, in the area used by the Railway Department as storage space for the timber holding racks on elevated ground above the rail tracks en route to Macdonaldtown.
