



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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24 Duff Street,
ARNCLIFFE 2205

November 1984

Dear Friend and Member,

The November Meeting will be held as follows:

- Date: Friday Evening, November 16, 1984
- Place: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale
- Business: General
- Syllabus Item: Centenary of the New South Wales Fire Brigade. (Awaiting confirmation)
- Supper Roster: Mrs Longhurst, Captain, together with Mesdames Samuelson & McLeod

Ladies Please Bring a Plate

Mr. L. Abigail,
President
Phone: 599 2363

Mrs B. Perkins,
Publicity Officer
Phone: 587 9164

Mrs E. Eardley,
Sec. & Bulletin Editor
Phone: 59 8078

Mrs E. Wright,
Treasurer
Phone: 599 4884

Miss D. Row,
Social Secretary
Phone: 50 9300

Mr. A. Ellis,
Research Officer
Phone: 587 1159

Friendship is the shadow of the evening, which strengthens with the setting
of the sun.

La Fontaine

My friend is one whom I can associate with my choicest thoughts.

Thoreau

A cheerio to our Friends who are not so well, and our best wishes for a speedy recovery

SPECIAL NOTICE.

The St. George Historical Society is pleased to announce that the following books, Nos. 1 - 7, written and illustrated by the late Gifford H. Eardley for the Society, have been reprinted and are now available. Books Nos. 8 and 9 have been compiled by Mrs. Bronwyn Perkins.

No. 1.	"The Wolli Creek Valley" (Reprint now available)	}	Books Nos.
No. 2.	"Kogarah to Sans Souci Tramway"		1 - 8
No. 3.	"Saywells Tramway - Rockdale to Lady Robinson's Beach"		\$2.50 each.
No. 4.	"Arncliffe to Bexley Tramway"		<u>Plus Postage</u>
No. 5.	"Our Heritage in Stone"	}	
No. 6.	"All Stations to Como"		
No. 7.	"Tempe and the Black Creek Valley"		
No. 8.	"Early Churches of the St. George District"		
No. 9.	"Early Settlers of the St. George District"		No. 9
	Price \$4.00 <u>plus postage.</u>		\$4.00.

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

Mrs. E. Wright - Phone 599 4884, Miss B. Otton - Phone 59 4259 (after 8 p.m.)
Mrs. E. Eardley - Sec., Phone 59 8078, Mr. A. Ellis - Phone 587 1159.

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SOCIAL.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 1984.

A Coach Trip to Kangaroo Valley and the Fitzroy Falls has been arranged by our Social Secretary, and your support will be appreciated.

DATE: Saturday, November 24, 1984.

TIME: 8.30 a.m. SHARP

PLACE: Usual Meeting Place (Western side of Rockdale Station).

COST: \$7.00 per person.

(WAITING LIST ONLY)

FURTHER DETAILS FROM DOROTHY, PHONE 50 9300.

2NBC-FM STEREO 90.1 - St. George Historical Society
Tuesday Evenings 6.30 p.m. - 6.45 p.m.

Tape 78	-	30th October, 1984	-	S.M.H. Historical Items Gallery by the Sea Just Part of Calcutta.	-	S. Richter
Tape 79	-	6th November, 1984	-	The Governor Bows Out Sir Samuel McCaughey	-	K. Rowsthorne
Tape 80	-	13th November, 1984	-	Changes Galore in a Century of Fire Fighting-Colonial Cabinet.	-	S. Richter
Tape 81	-	20th November, 1984	-	A Gem of Architecture Clearing the Forest and Henry Kendall	-	K. Rowsthorne
Tape 82	-	27th November, 1984	-	Of Interest - Carlton Railway Station, Saywell's Tramway, Early Surveys and Tenders, Sydney Square	-	S. Richter
Tape 83	-	4th December, 1984	-	Extract from Propellor - October, 1934 - When Kogarah Was Bush & Old Man Mile Posts	-	A. Ellis
Tape 84	-	11th December, 1984	-	History of the Peares in Australia	-	D. Sinclair
Tape 86	-	18th December, 1984	-	Old Kogarah Township	-	A. Ellis
Tape 87	-	25th December, 1984	-	Flynn of the Inland (continued)	-	K. Rowsthorne
Tape 88	-	1st January, 1985	-	I Remember Old Arncliffe	-	A. Ellis
Tape 89	-	8th January, 1985	-	Robert Sargent and His Wife, Agnes Maria Peare	-	D. Sinclair
Tape 90	-	15th January, 1985	-	The St. George English Rifle Regiment.	-	T. Allison
Tape 91	-	22nd January, 1985	-	Miles Franklin - Authoress	-	S. Cran

THE PARRAMATTA RIVER SERVICE.

- Vaughan Evans
Presented to the St. George
Historical Society
Friday 15th June 1984.

Some years ago, Geoffrey Blainey, had a book published - "The Tyranny of Distance" - which many considered to be a high water mark in the tide of books on the subject of Australian history. In planning this paper on the Parramatta River Trade, in the early days of the Colony, this title has come to mind for, to the first settlers, the distance even from Sydney to Parramatta, or Rose Hill as it was then called, could be seen as a tyranny indeed, to men without proper means of transport.

From the "Historical Records" we can see just how little was provided in the way of transport and beasts of burden. The "Return of Livestock", dated May 1st, 1788, shows that they had no one draught animal. One searches in vain for mention of vehicles, and although the list of equipment originally proposed for the settlement includes 40 wheelbarrows, at 10/- per piece - I do not know how many actually came for the use of the First Fleeters. Evidently, it was expected that the settlement would make its own, from local materials, using convict labour.

But what of boats? Surely Governor Phillip was supplied with something in the way of small craft for the use of the settlement, apart from the ship's boats of the SIRIUS and the SUPPLY? Here we find, that a gesture was made, if no more, for there were indeed the materials for 2 boats, sent out 'in frame', as it was termed, to be put together as soon as one of the ship's carpenters could be spared to do the work.

However, it was not until September 1788, seven months after the first landing, that the carpenter of the SUPPLY was able to complete the first, an 8 oared boat, the second - a 16 oared cutter - following soon after. For those first few months most of the ship's carpenters were too busy building huts on shore, when they could be spared from their ships, to be engaged on any other work at all. The tents brought out were really not quite good enough once winter had set in.

It is, in fact, in relation to the building of huts that we find the first reference to the use of boats for the settlement, apart from excursions to explore the many arms of Sydney Harbour. David Collins tells us in his "Account of the English Colony of New South Wales", that in March 1788-

...the long-boats of the ships in the cove were employed in bringing up cabbage-tree from the lower parts of the harbour, where it grew in great abundance, and ...was found very fit for the purpose of erecting temporary huts...

You will notice that they used "long-boats of the ships in the cove", and the reason was, indeed, that they had none of their own except, perhaps, for a few small pleasure craft brought out privately by the officers for their own use.

In those first few months of settlement, therefore, activity on the waters of Sydney Harbour and the Parramatta River, apart from the comings and goings of the ships of the First Fleet, were restricted to exploration by ships boats, and the use of these same boats to collect building materials.

During this early period, the desperate need for better land for the cultivation of crops led to the choice of Rose Hill, at the head of the harbour, where the soil appeared much more promising than around the Cove. However, access by land was tedious, to say the least, for a settlement which owned no draught animals. Even with a wheelbarrow, it is a long 15 miles from Sydney to Rose Hill on a good road, and in 1788 there was, as yet, not even a proper path. To support a permanent settlement so far from the landing place, something more was necessary than either the use of ship's boats, when they could be spared, or a wheelbarrow or two along a rough bush track, that had to make long detours to cross the creeks that intervened.

In September 1788, Governor Phillip had written a despatch to Nepean on this very subject, in which he noted:

... A strong launch to remove provisions will soon be necessary, as some convicts are going to cultivate land near the head of the harbour...

They proposed to move the first of the convicts to Rose Hill in November, and certainly could not expect any help from England for at least 2 years after that in supplying the required launch. In December 1788, it was decided, therefore, to construct locally a launch or hoy, capable of being employed in carrying provisions to Rose Hill, and for other useful purposes. In that month, we read in Collins' account -

... Mr Reid, the carpenter of the SUPPLY, now undertook the construction of a boat-house on the east side, for the purpose of building, with the timber of this country, such a vessel...

Work on the vessel itself actually commenced in May 1789. She was designed to carry 10 tons, which indicates that she was probably no longer than about 30', or about the length of one of the ship's long-boats.

The work was carried out entirely under the direction of Mr Reid, except during the month of July when he went off to Norfolk Island in the SUPPLY, in which time Mr Charles Parker, the carpenter of the SIRIUS, took charge. The vessel was completed in 5 months, and was put into the

water early in October 1789. What do we know of this historic vessel? Collins tells us -

... from the quantity of wood used in her construction she appeared to be a mere bed of timber, and, when launched, was named by the convicts, with a happiness that is sometimes visible in the lower order of people, the ROSE HILL PACKET. (She was generally known by afterwards, by the name of the LUMP, a word more strictly applied to her size and construction). She was very soon employed in transporting provisions to Rose Hill, and going up with the tide at flood, at the top of high water, passed very well over the flats at the upper part of the harbour ...

What Collins does not tell us is that she sometimes took a week for the round trip and that, according to James Scott, Sergeant of Marines, this much maligned vessel originally rejoiced in the name PRINCE OF WALES, for so she was christened at her launch, he wrote in his diary. Nobody ever bothered to address this poor lump as the PRINCE OF WALES, ever after, as far as I can discover; certainly not in the official records.

It is not possible to give an exact description of this, the first vessel of any size to be built from scratch in the colony, the first to be built entirely of local timber. No positively identifiable picture of her exists - she was far too lowly to have her portrait painted, although you can spot the boat-shed where she was built in several contemporary pictures of Sydney Cove.

You will have noted, that Collins described the heavy construction of the ROSE HILL PACKET, and stated further that she was 'generally known by the name of the LUMP, a word more strictly applied to her size and construction'. These references are significant, for, if we turn to a nautical dictionary of the period, we find that the word 'lump' is defined as follows -

... Lump - a stout, heavy lighter used ... in dockyards for carrying anchors, or heavy stores to or from vessels ...

The ROSE HILL PACKET was, in fact, correctly defined as a 'lump' and, indeed, as 'the lump', since she was the one and only 'lump' possessed by the colony at that time. 'Lumps' were ungainly craft, flat-bottomed and wall-sided, propelled by large oars or sweeps. They sometimes had a single mast stepped forward to carry a small sail, probably a sprit-sail like a Thames sprit-sail barge, to assist when the wind served. The main means of propulsion for the ROSE HILL PACKET undoubtedly was the tide itself. One cannot, I fear, be much more precise than that.

She gave good service for many years, plodding her humble way between Sydney and Parramatta with provisions up, and

timber and other produce, down. She passed out of the official record between 1801, when she was listed as 'very old', and 1803, when she no longer appears at all among His Majesty's colonial vessels. By that time she must have been quite worn out through heavy and constant use. A life of over 12 years was a good span for a craft of this kind, on that heavy service.

Governor Phillip had great trouble in completing even this simple little vessel, because of the demands made upon skilled labour, and the shortage of suitable materials. The carpenters of the SIRIUS and the SUPPLY, were assisted when possible by convicts capable of acting under their direction, and who, also, could be spared; fitness and skill were at a premium.

Even before the ROSE HILL PACKET was built, when Governor Phillip had written to England of the need for a strong launch, he had added that -

... the settlement at Norfolk Island, and the extent of the harbour ... would render 2 vessels of 30 or 40 tons of infinite service ...

Perhaps hopes had been raised too high, for in his despatch of May 15, 1788, he stated -

... they had the satisfaction of finding the finest harbour in the world, in which a thousand sail of the line may ride in the most perfect security ...

Undoubtedly, the harbour could have accommodated a 1,000 sail of the line, but only up to a certain point, for, not 2/3rds of the way up to Rose Hill, the bottom shelves rapidly from 3 fathoms or more, to just over 1. If only good land could have been found nearer to the cove, vessels such as those of the First Fleet could have been taken up to suitable landing places without the need to tranship their cargoes.

As it was, ocean-going ships such as those of the First Fleet, would have been baulked by this sudden shelving of the channel at what has been known from early times as Kissing Point - that lovely, romantic name - refers in fact to the 'kissing' - the correct nautical parlance of those days, for a place where the ship's bottom would first lightly touch, or kiss, the ground in any channel. It is just about this point, that a vessel would 'kiss' the ground.

Because of this Kissing Point, if Rose Hill was to be the centre of government, with Sydney Cove merely as the port of discharge and transhipment, there would soon have been the need for a fleet of lumps, lighters, barges or punts - name them as you will - not just the one ROSE HILL PACKET. Neither Governor Phillip nor his successors for many, many years would have the facilities to build such a fleet.

In the meantime, to serve his proposed settlement at Rose Hill, and for other necessary purposes, he borrowed 2 of the boats of the SIRIUS, which she could ill spare, while she went off to Table Bay for provisions. These boats were all he had to serve Parramatta during its first year of settlement there.

The voyage of the SIRIUS, from October 1788 until May 1789, was desperately important to the settlement, for the threat of starvation at that time was very real. It is not surprising that attempts were made to augment the rations with fish caught in the harbour. By April 1790, food was even more scarce, and all private boats were ordered - 'to be surrendered to the public use in fishing for the general benefit'. Incidentally, the largest 'fish' seen in the harbour, was a sperm whale which had the audacity to pursue and overset, not just a punt, but a punt owned by one of the officers.

By April 1791, an order was made limiting -

... the length of such boats as should be built by individuals to 14' from stem to stern, that the size of such boats might deter the convicts from attempts to take them off...

Phillip was concerned that some of the convicts might try to emulate the convict Bryant who had succeeded in escaping in a small fishing boat to Timor. Many convicts held the belief that China lay just over the horizon.

It was in February 1792, 4 years after the First Fleet had arrived, that Governor Phillip at long last received help from England, in the shape of a sloop of 41 tons burthen, sent out 'in frame' by the transport PITT, to be erected here, and to be used for communication with the other settlements. The problem was now, how to get this little vessel put together. It was not just a matter of fitting together the pieces of a 3 dimensional jigsaw puzzle: it was a task that only a trained shipwright could perform, for much of the final fitting and shaping had yet to be done. Mr Reid, who had built the LUMP, was the only shipwright in the colony.

Collins tell us ... Mr Reid, offered his services to put together the vessel that arrived 'in frame' in the PITT: and being deemed sufficiently qualified as a shipwright, he was engaged at 2/- per diem and his provisions to set her up. Her keel was accordingly laid down on blocks placed for that purpose near the landing-place on the east side ...

This building site was, more or less, where the Customs House stands to-day at Circular Quay. There, for the princely sum of 2/- a day, and his provisions, the ex-carpenter's made of the SIRIUS worked with convict assistance for the next 16 months.

Governor Phillip did not stay long enough to see the work completed. He returned to England in December 1792, leaving Lieutenant Governor Grose in command. Seven months later, the vessel was ready to launch, but to avoid the labour of setting up a slipway and constructing a launching cradle in the usual manner, it was decided to lay the hull down on her bilge, and drag her into the water on rollers.

The little vessel was safely let down on to rollers and, with the assistance of the store ship BRITANNIA was hove down to low water mark, to be floated off with the rising tide that same evening in July 1793. This became a common method of getting vessels into the water in the Cove for many years. The hull was hauled alongside the BRITANNIA for fitting out.

Collins wrote - ... The ceremony of christening her was performed at sunrise next morning, when she was named THE FRANCIS in compliment to the Lt. Governor's son, whose birthday (4 yrs.) this was....the general opinion being that she would be much safer if rigged as a schooner (with 2 masts) than as a sloop (with only 1), for which she had been originally intended - the carpenters were directed to fit her accordingly ...

When fitted out, the FRANCIS was sent off under the command of William House, formerly the boatswain of Captain Vancouver's ship DISCOVERY, and with Robert Watson, formerly of the SIRIUS, as mate. This maiden voyage was to Dusky Bay, in the south island of New Zealand, in the company of Captain Raven in the BRITANNIA, to see if the area was suitable for settlement. I have brought the FRANCIS into this account, to illustrate the difficulty the colony had in getting any vessel into commission. The FRANCIS saw service mainly between Sydney and Norfolk Island and to the Hunter River. Only seldom did she go up to Parramatta, because she was of far more value as a vessel capable of coastal and ocean passages.

While the FRANCIS and BRITANNIA were away, the shipwrights in the colony had put together the frame of a long-boat bought from Captain Raven. This was another small vessel shipped out 'in frame', but in this case it had almost certainly been brought out by the BRITANNIA for her own use, should her long-boat be wrecked. Many ships carried boats 'in frame' to be assembled if the need arose. It seems likely, that this long-boat was decked over, rigged with 2 masts as a schooner, and is the vessel named SYDNEY, that is recorded briefly in the Historical Records as being in service in 1797, with a master and 5 men to carry provisions to the Hawkesbury, and to bring grain, cedar and other produce, back.

While working on the long-boat, the shipwrights also repaired the ROSE HILL PACKET, which, after only 4 years service, had been put out of commission by the depredations of the teredo ship-worm, infesting the harbour.

Collins tell us - ... the boatbuilders and shipwrights found occupation enough for their leisure hours, in building boats for those who could afford to pay for them. 5 or 6 gallons of spirits was the price, and 5 or 6 days would complete a boat fit to go up the harbour; but many of them were very badly put together, and threatened destruction to whoever might unfortunately be caught in them with a sail up in blowing weather...

With all that liquor inside them it is a wonder that the boatbuilders finished anything that would float at all. They must have been nearly awash themselves. They must have been small boats, of simple construction, and made of whatever materials could be scrounged in a colony where everything was in short supply.

However, not all of them can have been bad, and not all of them can have been small, for we find that Collins reported in December 1793 that:

... among the conveniences that were now enjoyed in the colony was the introduction of passage-boats, which were allowed to go between Sydney and Parramatta. They were the property of persons who had served their respective terms of transportation; and from each passenger 1/- was required for his passage; baggage was paid for at the rate of 1/- per 100 cwt; and the entire boat could be hired by one person for 6/- ...

Collins stated that the proprietors found these rates very profitable. This is not really very surprising when it is realised that Parramatta, first settled in November 1788, had outstripped Sydney by the year 1792, with a population of nearly 2,000 against Sydney's 1,000 or so, and although the relative size of Parramatta declined from then on, the absolute number of settlers there steadily increased from year to year. A good trade for the passage-boat proprietors indeed. Soon they were able to employ others to do the hard part - the actual rowing of a heavily-laden boat all those tortuous miles between the 2 settlements.

These early passage boats carried the boatman and 6 passengers - if we are to rely on the arithmetic of the official scale of charges - 1/- a head, or 6/- for the use of the entire boat. To carry such a load, the passage-boats must have been built up to the limit of 14' in overall length. In any case, any experienced water-man will tell you, a rowing boat needs to be at least 14' long to move through the water efficiently, keeping way on between oar-strokes.

For the next 10 years all we know is the passage-boats were there and provided a popular means of travelling between Sydney and Parramatta - provided you had the 1/- for your fare.

However, with the publication of the 'Sydney Gazette' in

1803, came a veritable flood of information on the passage-boats.

In May 1803, there is a reference to the passage-boat belonging to Mrs Ann Marsh, having illegally landed goods elsewhere than at the Public Wharves - a serious misdemeanour in those days.

In June. there is an indignant letter from someone who signed himself - 'An Inhabitant of Parramatta'. His general complaint was that the boats were very badly managed, their boatmen not caring how much time they took on the trip. He wrote -

... This passage, which should at all times be made in 4 or 5 hours, is frequently lengthened to 10 or 12; and 2 Sundays ago I happened unfortunately to make one in a party that left the wharf at Sydney at 4 in the afternoon, but did not reach the place of destination until daylight the next morning ... thus completing our passage, or rather our voyage - to Parramatta, in little less than 14 hours ... The torture I endured from the coldness of the midnight air I cannot possibly describe; at Parramatta the inhabitants were in bed, a circumstance truly distressing to strangers, who are frequently unable to obtain shelter during the remainder of the night or morning. This evil might be prevented, were the boatmen to exert themselves in the duties of their occupation... To the owners themselves, too, much censure necessarily devolves, from their total indifference whether the boats leave Sydney at 2 or 4 o'clock ...

It may have been mere coincidence that, less than 2 weeks after this letter was published, a Government Order was issued to tighten up the terms of licencing.

This detailed historical record of The Parramatta River Trade, will be continued in another Bulletin, in order to do justice to the many, many hours of historical research put in to the writing of such an article. This Society is indebted to Mr Vaughan Evans, as indeed to many guest speakers for such work.
