



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

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6/9 Austral Street,
KOGARAH 2217

April, 1989

Dear Friend and Member,

The April Meeting will be held as follows:

Date Friday, 21st April, 1989 at 8 p.m.

Place Council Chamber, Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale

Business General

Syllabus Item

Alderman Ron Rathbone will be Guest Speaker, he will tell us about 'Miles Franklin'. A very interesting and most fitting subject for Heritage Week. You will enjoy listening to Ron.

Supper Roster

CAN YOU PLEASE HELP?

LADIES PLEASE BRING A PLATE

Mr. A. Ellis,
President and Research
Officer
587 1159

Mrs J. Price,
Minute Secretary
587 7407

Mrs B. Perkins,
Secretary
587 9164

Mrs E. Wright,
Treasurer
599 4884

Mrs E. Eardley,
Bulletin Editor
59 8078

No one knows the weight of a conscience except the owner.

C.C.

Time Leaps On

Every Summer goes more swiftly than the one before. Time moves faster, weeks go quicker. Though you may ignore the dates upon the calendar pretending it's not so, the summer fades too soon into the Autumn glow. In childhood's bright and timeless seasons summer lingers long, the blackbirds and the thrushes sing a never ending song, and there are always roses. But alas as old we grow the pace of life is quickened. Time leaps on. The hours once slow seem to fly away from us on wings that go too fast, and every summer passing by is shorter than the last.

Patience Strong

ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

For inclusion in the April 1989 Bulletin.

INTRODUCTION:

Members will be pleased to know that the attendance at the February '89 meeting, totalled 32. A lively and stimulating discussion was held, and many suggestions recorded.

Thank you to those members who phoned or wrote with suggestions concerning the future of the Society.

It was decided at that meeting to ask members if they would like to express their views on the reasons why the attendance at our meetings has diminished.

You are invited to express your views on the subject and we have compiled the following set of questions. You may add your name or not, as you wish.

Replies, as soon as possible, to be sent to the Correspondence Secretary.

The February meeting also decided to hold meetings normally until the Annual General Meeting in July.

The Management Committee is keeping the whole matter under review and takes a confident view of the future.

Bronwyn Perkins
Correspondence Secretary
6/9 Austral Street
Kogarah 2217 NSW.

QUESTIONNAIRE:

1. If the reason why you do not attend the meetings is that you do not have transport, would you come if this could be made available?
2. Do you find the meetings uninteresting? If so, can you offer a way to remedy this? Maybe you could state what type of activities you would like within the Society.

3. Would you join excursions to places of historic interest?
If so, would you prefer that these be on a -

Saturday Sunday or Week Day?

4. Would you like the Society to take a more active role in the preservation of local historical buildings or sites?
If so, please indicate how.

5. Would you be prepared to join a study group for historical research? If so, please indicate preferences.

6. Do you feel that a change in Executive style is desirable?
If so, what are your views? This could mean the direction the Society is taking or society personnel?

Do not hesitate to submit your views on any other aspect of the Society. The Management Committee is well aware that some members prefer to be "non-attending", but are interested in the historical material printed in the monthly Bulletins. Age, insecurity of venturing out at night also play their part in non-attendance of some members. Your views, nevertheless, would be appreciated.

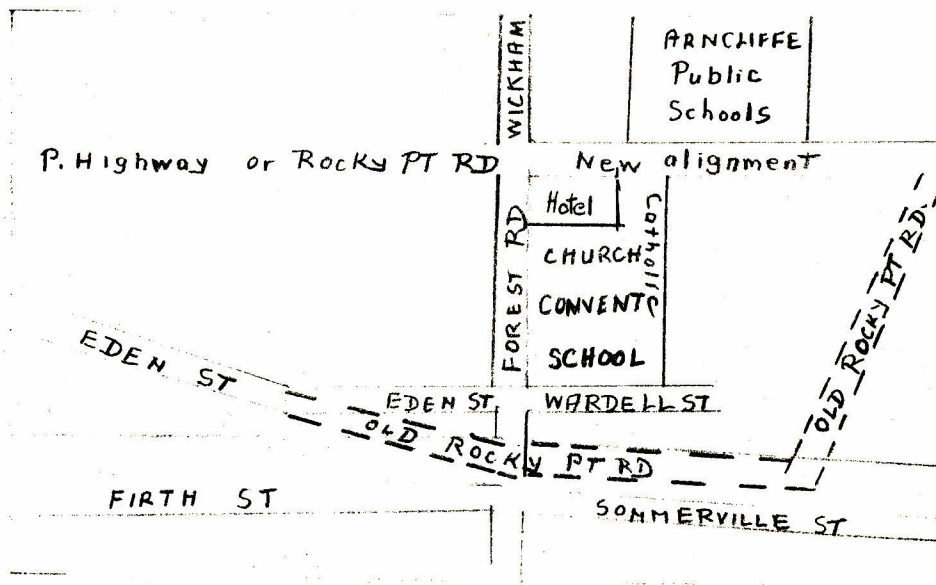
Bronwyn Perkins
Correspondence Secretary
6/9 Austral Street
Kogarah 2217 NSW

ARNCLIFFE'S "COBBLER'S PINCH" ...

-Arncliffe Progress
 Association News
 Vol.10.No.3
 September 1965

Supplied by Mrs E Eardley - 1987.

The contemporary motorist who traverses the Endeavour Bridge over Cook's River and proceeds along Princes Highway to Banksia would not be aware of any undue inconvenience except perhaps for a slightly stronger pressure on the accelerator in the intermediate stage of the trip.



Yet as late as a little over a century ago, to the drivers of the horse-drawn vehicles of the period, making the same journey from the dam-causeway at Cook's River to the area now known as Banksia, and beyond, it was an ordeal and often resulted in a capsized wagon.

Closely connected with the drama of this early journey was the original Rocky Point Road which once traversed the northern slopes of Arncliffe Hill in a south-westerly direction following the alignment of Eden Street for a great part of its length to gain a saddle in the ridge adjacent to the later intersection of Forest Road and Somerville Street.

This indirect route was taken to avoid a large awesome rocky outcrop known as "Cobbler's Pinch", which once dominated the crest of Arncliffe Hill in the vicinity of where St. Francis Xavier's Catholic Church, Convent and School, and also Wardell Street, the Arncliffe Hotel and the Arncliffe Public Schools now stand.

The place name was coined because the contour of this rock formation reminded early pioneers of a certain tool of the Cobbler's trade - a Cobbler's Pinch.

But what answer did the early waggoners have to the problem of negotiating what became known later as the historic "Pinch"? The endeavours they made and their practical results will be gleaned from the ensuing story.

We know that the first track (about 1840) south of the dam-causeway came to be known in later years as the road to Rocky-Point (now Sans Souci).

Tradition has it that this track was made by convicts. Certain it is that its earliest and most prolific user was a Mr. Robert Cooper, who has been handed down in history as a bootlegger, and transported his illegal wares on horseback, covered by bushes and rushes, from his isolated homestead at Rocky Point, to a Sydney market, via Arncliffe Hill.

This early road mostly followed the alignment of Princes Highway from Cook's River to a point near Allen Street and then, as before mentioned, continue along Eden Street.

Now-a-days at the bend in Eden Street, we may look diagonally across the railway cutting towards Somerville St. and visualize where the original road traversed Arncliffe Hill in the days of yore.

Continuing southwards from the saddle, the old road curved south-eastwards and followed, in a steep and treacherous descent, the lay of the land, to rejoin the present Princes Highway near the intersection of Hattersley Street. The border of the old alignment's whereabouts can still be discerned in the position of the back fences of neighbouring residences.

The terrors associated with this hazardous section of the road, particularly by those who negotiated it with fractious horse-teams, were such that it became notorious as "Cobbler's Pinch" (being emotionally identified with the awesome rocky outcrop bearing this name near its crest).

During the first 20 odd years of its existence, the old Rocky Point Road was the main thoroughfare for the pioneers who travelled from and through Arncliffe towards Rockdale and beyond, and about 1862, it formed a junction with the then new development of the ridge extension of Forest Road.

The glory of the old road was short-lived, as in the mid-1860's, when the main road to Wollongong was being routed via Tom Ugly's Point, it was decided to eliminate "Cobbler's Pinch" at Arncliffe and construct a new deviation which marks the alignment of the present Princes Highway.

This work necessitated the excavation of a deep cutting near the Public School and the building of a graded embankment, at the lower level, to maintain a much easier approach.

When this work was completed, the large rocky outcrop dominating Arncliffe Hill demolished, and Forest Road extended eastward to the new alignment, the infamous "Cobbler's Pinch" was abandoned, unhonoured and unsung.

The old road formation remained for a further two decades, until, with the construction of the cuttings at the approaches to the Illawarra railway tunnel under Forest Road in 1884, two large pieces of it were sliced away on Arncliffe Hill, the crest of Eden Street was straightened up with the railway cutting

and Firth Street was constructed opposite.

And so the original Rocky Point Road at Arncliffe passed into history, but the extant portions of the old highway will serve to remind us of the hardships endured not so long ago by the waggoners in traversing a once important road of Arncliffe and this hardship became synonymous with the terrors of "Cobbler's Pinch".

Arncliffe, like most shopping centres has undergone many changes. Listed are some of the adverts from Arncliffe Progress Association News, in the mid 1960's.

How many still trade there? How many do you recall?

.E.R. & S Co.Pty.Ltd. LX6434 - LX8950.
Engine Reconditioning & Service
210 Princes Highway Arncliffe NSW.

.STREETS - Proud to be a member of your Community.
Streets Ice Cream Pty..td.
Loftus Street Turrella 59-0471

.HARGREAVES OF ARNCLIFFE (Next to Commonwealth Bank)
Belmore Street
Ring LX 4563 - WE DELIVER FREE
Men's & Boy's wear - Ladies' & children's wear
Blankets, rugs, manchester, knitting wools
School uniforms for all Arncliffe Schools
Men's shoes, Ladies' slippers and casuals
School shoes etc.

.CORNWELLS BUTCHERIES
Firth St & Wollongong Rd.
Arncliffe. Only the primest pf yearly beef stocked.

.I.X.L. - Wheelbarrows & Carts
by
Federal Machinery Co.Ltd. Arncliffe
are built stronger to last longer.

.MORRISON'S HARDWARE - FOR SERVICE
All the best brands of paint stocked.
Luxaflex Venetian Blinds - Aluminium Awnings -
Holland Blinds.
Keys Cut - Saws and Tools Sharpened.
Burnie Board - Timber Paks - Kitchenware
Lay-Bys - Delivery
RIGHT AT ARNCLIFFE STATION. 59-1553.

ARNCLIFFE'S "Highbury Barn"...

Supplied by Mrs E Eardley
in 1987.

-Arncliffe Progress
Association News.
Vol.8. No.1
March 1965

Of interest to the St. George Historical Society is the name of the Editor: V.M.Saunders.

It could truly be said that the taverns in the pioneer days of the St. George District were intimately connected with the history of the early settlements which gave them birth.

No less was this so than in the settlement (known in later years as Arncliffe), which actually was the location of the first tavern in the district. It bore the name "Highbury Barn".

This "Ale House" was erected for a Mr Chas. Kelsey on the northern corner of the present Kelsey Street and Wollongong Road, where the cellars of the original building are still extant beneath the cottage which now covers the site.

"Highbury Barn", of slab structure, is said to have been built by paid convict labour and came in the wake of the construction of the first main road through the Illawarra District - the Wollongong Road (1843-1845).

This famous road, convict made, began on the southern side of Cook's River, adjacent to "Tempe House", and following the reverse side of the Knoll, on which Arncliffe came to be built. Thereafter, it climbed, then followed the ridge (now Forest Road) and wended its way to the crossing at Lugarno on George's River.

The country through which the road passed became the source of supply of timber and charcoal for early Sydney for many years, and in the wake of the road came the pioneers - the axemen, sawyers, charcoal burners and settlers, to gain a living in these primitive surroundings.

The intriguing question arises as to how the "Highbury Barn" came to be built on the particular site on Wollongong Road.

The answer - WATER. There was in existence at that time, a creek which ran through Kelsey Street and which provided, until the first decades of this century, a watering place for the horse teams drawing the waggons and drays along Wollongong Road.

In addition to the spot providing a watering place for the horses, an astute publican saw the business possibilities in erecting a tavern nearby a camp which had been made there to meet the voracious liquor needs of those engaged in denuding the forests and conveying the timber and charcoal to Sydney Town. And so the first tavern in the District was built, about 1845.

In 1861, it was decided by the Government of the day to reconstruct the Wollongong (or Forest Road) from its

primitive conditions, along most of its old route. However, on this occasion it was to begin near the present junction of Forest Road and Princes Highway, representing a detour, in the Arncliffe section, from the original Wollongong Road.

The reason for this detour, which we know so well to-day, was due primarily to the drier and better conditions which had been discovered by the pioneers on the ridge extension of Forest Road than on the lower reaches of Wollongong Road, which after rain often became a quagmire. These, of course, were the days before the modern drainage systems were known.

This ridge, it had been found, provided better traction for the waggon teams than the lower areas of the old road which often became impassable, holding the waggons in the tight grip of deep black mud.

The reconstructed road was opened in 1864, and it was this innovation which caused Kelsey's tavern to decline in popularity. It was found that the horse-drawn vehicles (mostly to and from Sydney) were travelling along the new ridge extension and thus by-passing the tavern on Wollongong Road.

So, paradoxically, water, which had acted as the force, which gave birth to "Highbury Barn" on its creek site, became also the prime factor in its loss of popularity to the better drained ridge nearby, which became the location of a new "Highbury Barn" as we shall see.

After observing the changed traffic pattern, a Mr. Fred Barden acquired a home (probably the first on the Forest Road extension), which stood on the corner of the present Barden Street, and converted it into a new "Highbury Barn", the liquor license having been transferred from the original site and owner.

The new inn was of stone construction and local tradition has it that the stone was gained from the quarry (the remnants of which can be seen to-day near the corner of Roach and Gore Street) only a short distance away.

Barden's inn, standing in relative isolation at the time on Arncliffe Hill, had a monopoly of the passing trade and for many miles around, for over a decade, until a new hotel was built in 1880 and named the "Botany View" (site of the present Arncliffe Hotel).

"Highbury Barn" was modernised in the 1880's and continued as an hotel until a referendum brought about a reduction in licences in 1911. Soon after the famous inn which had been an institution in Arncliffe and the district, closed its doors for the last time.

The building was converted in 1914 into a number of shops which persevered until it was demolished along with the Arncliffe Theatre, just on four years ago, (about 1960-61) to make way for a service station.

So the name "Highbury Barn" which had been a household word in the district for almost 120 years passed into history, but the old Barden home named after the inn, "Highbury Heights", at top of Queen Street, is still extant.

THE ROUND TOWER ON ARNCLIFFE HILL ...

-Arncliffe Progress
Association News
Vol.9 No.2
June 1966.

Supplied by Mrs E Eardley - 1987.

Mr V M Saunders, is remembered for the presentation of this article at an early St. George Historical Society Meeting.

Standing on one of the more dominant sites on the Forest Road ridge is St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church at Arncliffe.

The Church and particularly its Round Tower, may be seen in all their splendour at almost any vantage point within and even well beyond the immediate district.

In making their observation how many people realise that the Arncliffe Church was one of the first two places of worship to be constructed in Australia, incorporating in its structure the architectural form of the Round Towers of Ireland - edifices long famous in the popular imagination because of their association with the predatory raids of the Vikings in the days of yore.

St. Francis Xavier Church was opened for worship in 1931 during the sojourn of the late Mons. J. P. Rafferty whose inspiration it was that led to an intensive study being made by his architect (Mr C Glancey) of the design of seven of the more famous Round Towers of Ireland, resulting in the present design. It stands to this day as Sydney's only church incorporating in its construction a Round Tower and one of the few extant in Australia combining this unique feature.

Although not so well known in this country as in Europe, the Round Towers of Ireland have long been famous and supplied a theme for discussion to Antiquarians regarding their origin and uses to almost as great a degree as have the Pyramids of Egypt.

With the exception of a few Round Towers in Scotland, these unusual stone edifices are to be found in no other part of Western civilisation than Ireland. About 120 of these towers are known to have existed there, 90 still remain in varying stages of decay with about 20 of them more or less perfect to the very coping stone of the roof.

The Round Towers are hollow stone cylinders, narrowing as they approach the summit and are from 50 to 150 feet in height and divided internally into 6 or more stories.

The top story has from 3 to 6 apertures whilst the others are each lit by a single aperture with the exception of the lowest story, above which there is a door elevated from 8 to 30 feet above ground level (the high elevation of the doors led some to believe that this indicated the towers were designed for security purposes).

The Round Towers were used in Christian times (from the 5th century) as places of security where the church

valuables could be deposited and where the monks could find refuge in times of peril or alarm.

On critical occasions also, their higher apartments were probably lit up as beacons to guide the movements of friends or were used as Watch-towers.

The finest hour of the Round Towers in Christian times came with their use during the predatory expeditions of the Vikings (who terrorized the inhabitants also of Scotland, England and France and sailed the seas in vessels, for the era, of considerable size) on Ireland from the year 74 A.D. until they settled there about the year 850.

Before sufficient force could be collected to resist the raids of the Vikings great havoc was inflicted on monastic establishments, the pirates taking whatever booty was at hand when they hurriedly returned to their ships.

Whilst the Round Towers were utilised as places of security during troublesome times in the early Christian era, it is not so evident that such was their original destination.

Those who maintain that they are remnants of a civilisation of the pre-Christian era (probably built by the Tuatha De Danaan, a Greek race which settled in Ireland about the 9th century B.C. a hypothesis supported by much recent archeological evidence) can support their views with plausible if not conclusive arguments.

It is alleged by those who contend for their Christian origin, that they were all at one period associated with churches or toehr ecclesiastical erections and established mainly as places of security and as watch-towers.

The famous 19th century Irish poet, Thomas Moore, representing the majority view of Antiquarians on the pre-Christian origin of the Round Towers, wrote in the "History of Ireland" that their inspiration found its way to Ireland from Persian sources, a few towers bearing an exact resemblance to the Irish towers having been found at Bagdad (Persia) and Bhaugulpore (India) and that these were thought in India, to have belonged to a form of worship now extinct and even forgotten. (The Round Towers have not been found in any other part of Christendom).

It is also contended that the Round Towers had probably been fire-temples in which a sacred fire was kindled in connection with certain rites known to be practised by the Magi (Zoroasterism) in an elevated position (accounting for the high elevation of the doors); and that the top story (with its numerous apertures) was designed for astronomical observations - for determining the equinoctial and solstitial times.

Whatever the origin of the towers they played a part in the spread of Christianity in Ireland, were used as Keeps and Watch-towers in times of peril or alarm, and as Bell-towers whence the monastic bell summoned the populace to the house of God.