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ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

Registered by Aust Post
NBH 0335

7 Lynwood St
Blakehurst

APRIL 1991

NEXT MEETING

DATE: 8pm Friday 19th April

LOCATION: Council Chambers, 1st Flr Rockdale Town Hall, Princes Hwy
Rockdale

BUSINESS: Resolution regarding Tempe House

GUEST SPEAKER:

"AUTHENTIC RESTORATION OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS"

Heritage consultant, Michael McGowage, will show us how old buildings can be restored to their original appearance and in particular what a dramatic difference the right colour scheme and detailing can make.

SUPPER ROSTER: Members please bring a plate.

**ARNCLIFFE TO LYDHAM HALL
HISTORY WALK**

In view of the success last year of the Bexley History Walk it was decided to conduct a similiar one this year to coincide with the 30th Anniversary of the Society's founding.

It will commence at Arncliffe Railway Station and continue along Forest Rd to Lydham Hall.

We will have a number of people conducting the tour and there should be sufficient written guides to supply a large attendance.

DATE: Sunday 16th June

TIME: 1pm

STARTING POINT: Arncliffe Railway Station

OUR NEW TREASURER

We have a new treasurer! At our last meeting, Mrs Margaret Persen was elected unopposed to the position. Margaret is very familiar with book keeping as she has handled accounts most of her working life. She has been a member since early last year and has agreed to help out at least until our election of office bearers in July.

Congratulations, Margaret, and thanks for your help at a time when we most need it!

ATTENDANCES UP!

Our March meeting was well attended as have been the last three meetings. Our recent speakers have been very well received. Judy Dunn (February) in particular, with her off-beat subject, "Pioneers Down Under" generated quite a few belly laughs at some of the bizarre things people enscribe on tombstones.

Ald Ron Rathbone always attracts a good crowd and his topic last meeting was "Historical Buildings and Sites of the Rockdale Municipality". He certainly revived a few memories with slides of beautiful Rosevale Vila and other houses the Society attempted to save in the early days. It was also interesting to see places such as Lydham Hall and Macquarie Lodge before restoration.

It was good also to see some familiar faces at the last few meetings. Our former Secretary and Bulletin Editor of many years, Mrs Eileen Eardley, has made a welcome return. Last year she had a very difficult time with illness and it's good to see her up and about again.

CARCOAR TOUR A SUCCESS!

The recent coach tour to Carcoar was not only a financial success but also a boost for the St George Historical Society generally. Coach tours of this type have not been organised for some years now. They were once a very popular feature of the Society and were disbanded as a result of aging membership.

It is another indication of the revitalisation of the Society that the outings have been revived.

From all accounts it was a very enjoyable trip and excellent value.

Our sincere thanks to Joan Fairhall who made it all possible. Joan is one of our newer members having joined in June last year but she has been active from the outset and made an important contribution to the growth of the Society.

IS TEMPE HOUSE AT RISK?

Considerable concern has been expressed about the security and state of disrepair of the St George District's most historically significant building.

Last year, Tempe House received a Permanent Conservation Order and Australia's foremost restoration architect was engaged by the new owner Qantek (a division of Qantas) to restore both Tempe House itself and the St Magdalen Chapel.

Since then, however, the Australian economy has slid into recession and obviously this must have some impact on Qantek's financial priorities. The promised restoration of Tempe House has not eventuated. Both buildings are in need of attention. There is obvious water damage to the internal walls of the Chapel and Tempe House is dilapidated in appearance.

Possibly even more worrying is the fact that late last year an intruder started a fire which caused extensive damage to the dormitory complex. The dormitory is to be demolished in any case but if the fire had spread to Tempe House it would have been a tragic and irreplaceable loss. Although the property is patrolled by a surveillance company, security appears lax. The back gate is open and anyone can walk in unchallenged.

I believe there is an urgent need for our Society to petition Rockdale Council to ensure that:-

1. Tempe House and the Magdalen Chapel receive adequate weather protection and that essential repairs are carried out
2. the property generally is made secure from intruders (a security gate at the back entrance is a priority)

I will be bringing this matter before the next Society meeting for consideration and ask for your support.

Bernard Sharah
President



Rev. J. J. O'DRISCOLL, P.P. (Kogarah)
Senior Priest in the Illawarra District,
where he has laboured for 30 years.

Rev. Fr. J.J. O'Driscoll, then Parish Priest of Kogarah, presided over a meeting held in the Arncliffe Convent on 5th. February, 1911, to discuss "the advisability of erecting a school-church to meet the requirements of the Catholics of Arncliffe, and to relieve the congestion that was by then in evidence each Sunday morning at Rockdale."

On this page we publish a photograph of Father O'Driscoll, together with a photograph of the original school-church which he was instrumental in building.



ST. FRANCIS XAVIER'S SCHOOL-CHURCH, ARNCLIFFE.

The following article has been edited from a history written by Society member, Mrs Molly McDonnell. Our thanks is extended to Molly who has kindly permitted its publication in this bulletin.

A HISTORY OF THE ARNCLIFFE CATHOLIC PARISH

In March of this year 1982, we will celebrate the Golden Jubilee of St Francis Xavier's Church, Arncliffe. The present beautiful edifice with its magnificent facade, round tower, and beautiful interior will forever stand as a monument to the great and untiring efforts of the late Monsignor Joseph Patrick Rafferty. With his great band of helpers he was responsible for the building of our present church which was opened in 1932 and only 4 years later being declared free of debt, was duly consecrated. Given that all this was achieved during the years of the "Great Depression", this itself stands as a tribute to the generosity of parishioners and others and the hard work of all those who committed themselves wholeheartedly to this project.

Prior to this we had the original school-church, but the first of the ecclesiastical buildings was the convent, about which we shall talk.

THE CONVENT

There was much speculation as to when the convent was actually built and by whom. But the first name to appear in Sands Directory was a Mr Parrish, in 1887, who lived there with his family until about 1900. In 1901, it became the property of a Mr Herd who died in 1909, leaving the property to his wife who remained in residence until 1911. There is letter extant in the Kogarah Parish archives written by the sisters of Charity saying that they could no longer staff the Kogarah Parish school. There would have been a reply and correspondence requesting help from the Sisters of St Joseph, North Sydney. These letters no longer exist, unfortunately. They would have given us definite dates. However, 1911 seems to be the year when things began to move. The convent at Arncliffe was purchased by the sisters of St Joseph. The Superiors at the time, of the Sydney Province of the Sisters of St Joseph, signed the Certificate of Title on 14th September 1911. Their names as they appear on the deeds were:- Mary Molloy, Bridget Howley, Veronica O'Brien, and Mary Meskill. It would have been shortly after this date that 4 sisters took up residence: They were Sisters Gerard, Conception, Ignatius, and an unknown postulant. From Arncliffe they travelled to Rockdale and Kogarah to teach in the parish schools. As at that time there was no school in Arncliffe, the first pupils about 12 in number, were taught in the convent until the church-school was completed in 1912.

Over the years there have been many alterations to the present convent, mainly interior. New additions were also added upstairs. What is now the chapel was once the music room and later the room adjoining it became the music room. In these days the chapel had to be upstairs in 2-storey type buildings. When our new church was

built, the passageway leading to the sacristy and church was added, giving the sisters direct and easy access to the sacristy and their own chapel at the side of the High Altar, this later is no longer in use as a chapel. In recent years the small vestibule leading into the present music room has been considerably altered providing the sisters with a beautiful dining-room and access to a very modern kitchen .

To the best of the writer's recollection, Sister Marcellus was the first music teacher, with pupils numbering over 90. Lessons were given at all hours including Saturday.

THE CHURCH SCHOOL

The district stagnated during the 1850's as the lure of gold enticed many families to the gold fields but by the time Alexander Brodie Spark died at Tempe House in 1856, there was a well established village at Arncliffe, with an inn and several substantial buildings. As the population increased, the need for schools and churches was increasingly evident. There were other denominational churches and schools in the district but none for the Catholic population. About 1862, and due to the untiring efforts of Archbishop Polding, there were at least 2 schools in the Cook's River district. One at Rocky Point Road Kogarah, and one at Cook's River, Tempe.

In the early 1900's Hurstville appeared to be the central church for all the surrounding districts, including Kogarah. Pastors were, Rev. Fathers O'Driscoll, Walsh, Peoples and Cusack. Then Kogarah became the parent church and Arncliffe was incorporated in it.

Before these parishes were established, the nearest church was St Benedict's Broadway. It was nothing for families to travel a distance of 20 miles there and back to mass, sometimes on foot. With the establishment of St Peter and Paul's, Tempe, some of the Arncliffe Catholics were able to attend Sunday Mass there. Later on some of these families were privileged to attend Mass at St Magdalene's Retreat (on the former Tempe House estate) for some years until the number of people increased and the problem of accommodation arose, and the Rev. Mother was forced to revoke the privilege. Top Arncliffe and Banksia nearly all went to Rockdale church which by now had been established. It was a normal sight to see several families grouped together going to and returning from Sunday Mass all on Shanks' pony. Members of the Hardge, Stone, O'Keefe, Scott and other families used to walk to Rockdale to school and back, because trains were few and far between.

In 1904, Farther O'Driscoll was placed in charge of St Patrick's Kogarah. He erected Catholic buildings in Rockdale, Arncliffe, Hurstville, Penshurst, Cronulla, and in later days completed St Patrick's Kogarah which up to that time was an unpretentious stone church. The foundation stone of St Joseph's, Rockdale, was laid in 1891, but even the establishment of Rockdale church did not suffice for the ever-increasing number of Catholics common in to the district; and on 5th February, 1911, Fr. O'Driscoll presided over a meeting, held in the convent, Arncliffe, to discuss the

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desirability of erecting a school-church to meet the requirements of the Catholics of Arncliffe, and to relieve the congestion of Sunday morning at Rockdale. It was decided to erect a school-church at a cost not to exceed 600 pounds. As the sisters had acquired their convent on Forest Road, the site of the school was purchased from them at cost of 200 pounds.

In the Freemans's Journal and Catholic Press of 7th December, 1911, the following article appeared: "NEW CHURCH AT ARNCLIFFE, his Grace Archbishop Kelly, ceaseless in his efforts to provide for the spiritual wants of his flock, opened a new church at Arncliffe on Sunday 3rd December, 1911. The rapid growth of that part of the Illawarra District has increased the religious responsibilities of the energetic Father O'Driscoll. During recent years he had his hand to the busy plough of Catholicity, furrowing a road that leads sons to their eternal home : and, with the co-operation of generous parishioners, new schools and churches have studded the picturesque heights of the district."

The new church will be of brick. The building will be 70 foot long and 30 foot wide, with walls 15 foot 6 inches in height, and will accommodate 400 persons. The windows will be of Gothic design and the church is to be well lighted and ventilated to the apex of the roof with patent cowl ventilator. The site is alongside the convent in Forest Road, and is convenient to the railway station. Architect is Mr J Frank White, 94 Pitt St Sydney, and the contractor Mr W J Symons, Forest Road, Arncliffe.

The school-church was eventually completed in 1912 with pupils numbering 72. By 1914, it had increased to 76. The 4 extra pupils could have included the writer's 2 sisters and brother, whose family had arrived from England in April that same year. The writer also recalls Father O'Driscoll. In August, 1914, World War 1 broke out. It was a very sad and hard time for all concerned and , no doubt, raising money for the completion of the church must have been a problem.

The building was one long room with two long red curtains dividing the school from the sanctuary where the Blessed Sacrament was kept. The curtains were easily drawn aside for the altar to be exposed and for Mass to be celebrated. Large heavy desks were supported by adjustable brackets in such a way that they could be dropped perpendicularly on their hinges. Ink pots, of course, had to be removed from ink-wells! The front of the building did not reach the footpath alignment, as at present. There were a few steps leading into a porch and thence into the classroom.

By now the number of Catholics continued to increase; and in March 1916, the Rockdale-Arncliffe portion was divided from the parent Parish of Kogarah and made a separate parish under Father J P Hyland. A year later the parishioners of St Francis Xavier's rejoiced to learn that the Archbishop had formed a separate parish in Arncliffe, with Rev. Father Andrew Mulvihill as its first pastor.

ST GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S
30TH ANNIVERSARY REUNION

Are you unable to attend our monthly meetings but would love to have a get-together with old friends in the Society?

Well, we are planning an afternoon tea party at Lydham Hall to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Society. It will be a great opportunity to share a few memories with fellow members you may not have seen for some time.

Afternoon tea will provided FREE in the pleasant surroundings of the grounds of Lydham Hall.

For those of you who have transport difficulties we may be able to provide transport.

We need to have a good indication of numbers fairly quickly so if you are interested please complete the booking form and return to :-

St George Historical Society
36 Watkin St
Rockdale 2216

Joan Byrne will be happy to assist with your enquiries on phone no. 567 8641

DATE: SATURDAY 15TH JUNE

TIME: 2PM

LOCATION: GROUNDS OF LYDHAM HALL, LYDHAM AVE, ROCKDALE.

30TH ANNIVERSARY REUNION

BOOKING FORM

NAME:

ADDRESS:

PHONE NO.:

I will/will not need transport to attend.