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ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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Blakehurst

JULY 1991

OUR THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY



The St George Leader gave good coverage of our 30th Anniversary History Walk. The walk was a great success and an estimated 100 people attended. The photo shows one group outside St Joseph's Convent, Arncliffe.

OFFICE BEARERS

PRESIDENT: Bernard Sharah 599 1971

SECRETARY: Val Beehag 546 2819

TREASURER: Margaret Persen 771 5461

VICE-PRESIDENT: Don Sinclair 50 5366

RESEARCH OFFICER: Arthur Ellis 587 1159

PUBLICITY OFFICER: Joan Fairhall 546 5555

BULLETIN EDITOR: Bernard Sharah 599 1971

ST GEORGE HERITAGE FAIR CO-ORDINATOR: Joan Byrne 567 8641

SOCIAL SECRETARY: Vacant

LYDHAM HALL COMMITTEE

Miss B. Otton, Bernard Sharah, Mrs Val Beehag

AUDITOR: Mrs L. Thompson

All correspondence to the Secretary, 7 Lynwood St Blakehurst 2221.

NEXT MEETING

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - Election of Office Holders

GUEST SPEAKER:

Heritage Consultant, **Meredith Walker**, will report on the heritage study of the Rockdale Municipality which has recently been submitted to Council for consideration. The report contains many surprises and is sure to be the subject of lively debate. Meredith, I am sure, will put forward some viewpoints that will challenge what is commonly accepted as "heritage".

DATE: 8pm 19th July 1991

LOCATION: 1st Floor Council Chambers, Rockdale Town Hall
Princes Highway, Rockdale

Members please bring a plate.

A SUCCESSFUL REUNION

Despite threatening skies our thirtieth anniversary drew long-term members from far and wide.

Among the guests were Mr and Mrs Jack Stead. It was quite appropriate that we should be honoured with the Steads' presence given the family's association with Lydham Hall. Mr Stead's uncle was David Stead the internationally renown naturalist and father of authoress, Christina Stead. The occasion recalled childhood memories of the house for Mr Stead.

Pioneer families of the district were well represented. Descendants of the Geeves, Preddys and Beehags compared notes on family history. It was a pleasure for me to meet Mrs Geeves, wife of the late historian, Phillip Geeves, who was a very active foundation member of the Society.

To mark the occasion a birthday cake was provided and it was only fitting that our two longest serving members, Mrs Jean Faulkner and Mrs Eileen Eardley, shared the honour of cutting it. Mrs Faulkner (who is an amazing 92 years old) sent us a lovely letter of thanks which is printed in this bulletin.

The comment was made by a number of guests that "we should do this more often!". Indeed we shall.

Full credit to Joan Byrne whose idea it was to hold this function and who was chiefly responsible for its successful organisation. But it would not have been possible without the team effort of the committee members and in particular the contribution of people such as Geoff Rankin.

Most importantly we must not forget the generosity of the members who provided the delicacies for the occasion.

THE HISTORY WALK

Day two of our thirtieth anniversary celebrations proved to be equally successful as the previous day's activities.

A rough estimate of one hundred people congregated at Arncliffe Railway Station for the start of the Arncliffe to Lydham Hall History Walk. It was heartening to see so many people of all ages interested in our past. Weather-wise we couldn't have asked for better, it was a beautiful sunny day.

The walkers were divided into four groups under the leadership of Arthur Ellis, whose knowledge of the Arncliffe area and its history is unsurpassed; James Kane, M.A., who has regularly conducted history tours in the St George District; Geoff Croft, long term resident of Arncliffe; and myself.

The tour proceeded up Eden Street, which originally formed part of the old Rocky Point Road (later to become Princes Highway) to Forest Road.

Next was a tour of inspection of St Francis Xavier's Church which included its famous round tower (St Francis Xavier's is the only round towered church in Sydney and one of the very few throughout Australia). The tower certainly justified the Society's decision to take out public liability insurance. The stairs were very narrow and the last part of the climb was a step-ladder.

Some other points of interest on the tour were:-

Arncliffe Public School (1879) a small quaint Gothic stone school house, the oldest public school building in the St George District.

"Teluba" (1882) 19 Segenhoe Street - a beautifully restored Italianate building, originally built for Hon. Samuel Terry M.L.C.

Site of the Highbury Barn, one of the first public houses in the St George District.

"Gladstone and Wentworth" (1886) 134-136 Forest Road.
A magnificent two-storey semi-detached house with highly ornate cast iron decoration.

Some of the highlights were unexpected. When we arrived at Esdaile Place we met Mrs Bettie Hart, prize winning gardener, who took us on a tour of her wonderful garden. Bettie is responsible for the transformation of Esdaile Place from a former Water Board easement filled with rubbish into a lush oasis protected from the congestion and noise of nearby Forest Road. In 1988, Esdaile Place was named "Sydney's Most Beautiful Street" by Radio Station 2CH. Unfortunately, not all the tour groups were able to view Bettie Hart's garden due to lack of time.

I can tell you however, that one group (mine) that missed out on seeing Mrs Hart's garden was compensated in another way. Esdaile Street resident, Mr Kevin Green, very graciously offered to show us through his home. It is a lovely Federation house with leadlight windows that would be the envy of most lovers of old homes. The eyelet windows had expansive views of the valley below.

The tour went way over schedule and we concluded the walk with afternoon tea at Lydham Hall later than anticipated. The reaction of the participants was very positive and encouraging and we were able to sign a number of new members. All in all, a successful outing and well worth all the hard work.

B. Sharah
President

A MANDATE FOR CHANGE

President's Report for 1990-1

Some very positive things have been achieved in the past year which, I believe, auger well for the future growth and prosperity of the Society.

First and foremost we have developed a capable and enthusiastic management team. The members of this team are mostly people recruited as a result of the Bexley History Walk and for those of you who are unable to attend meetings I want to briefly say a few words about them.

It is very difficult to find a more dedicated couple than Noel and Val Beehag. They have been Rotarians for many years and have worked very hard fund raising for charitable causes. Together they have brought a wealth of experience to our organisation.

Since joining last year, Joan Byrne has come forward with many new ideas as to how we could improve the social aspect of our organisation and has been prepared to back it up with hard work.

The other members of the management team, Arthur Ellis, Margaret Persen, Don Sinclair and in particular, Joan Fairhall with her organisation of social outings, have given generously of their time to contribute to a better historical society.

It is pleasing also to see a greater level of participation by the members generally in the social functions.

There has been a greater sense of involvement with our house-museum, Lydham Hall. I would like to see this increase further over the next twelve months. Two things are planned in this regard. Miss Otton has kindly offered to share her knowledge of the house and its contents so that more people can assist in conducting tours of Lydham Hall. Secondly, a recommendation of the committee will be that we hold a Christmas function at Lydham this year.

Social activities have been revived and have proved to be a good recruitment strategy as well as heightening the public profile of our Society and encouraging interest in local history.

These are all positive signs that the Society has "turned the corner" in regard to its future.

However, one issue for concern is the fact that apart from the new members that we have been able to actively involve in the running of the Society we have not been able to translate increased membership into increased attendance at monthly meetings.

Meeting attendances this year have increased compared to the latter half of last year but this has been due to revived interest by the existing members.

If this Society is to grow we need to draw the new members to our meetings. I firmly believe the greatest obstacle in achieving that goal is the fact that meetings are held on a Friday night. I know of no other community organisation that holds its meetings on such a night.

Accordingly, I believe it is imperative that we change our meeting to another night of the week, preferably a Tuesday.

Whilst we are on the subject of change, I think there has to be a recognition on the part of the members that change is essential to growth. We must do different things and we find different ways of doing them.

I see a bright future for the Society if we adopt that attitude and I seek your co-operation and support.

Bernard Sharah
President

A LETTER FROM JEAN FAULKNER

Mrs Jean Faulkner, a foundation and Life Member of our Society, had some very complimentary remarks to make about the 30th Anniversary Reunion and also made a generous donation. Thank you for your comments and your generosity, Mrs Faulkner.

Dear Mrs Beehag,

Congratulations to you and your committee for the lovely garden party you organised to celebrate the Thirtieth Anniversary of the St George Historical Society. I think it was a great idea.

It was most enjoyable meeting members who, like myself, attended the Society meetings for years but cannot attend now, as well as those still attending and new members.

The lavish afternoon tea of mouth watering "goodies" was really something.

You will gather from this letter that I really enjoyed myself.

Enclosed please find cheque which is a donation towards the Society's funds.

Congratulations once again. Best wishes for the Society's future progress and success.

Yours sincerely,

Jean Faulkner
Foundation and Life Member

IS YOUR SUBURB GOING TO DISAPPEAR?

You may have read recently that there is currently a proposal for Rockdale Council to abolish all reference to locality names such as Banksia, Dolls Point, Turrella, Sandringham and Kyeemagh. The move has been prompted by the Geographical Names Board's stated objective of achieving definitive boundaries for all locality names. They hope to eliminate the current practice of some residents choosing which suburb they prefer for their address.

It was the feeling of the members at the last meeting that this was a very arbitrary move and one that would remove long standing associations the names have with their respective localities. The removal of the place name "Banksia" would be particularly objectionable from the Society's point of view as it was named by David Stead, the naturalist of international renown and one time occupant of Lydham Hall. Given these sentiments it will be moved at the July meeting that we make our objections known in letters to Rockdale Council and the Geographical Names Board.

St George Historical Society is saddened by the loss of two of its long term members, Mrs Laura Kell and Mrs Madge Piper. We are indebted to Rev. Peter Johnson of Christ Church, Bexley and Rev. Ewen Brown of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Rockdale for providing information for the following tributes. Our deepest sympathy is extended to the families of both departed and in particular to Mr Les Kell and Mr John Curran.

MRS LAURA KELL

Laura Kell was born Laura Elizabeth Butcher on the 4th August, 1912 at Flemington in Sydney. She was educated in convent schools in Marrickville, and worked for the Taxation Department until her marriage to Les Kell in April, 1939 at St Andrew's Lakemba.

Laura was an outgoing person who liked people and was involved in many community service organisations. She worked for the St Lukes Hospital Centre and used to run bus trips to raise funds. Laura was also involved in the View Club at Beverley Hills, and the Crippled Children's Association. She had a strong personal faith in Christ, which she nurtured through Bible study as long as she was able. Her life of service expressed her faith.

Rev. Peter Johnson

MRS MARJORY PIPER

Mrs Piper was born Marjory Annie Wildman on 21st June 1909 in her family's home at 26 Stoney Creek Road, Bexley. Her father was a stonemason and builder and he built the stone house which still stands today. She attended Bexley Public School and Kogarah High School and later worked as a dressmaker before marrying Mr Piper in January 1944. Madge Piper enjoyed ballroom dancing but her particular interest was Scottish dancing. She was a member of the Rockdale Scottish Association. Mr Piper died in 1973 and she continued to live at the family home until 1988 when she moved to Macquarie Lodge, run by the Salvation Army in Arncliffe. She was always interested in the St George Historical Society and when no longer able to attend meetings, her friend John Curran, would go in her stead and relate the events of the evening. Mrs Piper passed away on 29 June 1991.

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members: Susan and Stephen Milgate, Vicki Newman, Win Clarke and Johanna Palfy of Arncliffe; Jillian Kennedy, Hurstville; Alison Edsall and Nita O'Donnell of Bexley and Kenneth and Beryl Cato, Kyle Bay.

We look forward to meeting you in the near future.

OPEN DAY AT CARRS COTTAGE

Kogarah Historical Society is holding an open day at Carrs Cottage on the 25th August to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of their museum. Admission is **free** and guests can buy Devonshire Teas.

We congratulate Kogarah Historical Society and commend them for their fine museum. We also hope to see many St George Historical Society members join in the celebrations.

REUNION OF THE DESCENDANTS OF ISAAC & ANN FENTON

A reunion and registration of the descendants of Isaac & Ann Fenton will be held on 26th January 1992, at Tuena (between Crookwell and Blayney) NSW to mark 150 years in Australia.

Isaac and Ann arrived in Sydney 7th January 1842, from Westmoreland, England with three sons, William (7), John (4) and Isaac (11 months). Two other children, Henry (1845) and Thomas (1848) were born near Tuena.

All interested persons are asked to contact Graham Howard, "Kimberlee", Gilgandra 068 483530, Heather Davis, 25 Hambledon Hill Rd, Singleton 065 721236 or Ruth Morris, 12 Curtin Place, Lithgow 063 514749.