



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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7 Lynwood St
Blakehurst

SEPTEMBER 1991

NEXT MEETING

THE BATTLE OF VINEGAR HILL

The "Battle of Vinegar Hill" was Australia's first popular uprising and one of its greatest debacles. At our next meeting Lynette Silver will give an amusing account of this bungled rebellion.

DATE: Friday, 8pm, 20 September

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

SUPPER ROSTER: Members please bring a plate.

Office Holders

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SECRETARY: Mrs Val Beehag 546 2819
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BULLETIN EDITOR: Bernard Sharah 567 6063

LYDHAM HALL COMMITTEE:

Miss B.Otton, Bernard Sharah, Mrs V.Beehag

AUDITOR: Mrs L Thompson

All correspondence to the Secretary, 7 Lynwood St Blakehurst 2221

LYDHAM HALL

VOLUNTEERS PLEASE - NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY!

Would you like to assist at Lydham Hall? We need people who can occasionally spare a couple of hours on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon to show people through the house and tell them a little about its history and about the exhibits. **If you don't know very much about Lydham Hall it doesn't matter.** Everyone has to start somewhere and our curator, Miss Bett Otton, has kindly offered to share with other members her knowledge of this wonderful old house and its magnificent collection. This is a great way to be more involved and learn a little at the same time. If you are interested please contact Joan Byrne 567 8641 or 5870451.



(L to R) Ken Cato, Joan Fairhall, John Bradfield, Beryl Cato, Margaret Persen, Val Beehag, Arthur Ellis, Win Clarke, Heather and Bruce McLaren, Alison Edsall, Joan Byrne and Bernard Sharah. Foreground, Gloria Bradfield, Nita O'Donnell and Sue Bradfield (seated).

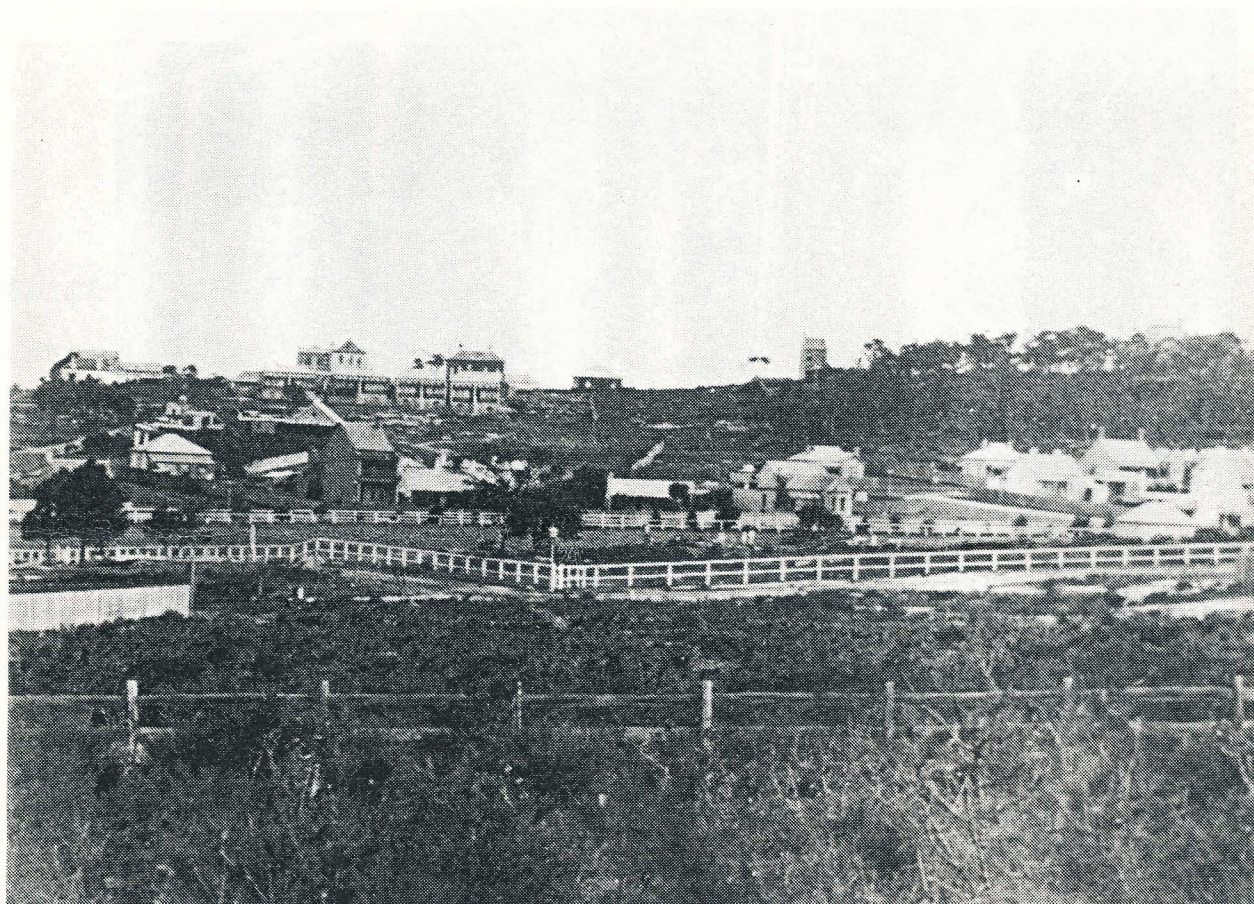
NEW MEMBERS GET-TOGETHER

On Sunday 11 August we held a get-together for new members to meet the management committee at Lydham Hall. The new members were first shown through our historic house-museum then invited to have a glass of wine in the grounds. The afternoon went off very well thanks in particular to the efforts of Joan Byrne and Geoff Rankin.

On the subject of new members we had 8 people join in the month of August. They were:- John, Gloria and Sue Bradfield and Eric and Jean Kauffman, Dora Lenane of Annandale (Dora is a sister of long-term member, Alan Stahl) and Mr and Mrs Moncaster of Rockdale.

MISSING BULLETIN

The solution to the mystery of the missing bulletin (Volume 1, Number 2, December 1962) may be that it didn't exist in the first place. At least that's the opinion of Ald. Ron Rathbone who was Secretary and Bulletin Editor at the time. We have checked with members who have assiduously collected every issue of the Bulletin and this particular issue is missing from their collections. Ald Rathbone feels that there may have only been a meeting notice issue for the month in question. Thank you, to those people that responded to the enquiry.



YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT'S IN YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY!

It often pays to investigate what is available to you at your local library. I came across the photo (above) and after reading the description realised it included my house (2 storey terrace style facing the park) and showed exactly how the area looked shortly before the turn of the century. The photo is of Arncliffe Park taken from the western side. As you can see there were very few houses at the time. The houses on the crest of the hill are fronting Forest Road and the clump of trees in the top right hand corner are obscuring Edmund Esdaile's *The Towers*.

The photo collection in the local studies section of Rockdale Council has largely been donated by Ald. Ron Rathbone. It is a wonderful record of how the Municipality looked in days gone by. Also in the Local Studies section are the Council Minute books, a complete collection of the St George and Sutherland Shire Leader, an indexed reference to the St George Historical Society's Bulletin and numerous other publications and newsletters of other local organisations. The Local Studies Librarian, Sandra Mowbray, has left recently but other library staff can assist with your enquiries. Because the Local Studies area is not staffed full-time it is necessary to make an appointment prior to viewing the collection. Perhaps, you will find a photo of your house or a mention of your family!

SOCIETY NEWS

Our Vice-President, Noel Beehag, took a nasty turn last month but after a short period of hospitalisation he is quite recovered. Good to see you up and around again, Noel.

Betty Robinson had an unfortunate accident on her overseas trip. Onboard ship she had a fall and broke her arm. Let's hope it hasn't ruined her holiday and we hope to have her sound and well when she returns.

If you have some item about a member you think would be of interest - it may be a member's birthday, a get-well wish, a special occasion or an interesting fact (preferably not libellous) - please let us know. Contact Bernard Sharah on 567 6063.

LAST MEETING

CHANGE OF MEETING NIGHT STATUS

A change of meeting night was agreed to in principle, however, it was generally felt that the second Tuesday of the month was more convenient for members. It was recommended that the possibility of booking the Rockdale Council Chambers for the second Tuesday be investigated. It has since been confirmed by Rockdale Council that there would be no problem with this particular night. However, the short interval (from a third Friday to a second Tuesday) during a change over would mean that a change of meeting night would not be practical until February, next year.

RAHS CONFERENCE

It was moved that two delegates, Arthur Ellis and Bernard Sharah, represent the Society at the Annual Royal Australian Historical Society Conference. The conference will be held at Tocal, Paterson in the Hunter Valley on the 12th and 13th October. The theme for this year's conference is "Regional Identity: Myth or Reality".

SALLY COWELL

Our guest speaker presented an interesting subject, *Restoring Old Photographs*, under difficult circumstances. Sally had a throat infection, but luckily she had a pre-recorded presentation she had given to an international conference of restoration photographers. Her slides demonstrated the tricks of the trade and the artistry of photographic restoration.

BEXLEY AS I KNEW IT

(From 1895 to 1917)

These are the personal recollections of Grace Nicholls (nee Middenway). Reprinted from the St George Historical Society Bulletin 1963.

I have been asked by Mr Philip Geeves to write some of my early memories of Bexley. I remember so much it is difficult to know what to record and what to leave unwritten.

We went to Bexley towards the end of 1895, when I was nine years old. We had been living in Wagga, where father had been headmaster of Gurwood Street School.

After being at Gurwood Street School for three years, an exchange was arranged with Mr Hume, headmaster at Bexley. Mr Hume did not have good health, and as Bexley was not far from the coast, he wished to move to a drier and warmer climate.

Father was only too pleased to make the change as his children were growing up; the eldest, Frank, was then in charge of North Wagga School. He was nineteen, and the next three children were aged from eighteen to fourteen years. He realised it was a good opportunity to give them the advantage of living near a city.

After the town of Wagga, with a main street nearly two miles long, and which even then, in 1895, had forty-six hotels, Bexley was quite a small village in comparison. The school, two or three small shops, two churches and a tiny post office, with a number of scattered houses, comprised Bexley. (On thinking back, I believe the Church of England was the only church and that the Presbyterian Church was built later.)

One side of Harrow Road was fairly well built on, but the district near the school was not nearly so closely settled. The post office was a tiny, white-washed building of the very early type seen in the country many years ago, with a low corrugated iron roof, and built almost flat on the ground. It was in Forest Road, on the western side, in about the same position as the Community Centre occupies, near the top of Harrow Road. I believe it was attended to by a Mrs Pearse. There were quite a number of people of that name living in Bexley then. Several of that name came to school. I remember a Charlie Pearse being in my class.

There was a larger cottage of the same type as the post office on part of the ground where Bexley School now stands. Granny Parkes (she was never known by any other name) lived there with her daughter and son-in-law, Mr and Mrs Luck, and their family. Granny Parkes appeared to be grandmother or close relative of nearly all the school children. I think she must have belonged to one of the earliest families to settle in Bexley. I would think by the style and age of the cottage that it was her original home.

Mr Luck was a wood and coal merchant. The family lived opposite the school residence, or "school house" as we called it, where we lived. It faced Forest Road, and the ground went to the corner of Bay View Street. The house has been demolished for some years. Mr Luck's house was similiar to the Post office, only larger; very low roofed, white-washed, and almost flush with the ground. It had a three-roomed frontage. The third room had no connecting door with the rest of the house, so the person occupying that room had to go out into the open when he wanted to go to bed, which was not too comfortable on cold nights.

From the verandah of the school-house we had a fine view of part of Botany Bay, the high ground on which Long Bay Gaol is built, the district round the northern end of the bay and beyond, near where Bunnerong Power Station now stands. It wasn't long before houses were built at the top end of Frederick Street (near Forest Road) and on the spare ground opposite the old school, blocking out much of our view; but on turning into Frederick Street on my way to the train or to the Congregational Church, Rockdale, which we attended, and where I was for many years Church Organist, I always had immense pleasure from the view of Botany Bay, Bare Island, Capes Banks and Solander ("the Heads"), Kurnell, then in its native state, forming a dark green background to the obelisk which was erected to mark the first landing on Australian soil. All this could be seen very plainly on a clear day (before the days of factories and smoke to take away the clearness of the atmosphere); the whole picture being highlighted by the blue of the bay, and the distant ocean showing between Botany Bay heads.

Eventually, that view was also was blocked out, as the large expanse of open country in that area was subdivided and streets and houses took the place of open ground.

The first night we spent in Bexley, it was decided that we should sleep at my Aunt's home in Judd Street, Rockdale Park (or at least some of us would) as our furniture having come by train, was still partially unpacked. (I remember my job was to unwind yards of strips of rag which had been wrapped round the legs of our dining room suite; how different from the easy way of moving furniture now!)

Rockdale Park is now Banksia, the name being changed when Banksia Railway Station was built. To go to Rockdale Park we crossed Frederick Street and Herbert Street. It was very dark, no lights anywhere. Soon we found ourselves stumbling over row after row of what we later found out to be grass covered furrows. It had cultivated ground some time before. We were told later that it had been part of an orchard owned by Mr Lauff or his father. They lived in Lauff Street, a street running off Railway Street, Rockdale, towards the higher land on which was the furrowed ground we stumbled across that night. The furrowed land stretched from the foot of the grounds belonging to "Lydham Hall", the large stone house on Lydham Hill, which was near what are now

Oswell and Clarence Streets. After crossing the furrowed land we eventually came to some rocks down which we had to scramble to get to the lower ground of Rockdale Park, not far from what was then Cairncross' Dairy.

It is all laid out now with streets and cottage homes. Mr Alec Sutherland was the first builder to buy land and erect cottages for letting or selling on terms in that area; in fact, I think possibly in Bexley. He was a Deacon of the Congregational Church. Why all the streets in that area were named Herbert, Frederick, Oswell, Clarence, etc., I am at a loss to know. I don't know if these boys' names had any historical significance or not. I never heard anyone speak of it, but I do think a little more originality could have been shown.

The street lighting in 1895 was most primitive and inadequate. The lamps were very few and far between, and many of the footpaths were not made. Frederick Street after rain was anything but pleasant to walk in, especially at night. One could easily be bogged as the ground was composed of clay in parts and would be very slippery and dangerous to walk on. Later, the centre was laid with a path of bricks, about three feet wide.

The light from the street lamps was practically no use at all as the lamps were lit by gas. To the time of our leaving Bexley in 1917 there was no electricity. The school building had no lighting whatsoever. If a meeting was held there, it had to take place in the daylight hours, or those attending had to take kerosene lamps, storm lanterns, candles, etc., to light the room in which the meeting was held. Often lanterns were carried to church or meetings which were attended at night as the street lighting was so poor.

When we first went to Bexley we would see the lamplighter carrying his little step ladder over his shoulder every evening as he went on his rounds lighting the lamps. Later, when the incandescent burners were introduced, he used a stick with a hook on the end. There were two chains with rings attached at the end, hanging from the burner. To light the lamp, one of the rings would be pulled down and the burner would light. In the morning he would come round again and pull the other ring and the light would dim, but not go out. It was then ready to light in the evening by repeating the process.

Incandescent lights had a great habit of burning holes in the asbestos mantle if the light was pulled up too quickly, or exposed to a draught. The lamplighter must have spent as much time renewing mantles as lighting lamps.

An area which changed tremendously after we had left Bexley was along Forest Road from the old school to Preddy's Road. There were no streets running off Forest Road from Stoney Creek Road corner to Preddy's Road, and there were only two houses in all

that distance. The houses and the land belonging to them occupied the whole of that space.

They were Preddy's home *Besborough* and *Kinsel Grove*, the home of the Kinsela family. The Preddy home was fairly large, but *Kinsel Grove*, built by Mr Kinsela, founder of the firm of that name, was a large, square, stately home, standing in park-like grounds with a tennis court and carriage drive on the rise between Forest Road and Stoney Creek Roads. In the parklands from the house to the corner of these two roads were animals and birds roaming under the large trees. I am not quite clear as to the kind of animals they were. If my memory is correct, there were kangaroos, emus and deer. It was all very peaceful, and has left a delightful memory; the large shady trees, the tiny creek running through the grounds and the animals grazing; the green grass and tiny stream giving food and drink to the animals. There was also an animal shelter built for bad weather.

On the eastern side of Forest Road, from Dunmore Street to Queen Victoria Street, there were about three large houses, possibly four. One near the top of the hill was occupied by the Macleod family. Mr Macleod's brother was Dr Macleod of Rocky Point Road, Rockdale (now I think known as *Princes Highway*). The girls came to school with me, Jessie, Flora, and I think there was a third girl.

From the corner of Queen Victoria Street, looking towards Carlton, there was a large open common. Away in the distance could be seen a few houses. I would say those houses which were seen in the distance would be within walking distance of Carlton Railway Station.

Other large houses in Bexley, Arncliffe and Rockdale are worth mentioning, as also are the families who lived in them. Mr Gibbins lived in a large home on Wollongong Road, about half way between Bexley and Arncliffe. I have been told that he accumulated his money in the pearl fishing industry. Before we left Bexley the house had been taken over by the Salvation Army as a "Girls' Home". Another residence was purchased about the same time by the Salvation Army, as a "Boys' Home". It stood on the top of the hill between the first and second gullies.

Miss Gibbins married Mr David Stead, for many years a leading official in the Government Fisheries Department. They lived for some time with their family of young children at *Lydham Hall*. Christina, a daughter of Mr Stead's by a previous marriage (known at school as "Peggie"), was a very quiet and almost shy girl at school. She later wrote a book which was wonderfully received. The reviews were the most outstanding I have ever read. It took the bankers and men of the financial world by storm. It was stated in effect that never had a woman shown such insight and understanding in matters of finance. She wrote other books later, but I understand she was living overseas, so I have not had any news of her for years.

Mr Clayton, a well-known Sydney solicitor, lived with his family at Myee near the junction of Wollongong and Forest Roads. Hector later became a solicitor and Harry became a doctor. Both these boys were at school with me. I am told the home is now a Babies' Home or Hospital.

Esrom Convalescent Hospital, which is connected with the Rachel Foster Hospital, Sydney, was once the home of the Cormack family. It was later bought by Mr Tom Morse (one of a large family of that name, who married and settled in the St George district some years previously). He named the house *Esrom*, which is the name Morse spelt backwards. They were still living there when we left Bexley.

Mr W G Judd, who had at one time a business interest in the Hurstville Brick Works near what is now Allawah Station, was a very much respected and well liked member of the community. He was always a most enthusiastic member of any organisation of which he was a member. He was Mayor of Rockdale for some time. He was much interested in the Congregational Church. He was deacon, choir master and an Office Member of the Literary and Debating Society of the Church. He lived at *Athelstane* in Wollongong Road, Arncliffe. He owned a large piece of land adjoining his house. This he made available for the use of the church football and cricket clubs. He was very interested in young people, and on occasions he and his wife would entertain a number of them at his weekend cottage in a delightful setting at Yowie Bay on the banks of the Hacking River.

My first drive in a motor car was with Mr and Mrs Judd. I'll never forget it. It was a glorious day and we drove to Yowie Bay. It was quite an experience. I asked how fast the car would go, so Mr Judd showed us what he considered "speeding". We travelled at 34 miles per hour. It was an open car of course and compared with the very low cars of the present day, we appeared to be perched very high in the air.

There are of course many men and women who did much to help build Bexley to the important position it holds today, but it is of course not possible to write of more than a few who started the good work.

To be continued.