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ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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7 Lynwood St
Blakehurst

OCTOBER 1991

NEXT MEETING

THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM - A PREVIEW

After three years delay the Australian National Maritime Museum is due to open on the 31st October. The museum will cover all aspects of Australian maritime history and use of the sea. As Australia is an island continent this should be particularly relevant to much of our history. Our speaker, Mary Smith, will give an interesting preview of what we can expect from this important cultural institution.

DATE: Friday, 8pm, 18 October

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

SUPPER ROSTER: Members please bring a plate.

Office Holders

PRESIDENT: Bernard Sharah 567 6063

SECRETARY: Mrs Val Beehag 546 2819

TREASURER: Mrs Margaret Persen 771 5461

VICE-PRESIDENT: Noel Beehag 546 2819

RESEARCH OFFICER: Arthur Ellis 587 1159

SOCIAL SECRETARY: Mrs Joan Fairhall 546 5555

PROMOTIONS OFFICER: Mrs Joan Byrne 567 8641

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

LAST MEETING

At our August Meeting members endorsed the change of meeting night to the 2nd Tuesday of the month. This change will not take place until our meeting in February next year.

Guest speaker, Lynette Silver, gave us an amusing account of *The Battle of Vinegar Hill*. Mrs Silver had copies of the book for sale to members at a discounted price. She also brought along a number of copies of her new book *The Heroes of Rimau*, the first run of which has already sold out.

TEMPE HOUSE

Members will recall some months ago that concern was expressed over the apparent lack of security at Tempe House. In spite of a sign on the back gate warning potential intruders that the site is patrolled by a surveillance company, it was quite evident that the rear entrance to the property was open and presumably anyone could enter unchallenged. The physical condition of the two historic buildings on the site was another area of concern.

After pursuing this matter for some time we have received a commitment regarding the provision of security fencing around the property. Qantek have indicated in a letter to our society that after demolition of the dormitory complex (deemed to be of insufficient historical importance to justify retention) security fencing would be erected within six to eight weeks.

Qantek assures us that Tempe House is in quite good order and that any water damage to the St Magdalen's Chapel is very minimal.

COMMONWEALTH BANK 60TH ANNIVERSARY

In December this year the Rockdale and Arncliffe branches of the Commonwealth Bank will celebrate their 60th Anniversary. They have asked for some assistance in preparing a photographic display for the occasion.

We have liaised with Rockdale Library to make a number of photographs available. If members have any old photos of the area (particularly those taken of the shopping centres) the Commonwealth Bank would greatly appreciate the loan of the photos for the display. Please contact Bernard Sharah on 567 6063.

FINANCIAL REPORT

In this issue is a copy of the half-yearly financial report which due to oversight was not previously published in the bulletin.

St. GEORGE HISTORICAL

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

INCOME

Members Subscriptions	412.00
Donations and stamp duty refund	80.60
Sale of Society Books and Badges	295.00
	<u>787.60</u>

Balance in Bank at 30th June 1990 2034.61

\$2822.21

I certify that I have examined the books of account Vouchers, cheque butts and bank statements presented by Miss C. Wilding as treasurer of the above society and in my opinion this represents a true statement of its financial affairs as at 20th January, 1991

L. Thompson.....

auditor 20/1/91

SOCIETY

HALF YEAR ENDING 20th JANUARY, 1991

EXPENDITURE

Unpresented cheques from June 1990	140.52
Mr Sharah, Postage	223.96
Australia Post, Registration	65.00
R.A.H.S. Annual Subscription	50.00
R.A.H.S. Annual Conference	48.00
Mrs. Loring, Secretarial Expenses	3.23
Mrs. Perkins. Gift for Services	29.95
Miss Annabel, Travelling Expenses (Speaker)	20.00
Torch Publishing, Envelopes.	223.00
Mrs. Beehag, Secretarial Expenses	18.24
Mrs. Beehag, Rubber Stamp	17.60
Miss Wilding, Treasurers Expenses	33.02
R.I.D. and R.D.T.	3.49
	<u>876.01</u>
Less unpresented cheque from December	<u>37.48</u>
	<u>838.53</u>

Less *for postage* underpayment on Sept. -Oct Postage

.72
837.81

Balance in Bank at 14/1/91

1984.40
\$ 2822.21

ST GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

INCOME

Balance in Bank at 14.1.91	1984.40
Members subscriptions	45.00
Donations	61.20
Sale of society books	150.00
Bus trip.. Ryde	350.00
Coach trip.. Carcoar	2970.00
Bank Interest	66.91
	<u>\$5627.51</u>

Ryde Bus trip	756.00
Deposit	350.00
Expenses	406.00
	<u>\$756.00</u> <u>\$756.00</u>

Carcoar Coach Trip	3680.00
Deposit	2970.00
Expenses	450.00
profit	280.00
banked July	<u>\$3680.00</u> <u>\$ 3680.00</u>

Expenditure

Postage	197.68
Gift for Speaker	8.93
National Trust subscription	50.00
Wreath - Mrs Stahl	30.00
R.A.H.S. Public Liability	135.00
30th Birthday Cake	49.00
Donation to St Peters Restoration	50.00
Carcoar Coach Trip - deposit	2520.00
Carcoar expenses to Mrs J Fairhall	450.00
Ryde bus tour & Group Entrance	350.00
Outstanding Cheque 430378- presented	37.48
F.I.D. \$1-85 P.D.T. \$ 3.35	5.18
Balance in bank 28th June 1991	<u>1813.74</u>
	<u>\$5677.51</u>

less unrepresented cheque June 430395

	50.00
	<u>\$5627.51</u>

I have examined the books, bank statements, vouchers and cheque books presented by Mrs Persenpas Treasurer of the above society and in my opinion this represents a true statement of its financial affairs as at 30th June 1991.

..d. Thompson..

Auditor 9th August 1991

BEXLEY AS I KNEW IT

(1895 - 1917)

(This is Part 2 of Grace Nicholls' story originally published in the St George Historical Society Bulletin February 1964)

The trains until after we had left Bexley were all steam-driven. They ran once an hour, to and from Sydney Station, which at that time was situated on the southern side of Devonshire subway, which runs from Central Square to Bourke Street. The subway at that time was Devonshire Street, and was in much the same position to the old station as Eddy Avenue is to the present one.

We lived three quarters of a mile from Rockdale Station. The only conveyance from the station was a horse-drawn wagonette, which occasionally met the trains. As the charge from the station to our home was 2 shillings, we mostly ended up walking home, up the steep Frederick Street hill.

As the district continued to grow and the transport did not improve, a tram line was laid from Arncliffe Station, along Wollongong Road, into Forest Road, past the old school, and along Stoney Creek Road. The whole line was three miles in length. Although the lines were welded for future electrification, with the idea of joining the new line and the Cook's River Bridge service, this was never done. A steam tram ran for a few years before the 1914-1918 war. Besides giving better transport to a Railway Station, it contributed largely to opening Alston Park Estate (the open country to the north of Stoney Creek Road). The lines were taken up later and buses began to take the place of trams. That was after we had gone to live in Vaucluse.

The Kinsela Estate was subdivided, the trees and parklands disappeared (the animals had long since gone) and rows of houses were built round the old home. It would be difficult to find the old place if one did not know it in the early days - that is, of course, if it is still standing. Shopping centres sprang up like mushrooms and the old Bexley was completely transformed.

I cannot help thinking that an article in a daily paper was in a small way responsible for some of the growth of Bexley. The article stated that by world-wide statistics it was found that Sydney was the healthiest city in the world, and medical statistics proved that by average, Bexley had the least deaths of any of Sydney's suburbs. Bexley residents were going about telling people that Bexley was the healthiest spot in the world.

About this time there was also a large influx of British migrants. Bexley had a fair share. It was about this time that Sydney was introduced to the slang word "Pommy" for the English.

Bexley is all so very different now. One pleasant little spot which most children and many adults loved was the first gully. It was a small gully, not very wide or deep. It commenced near Stoney Creek Road, and went through the back of Bexley, old Arncliffe, nearly to Tempe.

The part of the gully we liked most was at the bottom of Bay View Street, about ten minutes walk from the school. It was the first of three gullies running almost parallel with Forest Road, on the western side, almost as far as Belmore.

I understand that the East Hills Railway line runs along the second gully. (Of course all that country was in its native state then.)

It was very pretty in the first gully, with very many native flowers growing. Bordering a small creek were Lilli Pilli trees, with wild clematis, sarsaparilla and hardenbergia vines entwining the branches, and on each side of the little stream grew bracken, small lavender, pink, and blue bush orchids, small purple and white wild violets, and many varieties of native flowers. Along the creek banks grew maidenhair fern, and several other varieties. It was a delightful spot, but it has all completely disappeared in the march of progress.

I would like to write of Brighton-le-Sands as I knew it, which is totally different from anything one could imagine it ever resembled.

It was originally named *Lady Robinson's Beach*. The baths were dreadful; all the timber used in their construction was about as heavy as railway sleepers are. All the protection one had to the dressing cubicles was a flapping piece of hessian hung across the doorway. Many of them faced south and they were all exposed to all the winds that blew across the wide bay.

There was a wide pier built at right angles to the street, and running out into the water, boarded on each side by the timber enclosures to the ladies' baths on the right and the gentlemen's on the left. As one walked along the pier, on the right was painted in huge letters on white, anything up to two feet high: "*Gentlemen walk on, blackguards look in.*" By the time anyone had walked far enough along the pier, the figures bathing would look not much larger than ants, and then all in neck to knee costumes.

The south-eastern corner of Bay Street and the Esplanade was a most desolate spot, sand dunes, scrub and rubbish etc. A little later a place which was named *Shady Nook* was developed on it. It was slightly better, but not much. There were some benches and tables and a merry-go-round, with a raucous, wheezy

Calliope to supply the music. In memory I can still hear quite distinctly "*She was the Belle of New York*". It played one other tune, but I do not remember it.

The place attracted crowds of people on public holidays and weekends. It eventually became the kind of public place that respectable people shunned. There was one murder committed there on a Sunday afternoon while *Shady Nook* was crowded with people.

Bexley school children went to the baths for swimming lessons (although no one taught us) every Friday afternoon during the summer. Very often the steam tram in which we travelled was crowded with men returning to Rockdale Station from the races. Later the race-course was closed, and the whole area was subdivided into streets and building blocks. Now for very many years it has been what may be called a suburb of Rockdale.

I have written of the changes to the district. I will now tell of the big changes to the school itself while we lived there.

When we went to Bexley the attendance must have been something over 200, as I remember Father coming home soon after we went there, and telling us there had been a record attendance of 240 pupils.

At first the district, also the attendance, grew rather slowly; then later, more quickly, till a few years before the 1914-1918 War, it was found necessary to enlarge the accommodation for the pupils. Quite a number of children in the earlier days had to walk up to two miles each way to and from school. Later small schools (one at least was a kindergarten) were built in the district, which made it much easier for small children to attend school, bringing school and home so much closer together.

About this time or perhaps a little earlier, a large galvanised iron building was erected in Broadford Street very near the school. It was used for the *Silent Movies*. One half only was roofed, sixpence was charged for the roofed end and threepence for the unroofed part. The whole building was later floored and covered, and for quite some time it was used to accommodate some of the school pupils. Christ Church Hall was utilised next. This was not sufficient, so prefabricated rooms were erected in the school grounds, followed by more and more prefabricated rooms. An extension of two rooms, a corridor, and the enlargement of an existing room, onto the old building was not nearly sufficient.

Finally, a brick two-storied building of four rooms was erected in the grounds. Before it was finished, it was found necessary to double it in size. By that time the playground had so many buildings, there was not much room for the children to move about.

When the First World War broke out, there were calls for books and reading matter for the troops, from Salvation Army Headquarters, Red Cross, etc., for use on transports, in hospitals etc. I collected from my friends, and asked Father to send a notice round the school, asking for any suitable reading matter the children's parents could spare.

The result was astounding. Hundreds of books, magazines and other reading matter came in, and continued to do so until we left Bexley in 1917. Each magazine enclosed a letter from one of the senior pupils, and some very interesting replies were received by the pupils. Father packed them in cartons which a local carrier took to the receiving depot.

One of the lady teachers organised knitting classes for girls and boys, and these classes were held regularly during school hours. They made socks, scarves, Balaclava caps, and other comforts, which were all sent to troops overseas.

One fete held in the old school and grounds, by the school, staff and residents of Bexley, brought in 1200 to 1300 pounds. Smaller war efforts were also held for Red Cross, War Chest and other war comforts funds.

It became very difficult for the Education Department to keep up supplies of men teachers to the various schools which were short staffed (as many were) owing to enlistment, numbers killed and other casualties.

Father through this lack of sufficient teachers was obliged to teach a class of 80 boys, as well as supervising a school with an enrolment of 1200 pupils and a total teaching staff of 22. The school had a few years previously been divided into three departments, boys, girls and infants, all at Primary level. We were then planning for Father's retirement. The strain was telling on him. He had been teaching for 48 years, and for more than 30 of them had suffered attacks from Angina Pectoria.

I do not think he would have retired during the war if he had been in good health. Father retired at the end of 1917. He held a 1A Classification and he had built the school to a 1st class Classification. He had been teaching at Bexley School nearly 22 and a half years. He was nearly 63 when he retired, and his salary on retiring was under 6 pounds a week.

Better conditions and pay came in a few years after Father's retirement.