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ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL



# ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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7 Lynwood St  
Blakehurst 2221

DECEMBER 1991

COME ALONG TO OUR  
CHRISTMAS GET-TOGETHER  
AT  
LYDHAM HALL  
SATURDAY 14TH DECEMBER  
2PM

SEE SEPARATE SHEET FOR DETAILS

IMPORTANT

THIS WILL REPLACE OUR NORMAL  
DECEMBER MEETING

The President and Committee  
wish everyone of you

**A HAPPY CHRISTMAS**

### OFFICE HOLDERS

PRESIDENT: Bernard Sharah 567 6063

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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

### ***SOCIETY NEWS***

At our last meeting it was good to see a few members who have been unable to attend recently.

John Curren had an accident on his motorcycle and we were pleased to see him up and around.

Betty Robinson returned from her overseas jaunt - She enjoyed the trip to Europe very much in spite of the trip she had on the way (Betty had a nasty fall on deck and broke her arm).

Peter Sage sends his apologies as he will be unable to attend our Christmas get-together at Lydham Hall. He will be spending the day with his father who will be celebrating his 92nd birthday. Congratulations to your father, Peter, and sorry we won't see you on the day.

## LAST MEETING

### HORSE-TROUGH

There was the problem of what to do with the horse-trough which has been kept in the backyard of the late Mrs Piper for many years. The horse-trough was originally located at the corner of Connells Point and King Georges Roads, South Hurstville. As Mrs Piper's house is to be sold in the near future a new home had to be found for the trough. The Society wrote to Rockdale Council to have the trough moved to a more suitable location and Council has since suggested Rockdale Park as a site for its relocation.

### LIAISON OFFICER FUNDING

Over many years the Royal Australian Historical Society has provided much need support to affiliated societies, such as our own, through the medium of its liaison office position. This position up until last year been fully funded by the State Government. Over the past year the position has only been partially funded and the balance made up by the RAHS. Given the limited finance of the RAHS, this is a situation that cannot continue indefinitely. The liaison officer provides valuable expertise to historical societies that would be sorely missed if the position was discontinued due to a lack of funding. Accordingly, it was decided to lobby the State Government and local members to restore the full subsidy.

### ROSEMARY BLOCK

The Bicentenary proved to be a great catalyst for oral history and history in general. However, after the history boom came the bust, and since 1988 then there has very little activity in the recording of oral history. Rosemary Block is the Oral History Project Officer for the State Library and her visit as guest speaker was to promote this particular field of study. Her task is also to encourage the proper storage of existing recordings and make this material be more accessible to the public. The State Library has top quality recording equipment which is available on loan for approved oral history projects. Rosemary's talk was very informative and effectively highlighted the value of oral history.



## **DARK FAMILY SECRET NO LONGER**

by Alan Gill

(This article originally published Dec. 90 in Heritage Conservation News)

Eleanor Dark died in September 1985, aged 84, and her husband, who was 98, in July 1987. Both were prominent Blue Mountains identities.

The Minister for the Arts, Peter Collins, will officially open the writers' retreat at Varuna, in Cascade Street, early in the New Year. Three writers are already in residence. The owner of the property, Mick Dark, who inherited it from his parents, has generously donated it for community purposes.

The environment centre, located in Waratah Street, near the town centre, opened in mid-September. Both will be run by the newly formed Eleanor Dark Foundation.

The NSW Government has made grants totalling about \$90,000 towards the two projects.

Eleanor and Eric Dark lived in Varuna, and the house which previously occupied the site, for more than 60 years. Its peace and solitude, and the mist coming through the tall trees in their two acre (0.8 ha) garden, influenced her writing, which has contributed significantly to Australia's literary heritage.

Heritage means many things. Dr Eric Dark contributed, in his own way, equally to Australia's heritage. Indeed, in a manner of speaking he was a heritage "item" himself.

As a medical practitioner, whose service to the local community spanned over 50 years, Eric Dark had the reputation of Mr Chips and Dr Cameron (of "Dr Finlay's Casebook" fame) rolled into one.

He bought a medical practice in Katoomba, in 1922, having fallen in love with the area while on cycling trip. He officially retired in 1950, but started again as a school medical officer, visiting schools in the Blue Mountains and Blaxland Shire, being finally instructed to quit - he was then in his 80's - in 1965.

Stories are legion of his concern - particularly of his tact, during the depression years, in "forgetting" to bill poorer patients.

His experiences in the depression led to an association with left wing politics, and to accusations - which he denied - that he was a communist. He was expelled from the Returned Services League and suffered various indignities including an anonymous letter campaign.

In World War II, all this was forgotten. He was given an astonishing intelligence assignment by Australia's military

brass. This was to find a hideout in the mountains from which, in the event of Japanese occupation, guerillas could set up bases from which to harass the enemy.

Dr Dark located just such a redoubt, then - according to local lore - kept the information to himself. After the war, so the story goes, he and Eleanor Dark continued to visit their hideout, from which, lacking the distraction of visitors, she produced some of her best work.

In April 1946, Dr Dark was considered for the post of Australian Ambassador to Russia. The information was leaked to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and the campaign against him renewed. Dr Dark was at the time vice-president of the Katoomba branch of the ALP, which was in the electorate of the then Prime Minister, Ben Chifley.

His situation was not helped by an article under his by-line, in another newspaper, which criticised ALP policies as being "too soft" on certain industrial issues. There was an outcry - this time from Dr Dark's own party - to which the State Executive responded by withdrawing the charter of the Katoomba branch.

Once more, so the story goes, Eric Dark found refuge in his mountains' hiding place. Locals feared the couple would die without revealing its whereabouts. The mystery this engendered became - and still is - a talking point.

Mick Dark says there is truth and falsehood in all these assertions. His father passed details of several caves to the authorities, but DID keep information about one of them - his favourite - to himself.

According to Mick Dark: "Dad discovered the cave before the war, so did not feel obliged to pass it on. He took his assignment seriously, but with an element of "tongue in cheek". Food and other supplies would have had to be dropped by air. He was well aware that if it came to the crunch they would be unsuitable."

Eleanor and Robert Dark DID pass the secret of its location to their son, who accompanied his parents on visits as a boy, and describes it as "like a weekender, a marvellous place, a sort of big overhang, with room for a dozen people."

Actually, the Dark family secret is not really a "secret" at all. In the past few years various bush walking groups and individuals have found it, even spending the night in its portals. One such group left behind a "visitors' book" inviting subsequent visitors to sign it and send a postcard to the immediate previous caller to ascertain the time elapsed.

Eleanor Dark did not use the cave "for writing, but to get away from writing." She did most of her literary work in a separate, purpose built studio, in the garden of Varuna. Its privacy was



sacrosanct. Mick Dark recalls, as a boy, being told that his mother was to be disturbed only "in a life or death situation". One day, feeling lonely, he tapped on the door, and opening it a few inches, declared: "This is a life or death situation."

The studio, like the main house, has been restored, and will offer accommodation to one of the visiting writers. Eleanor Dark's writing desk is still there, along with some old notes, a recipe book, her husband's globe, and a fascinating assortment of photographs. She wrote all her books longhand, in pencil. Writers who stay at Varuna will have modern innovations, including loan of computer terminals, courtesy of local firms.

Varuna will take up to seven or eight guests, depending on how the accommodation is used, on a length of stay varying between one week and three months. Appropriately, early visitors will include two writers, Barbara Brooks and Judith Clark, who are preparing a biography of Eleanor Dark.

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#### BRONWYN PERKINS

The untimely death of former Society secretary, Bronwyn Perkins, came as a shock to most members. At age 69, Bronwyn, died on 17 November from a cerebral haemorrhage.

Bronwyn was a person of strong religious belief and character. At age, 18 she commenced studies at Croydon Bible College. After graduating she became Mission Sister at the Sydney City Mission for four years.

It was only fitting that Bronwyn served the Society as Secretary as she was a secretary for most of her working life. For many years she was Secretary to the Department of Surgery at St George Hospital.

A sincere and caring person, Bronwyn quietly went about the business of helping others in the most inconspicuous manner. Apart from work as Mission Sister she was a counsellor for Calvary Hospital providing consolation to relatives and friends of patients.

Bronwyn gave many years of valuable service to the Society both as Publicity Officer (1976-1990) and Secretary (1987-1990). She compiled the Society booklet *Early Churches of the St George District* as well as doing an enormous amount of transcription work for the Society's Community Radio broadcasts.

Above all, Bronwyn's sincerity and thoughtfulness will always be remembered by Society members.