



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

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NBH-0335

7 Lynwood St
Blakehurst

MARCH 1992

NEXT MEETING

TUESDAY 10 TH MARCH

Art Deco

with

Mary Nilsson

Until recently this strikingly appealing decorative style has been under-valued and under-appreciated- hence the formation last year of the Art-Deco Society. The Society's President, Mary Nilsson is a forthright and witty spokesperson for the group. Mary will also be glad to comment on any Art-Deco piece you care to bring along.

LOCATION: Council Chambers, Rockdale Town Hall
Princes Highway, Rockdale.

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

Our inaugural Tuesday night was well attended and the subject of the talk - *The Mecca Cinema* ensured lively discussion. The meeting attracted a representation from Hurstville Historical Society, Hazel Blair and June Lane, and there were some familiar and welcome faces present, Peter Sage and Bruce Blackshaw.

NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to new members Pamela Herrick of Caringbah and Mrs Joyce Saunders of Arncliffe. Mrs Saunders' late husband was well-known to long-term Society members. Vincent Saunders was an alderman on Rockdale Council and took a keen interest in local history. He contributed a well remembered article about the round towered church of St Francis Xavier's Arncliffe. Pamela Herrick is no stranger to history - she has a university degree in the subject. We look forward to seeing both new members soon.

A REPRIEVE FOR THE MECCA CINEMA

The Heritage Council last month declared the Mecca (Savoy) Cinema an *item of heritage* but the future of the Art-Deco picture palace still hangs in the balance. Kogarah Council will determine the Mecca's fate at the conclusion of a Heritage Council funded feasibility study to consider the building's reuse.

At last month's Society meeting members voted to endorse President Bernard Sharah's submission to Kogarah Council to retain the building.

At that meeting National Trust representative, Graham Quint, gave a talk on the merits of the Mecca and in particular looked at ways in which the building could be reused.

The National Trust rates the Mecca the third most significant cinema in NSW after the State and Capitol Theatres. Considering the fact that the Capitol is in a serious state of neglect and dilapidation and that the State Theatre itself is threatened with unsympathetic alterations (pillars to exploit the airspace above) the once ubiquitous picture palace is now a rare item of heritage.

Mr Quint pointed out that there is dearth of live entertainment venues in Sydney and that the Mecca would be ideal to stage first-run shows in the same way that new shows overseas are generally tried "off Broadway".

At the conclusion of the talk Mecca owner, Mr Phil Doyle, addressed the meeting and pointed out some of the difficulties to be encountered if the building was to be retained. He stated that the stage area would be too small for live shows and the building had suffered considerable deterioration since the cessation of business.

HERITAGE GARAGE SALE

Do you have old furniture or bric-a-brac that you would like to get rid of? Or perhaps some disused building materials such as an old door or window that you simply haven't got around to disposing of? Well, this is your opportunity to actually sell that item. Rockdale Heritage Association are organising a *Heritage Garage Sale* to raise money for their group. Ten percent of sale price goes to the Association. If you are interested ring Geoff Croft 567 8206.

INCORPORATION

Our plans to incorporate the St George Historical Society are way over schedule but, you will be pleased to hear, nearing completion.

Incorporation is seen as an essential measure to protect our members from the risk of litigation. Additionally it would create the Society as a legal entity thereby enabling it to hold, acquire and dispose of property.

We are required under the Associations Incorporation Act 1984 to have a set of rules governing a whole range of Society issues such as membership, voting, election of officers, powers of committee, conduct of meetings, etc. Our existing constitution covers some of these issues but in many instances we have no ruling. A model set of rules has been adapted to include provisions from the Society's existing constitution. At the last meeting of the Society's management committee this proposed constitution was thoroughly scrutinised and recommended for members approval.

Within the next month we intend to forward to all members a copy of the new constitution for your perusal. Under the Incorporation Act's guidelines a Special General Meeting must be convened for endorsement of the proposed constitution. Committee has suggested that this be held in April in lieu of our normal general meeting.

The delay in incorporation has been holding up the organisation of social outings and tours. With the completion of the legal process we will resume these activities. Some of the suggestions for future activities include a picnic day at Vaucluse House, a tour of Sydney University and more local history walks.

IN MEMORIUM

The last month or so saw the passing of three more members of our Society - Mrs Joan Price, Miss Florence Lambert and Mrs Noreen Judd. Mrs Price was Minutes Secretary from 1987 to 1989 when failing health prevented her from taking an active role in the Society. Of a quiet and unassuming nature Mrs Price carried out valuable work for the Society and her contribution will be remembered. Miss Lambert a regular attendee of Society meetings will be long remembered for her independent spirit. She was always very proud of the fact that she was one of the first women in New South Wales to obtain a motor vehicle driver's licence. She held her driver's licence right up until the last couple of years of her life. Mrs Noreen Judd was a remarkable lady who overcame tremendous physical disabilities. The committee extends its sympathies to relatives and friends of the departed, in particular to Mr Charles Price and Mrs Eileen Eardley.

EXPLOSIVE EXPOSURES

A historic old 35mm nitrate film in Rockdale Municipal Library proved to be one item the Library was glad to be rid of.

Late last year the Society brought to the attention of Rockdale Library staff the alarming state of decomposition of an old film in the Local Studies Section. Stored in a metal canister, it was labelled *Opening Bardwell Park* and the partly obliterated date appeared to be in the 1920's.

Kellie Grenfell, the Local Studies Librarian, contacted Mr Martin Wood of the National Film and Sound Archive to have the film examined. On collecting the film Mr Wood informed library staff of the explosive properties of nitrate film and needless to say they were somewhat relieved to have it removed from the premises.

The film is now in Canberra where it will be assessed for its historic value. Mr Wood promised to keep us informed.

LYDHAM HALL VOLUNTEERS PLEASE

Would you like to learn a little more about Lydham Hall and at the same time perform a valuable task for the Society? Joan Byrne is organising a group of people to be trained as tour guides. If you are interested please ring Joan on 567 8641.

A SOUTHERN SUBURBS TRUST?

A meeting was held on 27 February at the Hurstville Civic Centre to consider the establishment of a *southern suburbs* branch of the National Trust.

Such a move be the first of its type in a metropolitan area. The Trust already has a number of branches in country areas.

The meeting drew a good response and there were plenty of volunteers to form an interim steering committee to make the necessary preparations for the establishment of the branch. It was particularly heartening to see so many people interested in the heritage of this area.

ANYONE FOR....CRICKET?

Do any of our members have diaries related to the sport of cricket? Rockdale Library has received an enquiry from the Charles Sturt University of Albury who are seeking **primary source** material on the subject of cricket. If you have any such material please contact Kellie Grenfell, Local Studies Librarian, Rockdale Library 597 1666.

MY HOUSE
BY
SISTER GONZAGA STANLEY

In this bicentennial year, one's mind is inclined to withdraw from our sky-scrapered skyline, and to endeavour nostalgically to recall the sky-scrapers of homes in the last century with their gentle outlines, with outlines, with even a surmounting scroll featuring the name, such as *Meath House*, or in my case, *Kinkora*. How much kinder this is than the rectangular ugliness of storeys of units raising their shoe-box shapes against our Australian skies.

As the last survivor of one of the characteristically large families of the turn of the century, I look back at times through the eyes of my elder sisters, at our ancestral home which still stands, sentinel like, with its three storeys above the neighbouring two-storey terrace houses - once called Stanley Terrace - at 25 Cleveland Street, Redfern, between Bourke and South Dowling Streets, on the south side of Cleveland Street. Up until a few years ago, it still maintained its original name, *Meath House* from County Meath, Ireland, the birthplace of Patrick Stanley, an Irish emigrant who left his native land in 1845, at the time of the Irish famine. Though the house is still there, it bears another name, *Illoura* with its street number 461, and is today a shabby edition of what would have been, in the mid 1890's a well-built home capable of accommodating its owner's family of two sons and five daughters, as well as a number of grandchildren from time to time.

The builder of these properties had to start from rock bottom. As a nineteen-year-old immigrant to a new land, he must have exercised courage and enterprise. A family legend has it that an uncle had given him three golden sovereigns from his bakery, and advised him to set off from famine stricken Ireland and seek his fortune, like Dick Whittington, in a new land. His mother's death certificate reveals that he came from a farming family, so that when he arrived in Australia, he sought work in the market gardens set up by Jean Baptist near Redfern.

From working in the market garden business, he was either given land, for, in ten years, he was able to bring out and support his mother, Mary Stanley. Up till a few years ago, there was an old hoarding up in the area of Paddy's Markets, bearing the name *Christopher Stanley, Shipping Providore*, Christopher being the name of his grandson, later in the same business. When I went last year hoping to see it, the old buildings had been replaced by new ones. It is interesting to note, too, that an article appeared in a Sydney newspaper, five or six years ago, on the name *Paddy's Markets*. One theory put forward was that they were called after Patrick Stanley, Mayor of Redfern. The more likely origin, however, was given as being called after the number of Chinese paddies who worked the markets.

However interesting these suggestions are, the fact remains that Patrick Stanley became a wealthy man. There may have been other profitable sidelines readily available in the expanding colony, to have enabled Patrick, within a few decades, to accumulate house property - about twenty dwellings in the Redfern area, considerable land - some fifty acres at Belmore and Hurstville, later to form the dowries of his daughters, Kitty and Mary, two sizeable dairy properties on the Richmond River and *Meath House*. And he - the Dick Whittington of 19th century New South Wales - became Mayor of Redfern not three times, like his London counterpart of the 15th century, but four times (details of the will in the Sydney Municipal Council.) More significant for his adopted country, though, is the fact that he set up a fine family of Stanleys, O'Briens, Bridges, Scahills and Keoghs who have proliferated into dozens of other families who have produced people distinguished in many fields - business, professional and academic fields - over some five generations.

The focal centre of this widespread family was *Meath House*, the old home of Patrick Stanley and his wife Elizabeth Regan. As the families appeared, Grandpa Stanley's home became the rendezvous of the grandchildren who were brought on Sunday mornings to see and delight their grandparents. One grand-daughter, Mary Bridge, writes in her autobiography,

"Jack, my big brother, and I loved these affectionate people. Grandpa Stanley was full of vigour, however. We gave them crazy concerts in the evenings when we stayed with them. Jack would stuff a pillow under his small pyjamas coat like a cranky old man. This produced hearty laughter from Grandpa, and Grandma's eyes twinkled. We had fun, too, looking over Grandpa's fence on to Stanley Lane to watch the antics of the cabby's monkey, attached to a long lead, as it scampered round the yard below, and up and down a peppercorn tree quite near us. Another joy was listening to *Grimm's Fairy Tales* read by one of our grandparents."

The Stanley girls remembered, too, how Grandpa, after the death of his dear Bessy, would love to have his Stanley grand-daughters read to him in the evenings from Dicken's novels; in fact, they were paid threepence a week for such a chore. The Stanleys lived close by in another three storey house, *Kincora*, still standing at 651 South Dowling Street, and still quite elegant with its black "Sydney lace" on each of its three storeys, set against its tasteful henna coloured facade.

Being a much younger member of the Stanley family, I never saw my grandmother, but Grandpa lingered on for many years in that large house, empty except for his Irish housekeeper. I remember feeling very much in awe of a large portrait of the very solemn, life-size, George Eliotish visage of my great-grandmother, and was told that the tiny deguerrotype (about four inches by three inches), on the dusty blue velvet tablecloth of the small table nearby, was the original photo which had been sent to China to be enlarged to life-size. This large portrait was passed on through

the generations till I was the last owner. As I had nowhere to keep it, I presented it to the Mitchell Library. When removed from its frame after about a century, the words *Hong Kong* were printed in large lettering across the back, thus proving the truth of the enlargement being a Chinese process.

For a description of the Victorian residence, *Meath House*, I am indebted to my sister, Elizabeth Stanley, former librarian for some thirty years at the Fisher Library, Sydney University, and later in charge of the Library, Sydney Law School. This is how she writes - she had a wonderful memory.

"Included in the many properties owned by Patrick Stanley was "that quintessence of urban, Victorian domestic architecture" - number 35 Cleveland Street, Redfern. Built almost on the street, separated from the footpath by about six feet of verandah, it reared its three storeys, the upper two bordered by balconies, above its single or two-storied neighbours. A long side passage with two doors, provided access to the house, which stretched back some hundred feet to an asphalt yard, with a row of poplars along one side, flanked by a series of stands for pot plants, opposite the windows of the domestic offices. A glassed verandah ran across the back of the house, and beyond the kitchen and laundry were a shed and a lavatory, with a bricked fowlyard stretching back to rather squalid land at the rear. In my childhood, there were still a few dispirited hens whose meal of bran and pollard, mixed to a kind of porridge with the household scraps, was usually compounded by my grandfather under my absorbed gaze. The lavatory, I remember, had a very high seat, rather awkward for my small stature, and was provided always with a bundle of neatly cut squares of newspaper on a loop of string hung on peg - shades of Lady Scott and the rainbow-hued and floral toilet rolls of this nuclear and wasteful age.

The ground and first floor front had a large drawing room with french windows opening on to the adjacent verandah and balcony. The ground floor was carpeted in a rather ugly mustard and red, with a suite of drab chairs, several small tables and whatnots crowded with sepia toned photos, a fair number of them being of ecclesiastical gentlemen who visited the well-to-do Catholics of the city. Dean O'Haran figured there, possible Archbishop Polding, and I know Cardinal Moran visited them on some family occasion."

Grandpa's name can be seen in St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, in the east transept, on one of the two brass rectangles of names of churches, schools and ecclesiastical institutions, together with a few names of individual, under the heading: "Cardinal Moran's Honour List".

To return to the description of *Meath House*.

"The outstanding article of furniture in the ground drawing room was a piano with a fretwork back, lined with red silk. My Aunt Julia played Gilbert and Sullivan by ear. I can still hear the tinkle of her bracelets. She suffered from a tubercular spine, but was a lively and cheerful character, with magnificent brown wavy hair, the care of which took up a lot of time and required several hair brushes. She used to divert herself on the telephone in our shop by exchanging airy badinage with the telephone clerk while waiting for her number to answer.

On the ground floor at the back of the drawing room, was a dark dining room, rendered even darker, by a suite of furniture upholstered in black horse-hair, whose prickly strands would be pulled out in the many boring periods when we were supposed to sit quietly while the grown-ups droned on interminably about family matters. Along one side was the sideboard, allegedly an exhibit at the London Exhibition in 1886, rearing its majestic mirror and elaborately carved mahogany, topped by two realistic pineapples; and on it was displayed the very beautiful silver tea and coffee service presented to grandfather as Mayor of Redfern, and now in the possession of his great grandson. Here, too, were several biscuit-barrels of Royal Doulton, the contents of which were usually limp and stale. The room (too) smelt rather pleasantly of apples, kept in a rather plebeian double-lidded basket lurking in a dark corner. The illumination was provided by the usual hideous gas chandelier of the period, equipped with one or two incandescent lights which were lit by a taper, applied by standing on the table beneath. My Aunt Julia was reported to have used this chore to escape the embraces of one of the regular old ladies - visitors - who was afflicted with a rather bristly chin.

Opposite the dining room was the main, rather unimpressive entrance door with frosted glass panels which opened on to a narrow stairway leading to the upper storeys. A long passage led out to the back verandah and kitchen, so that meals served in the dining room can never have been appetisingly hot, though the verandah pantry did house an impressive cohort of pewter dish covers as well as a rather hideous dinner service of solid china bordered with broad bands of solid turquoise, of which I still use the sole survivor - a soup plate. The kitchen was a rather long room with a window overlooking the asphalt yard with its border of poplars and pot plants on stands.

The equipment of the kitchen would appal the modern housewife used to a multiplicity of electric gadgets. There was a fuel stove and a gas ring, the former not always lighted, and a stone sink and the necessary wooden table and chairs, also a chiffonier which housed cutlery and various small items such as cruets.

The brick walls were a deep cream, and the last household help who reigned there, had adorned them with colour prints cut from the Jubilee issue of one of the London journals commemorating the glorious reign of Queen Victoria. The one I most admired showed the youthful sovereign, looking like one of Greuze's blooming maidens. Another kitchen appurtenance was an old clock with a charming face garlanded with flowers. It never functioned in my time, but supplied a rustic, decorative note in an otherwise prosaic apartment. Down a step from the kitchen was the laundry furnished with a brick copper, three wooden tubs and a long bench.

A verandah outside the dining room combined as a passage to the kitchen and an area for storing a dinner service and massive pewter dish covers.

Outside the dining room, a narrow stairway led to the other two storeys, with a bathroom and a maid's room opening on to a small landing at the top of the first flight. A smaller flight led to the bedroom occupied by my grandparents, comfortably furnished with a walnut suite and boasting a gas fire. A large drawing room occupied the rest of the floor. This was furnished rather more elegantly than its downstairs counterpart, with a green carpet and a suite of chairs with cabriolet legs, and matching sofa, upholstered in green satin. I remember, too, a couple of sinister looking paintings, which could only be landscapes of troll's country, being executed in dreary shades of grey. There were also a few pieces from the hands of a talented maidservant, Effie Nutt, a rather fragile looking lass who dealt with the pretty heavy chores of the household.

There was, of course, a good deal of bric-a-brac, some nice Wedgewood pieces, a few porcelain vases, and a quite fascinating screen with a Chinese dragon procession embroidered across it. I was also rather fond of a little girl on a swing, made of china, attached to one of the chandeliers, and a couple of Chinese mandarins with movable heads, and also a gilt clock under a glass dome.

As long as we, Matthew Stanley's children, lived in our shop on the opposite side of Cleveland Street at the corner of Bourke Street, several of us were always accommodated in the second floor bedrooms of *Meath House*, austere furnished with four-poster iron bedsteads with white canopies and mosquito nets, wash stands and dressing tables adorned with frills and blue bows. I can remember how our grandparent's bedroom was the gathering point at night for family and visitors, as Grandma was incapacitated with rheumatism. I can remember, too, how a German doctor, Herr Grader attended to her, supplying the evidently ineffective unguents, willingly applied by the current Abigail, who was always in admiration at her patient's smooth, white skin."

Such was *Meath House* at the turn of the century: the focal point of the growing number of families of grandchildren who found the big house a fascinating museum of furniture, ornaments, photos and news.

How grateful I am to my sister Elizabeth for these recorded memories which have brought to life for me the old home and the people who frequented it, after they had become so many families themselves. How I wish I could have known those dear people, my grandparents!

Happily I have here before me as I write, that sparkling cut-glass inkwell that is my one authentic memory of *Meath House*. How well I remember that day, when as a child of six, I made those beautiful rhomboidal patterns on the dust of the velvet tablecloth by pressing the somewhat heavy inkwell here and there over its surface, little suspecting that, one day I would have it to myself. How delighted I was to find it amongst the bric-a-brac in the old home at Greenwich, some seventy years later. It now brings back to me rather dim but tender memories of those grand life-giving people, the Stanleys of *Meath House*.

Sister Gonzaga Stanley's memoirs are an extract from *Locating Australia's Past* a book produced by the Local History Co-Ordination Project (University of NSW) The book is an excellent and very practical guide to writing local history and is recommended reading for anyone with an interest in this subject.

IF YOU ARE NOT ALREADY A MEMBER-

WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN OUR SOCIETY?

We are a group of people interested in local history and where possible we would like to see the preservation of historical records, sites and buildings.

We have outings to places of historic interest and have other activities such as history walks and day trips to heighten public interest in our heritage.

Our meetings are held on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at Council Chambers, 1st floor, Rockdale Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale at 8pm.

Our society assists in the running of "Lydham Hall", our historic house-museum located at Lydham Avenue, Rockdale and we have a monthly bulletin to keep members informed of current activities.

If you like to join please complete the following and forward with cheque for \$7 (individual) or \$10 (house hold) to 7 Lynwood Street Blakehurst 2221.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

NAME:

ADDRESS:

TEL.NO:

Please find enclosed cheque/money order for \$____.