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ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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7 Lynwood St
Blakehurst

JUNE 1992

NEXT MEETING

SYDNEY TRAMS

NOEL THORPE

Trams were first used in Sydney in 1861 and continued to be used as a method of transportation until 1961. In its heyday the tram had an extensive network throughout Sydney providing an efficient means of cheap public transport for a great many people. Society member, Noel Thorpe, has a fascinating collection of slides covering this period.

8pm TUESDAY 9TH JUNE

**Council Chambers, 1st Flr, Town Hall
Princes Highway, Rockdale.**

Members: Please bring a plate.

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

AUDITOR: Mrs L Thompson

All correspondence to the Secretary, 7 Lynwood St Blakehurst 2221

SOCIETY NEWS

THE END FOR THE MECCA CINEMA As most of you would have heard by now. The Heritage Council has rejected an application for a Permanent Conservation Order to be placed on the Mecca. This paved the way for Kogarah Council's approval of a mixed retail/commercial/residential re-development proposal which requires demolition of the 1930's Art Deco cinema. In Sydney this will leave only the State Theatre (air space under threat), the Cremorne Orpheum and the Capitol (decaying in its long wait for restoration).

HORSE TROUGH The horse-trough which was formerly stored in Mrs Piper's house has been removed for restoration to the home of Mr Gordon Smith. Anyone who is able to assist in the restoration (previous experience not needed, just willing hands) could they please contact Mr Smith on 580 1764.

JACK WOOD Last meeting we heard long-time member, Jack Wood, was to be hospitalised for an eye operation. We wish him well and hope the operation was a success. Get well soon, Jack.

MOORFIELDS CEMETERY Our May Bulletin carried a story about Moorfields Church and Cemetery. Dr Joan Hatton at our last meeting informed us that the church has been sold and there is some doubt about public access to the cemetery.

In last month's bulletin members were asked for any historical information regarding Arncliffe Park. This was to assist Rockdale Council in their plans to improve the facilities. To start the ball rolling I have published below a copy of letter I wrote from a personal perspective.

19 May 1992

Mr Paul Lavery
Parks & Gardens Department
Rockdale Municipal Council
Fax 597 3879

Dear Paul,

Accompanying this fax is an extract from a St George Historical Society publication, "The Arncliffe to Bexley Steam Tram" by Gifford Eardley.

It describes Arncliffe Park as it probably was in the early part of this century and gives the following information:-

- * The area was originally a chinese market garden owned by Kim Too.
- * March 1889 officially proclaimed a public park.
- * C.1904 avenue of trees planted around the perimeter of the park. Horsetrough installed.

The other information I have is based on personal recollection but is in my opinion accurate.

My family having lived opposite Arncliffe Park for almost 60 years can remember many features of the park as they were many years ago.

The Grandstand:

The original grandstand was not built in 1904 as stated in the "Arncliffe to Bexley Steam Tram" book. My maternal grandfather, Barney Jarvis, (aged 19 - 20 years old) played for a junior Rugby League football team called the Arncliffe Waratahs for the 1918-1919 seasons. The team had to change in a room at the rear of a shop which is now the former service station site at 82-84 Wollongong Road. There was no dressing shed and no grandstand then. A photo taken in 1910 bears this out. The original grandstand was a brick and timber structure much higher than the present building. It had an iron roof and was open to the weather at the rear (at the very top) Underneath were dressing rooms and toilet facilities.

When my grandparents moved into this house (number 78 Wollongong Road) on March 19 1932 the grandstand was already in existence so we can safely assume it was erected somewhere between 1919 and 1932.

The present building was constructed in 1979.

The RSL Club:

This was under construction in 1932 and was probably in use before the foundation stone date of 1934. The original building was single storey and set back slightly from the street. It had a very small forecourt with a flag pole and a low brick fence.

The War Memorial

According to Mr L. Merriman, another long term Arncliffe resident, the war memorial was erected in the early 1950's. On the four sides of the monument were black glass plaques which depicted a soldier, a sailor, an airman and a nurse (Edith Cavell's image).

The Stone Boundary Walls

These were constructed either shortly before or after February, 1935 as part of "Relief Work" during the Great Depression. My paternal grandfather, Mick Sharah, worked on this construction as well as a number of other projects which were carried out around the same time - the surfacing of Wollongong Road and the stonework at Gardiner Park, Banksia.

Park Furniture

On the Wollongong Road side there were three tables and seats of concrete and timber construction similiar to the present ones and in the same location. The tops of the tables had draughtboards incorporated in them.

The horse trough

Was of concrete construction and located almost directly opposite the service station site in Wollongong Road. The footings can still be seen.

Plantings

Much the same as today. The western side was much more rocky and barren than it is now. There have been some major losses. Three magnificent Port Jackson Figs have died and been removed but never replaced. One on the Wollongong Road frontage and two larger ones on the Broe Avenue side. There was also a row of Phoenix palms extending from almost the middle of the park to Mitchell Street - but they never did particularly well.

Could I make a suggestion on how to improve the park? I believe the Port Jackson Figs are the park's greatest assets. They are indigenous to Arncliffe and together with the stonework they lend character and beauty to an area sadly lacking in trees. Every effort should be made to ensure the extended life of these wonderful trees. (Some look like they may need attention). We have already lost three of these wonderful specimens (through borer infestation, I think). They belong to the area and should be replaced with the same type of tree.

I hope this information has been helpful. Please give me a call if I can be of further assistance.

Regards,

Bernard Sharah

THE HORDERN DYNASTY

An excerpt from "Streets of Old Sydney" by Alan Sharpe 1987.

A famous landmark will soon disappear but the name associated with it will be remembered for at least another generation. The name Hordern was first heard in Sydney in March 1825 when Anthony and Anne Hordern, a couple in their thirties, arrived with their three children as free passengers in the convict ship *Phoenix*. The *Phoenix* struck a reef just inside Sydney Heads and thereafter was used as a prison hulk moored at Lavender Bay. Anthony was a coachbuilder with dreams of becoming a farmer in the colony but his stern-faced wife had other ideas. Anthony opened a coach building and wheelwright workshop at 17 King Street, just down from Castlereagh Street, and Anne opened a bonnet and haberdashery store next door. In an advertisement in 1834 Mrs Hordern offered "Bargains in Bonnets" and "Ladies' stays boned to order".

In 1839 their eldest son, Anthony the Second, who was 20, visited the new settlement in Melbourne where land was available for a pittance. He was so impressed with the place that he persuaded his parents to move to Melbourne. They left the King Street haberdashery in the hands of their other son and daughter and bought three Melbourne town lots for a mere 380 pounds and opened a drapery store.

After dabbling in local politics in Melbourne, Anthony Hordern the Second returned to Sydney with his young family. His parents remained behind in Melbourne where his father died in 1869 having fulfilled his dream to become a farmer and seeing those three blocks of land multiply in value 170 times over.

Anthony Hordern formed a partnership with his brother, Lebbeus, and opened a drapery and haberdashery on Brickfield Hill in George Street. It was here that the Hordern trademark showing a Moreton Bay fig tree with the motto "While I live I grow" was born. The partnership lasted ten years, it ended with a quarrel and Anthony the Second opened his own store in the Haymarket bringing his two sons into the business and changing the name to Anthony Hordern and Sons. Anthony Hordern the Second died at Retford Hall, his palatial home in Darling Point in 1876. His sons, Anthony Hordern the Third and Sam Hordern the First continued the business which grew like the fig tree.

In the final two decades of the nineteenth century the company's turnover soared and the brothers kept acquiring adjacent premises for their expansion. Their claim to be "Universal Providers" was borne out by the wide range of goods offered in their weighty mail order catalogue. During this time there were family squabbles as to which of the several Hordern family businesses around town had the right to claim to be "the original".

When Anthony the Third died during one of his frequent overseas trips his brother, Sam the First, became the sole proprietor of

Anthony Hordern and Sons Palace Emporium, the biggest department store in the southern hemisphere. At its peak the company employed 3,500 people and operated a fleet of 200 carts. Sam Hordern enjoyed his wealth: he bred horses on his extensive property at Bowral and a well-known photograph of him exists wearing a yachting cap as Commodore of the Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club.

In the 1890's there were six retail outlets in the city area bearing the Hordern name and run by various branches of the family. Hordern Brothers in Pitt Street, which opened in 1879, remained in the family until 1959 when it went private. The name still appears across the front of a store far from the hurly-burly of modern Sydney in the slower-paced historic town of Windsor where two Hordern brothers, Hunter and Ross, jointly run the business.

In 1901 the devastating Anthony Hordern's fire destroyed the store buildings and a half-million pounds worth of merchandise. Sam Hordern bought up eighty properties in George Street, along Goulburn Street and around to Pitt Street and there built the grand Palace Emporium which opened in September 1905.

Sam the First died in 1909 and his son, Sam the Second, took over. It was said that he lacked his father's single-minded dedication to the business and became involved in many other interests including the chairmanship of the AMP Society and the presidency of the Royal Agricultural Society. In 1926 Sam the Second sold the company to private investors for the sum of three million pounds. Perhaps he realised that the opening of the city railway which carried passengers through to the Town Hall and beyond and the forthcoming prospect of the Harbour Bridge would rob that end of George Street of its popularity and importance which eventually did leave the huge Palace Emporium isolated "like a stranded whale" on the slopes of Brickfield Hill.

The real decline of Anthony Hordern's began in the 1950's when a new generation found the store stodgy and old fashioned. In the 1960's, Sydney's office population was moving up into the new high-rise blocks in the centre of the city and the decline of the southern end of George Street continued. In October 1969 the grand old store closed its doors for the last time. Some of the floors were turned into make-shift offices and a variety of temporary shops moved into the street level along George and Pitt Streets.

In 1981 the building was sold to Malaysian-Chinese property developers who claimed the facade was crumbling in some corners whereupon the NSW Heritage Council imposed an interim conservation order on the property. The Council was particularly concerned with preserving the antiquated "bird-cage" lifts.

Horderns was a proud relic of the turn-of-the-century Sydney and history has passed it by, in its place the city will see an \$800 million development, a concrete fantasyland of stores and entertainment venues more in keeping with a Sydney of the twenty-first century.