



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

INC.

APRIL - MAY 1994

7 Lynwood St
Blakehurst 2221

MEETING PROGRAMME

APRIL 12TH

PETER SAGE - "NATIONAL PARKS OF THE USA"

We missed out on seeing Peter at our Christmas meeting due to illness but in the meantime he's been tripping around the U.S.A. and is now fit and rearing to show us his latest slide presentation.

MAY 10TH

ROBERT GREIG "HIDDEN TREASURES"

Robert Greig's consuming interest is metal detection and the fascinating objects that can be discovered right under our very noses - or rather houses. Some of the most weird and wonderful assortment of objects can end up buried under houses. Robert will bring along some examples and give you some tips on how to start a treasure hunt in your own backyard.

NOTE: Refurbishment of the Council Chambers is expected to be completed by the date of our April meeting so please meet at the usual venue.
ie. 1st floor, Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale.

Members please bring a plate.

OPEN DAY AT LYDHAM HALL

SUNDAY 24TH APRIL

Join in our Heritage Week activities at Lydham Hall where we will display the Esdaile collection of photographs entitled ARNCLIFFE 1910. Light refreshment will be available. 10am to 3pm - see flyer for details.

OFFICE HOLDERS

PRESIDENT: Mrs Bettye Ross

SECRETARY: Mrs Val Beehag 546 2819

TREASURER: Mrs Margaret Persen 771 5461

SENIOR VICE-PRESIDENT: Arthur Ellis 529 4879

VICE PRESIDENTS: Noel Beehag and Bernard Sharah

RESEARCH OFFICER: Arthur Ellis 529 4879

SOCIAL SECRETARIES and PROMOTIONS OFFICERS:

Mrs Joan Fairhall 546 5555 and Mrs Dora Lenane 660 2714

BULLETIN EDITOR: Bernard Sharah 567 8989

LYDHAM HALL COMMITTEE:

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

AUDITOR: Mrs L Thompson

All correspondence to the Secretary, 7 Lynwood St Blakehurst
2221

LAST MEETING

Jack Gibbs, guest speaker at our February meeting, really captured the imagination of his audience. His slide tour of the gracious mansions of "Woolloomooloo Hill" (now Potts Point) took us back in time and his enthusiasm for his subject was infectious. The unanimous reaction was "when can you come back?" We will try to do just that later in the year to coincide with a visit to H.M.A.S. with Jack Gibbs as our guide.

Ron Rathbone's response to being asked to be guest speaker for our March meeting was "What on earth can I talk about?" Well, we don't believe that Ron's range of subjects is exhausted and he proved it with his entertaining account of the odd, the eccentric and occasionally shady characters of Rockdale Council.

THE HERITAGE ISSUE

If you have been reading the Leader over the past few months you would be aware there has been some debate on this topic. The main areas of concern seem to be fear of overregulation, alleged lack of information and advice regarding the introduction of heritage legislation and a perceived threat to property values.

OVERREGULATION: Firstly, heritage guidelines are primarily concerned with the exterior of your building, more particularly the street frontage. Interiors are not affected. Secondly, because of changes in 1993 by the NSW Government to the Local Government Act you cannot demolish ANY building (regardless if it is heritage listed or not) without first obtaining consent from your local council. Similarly, if you wish to extend or make structural alterations (to ANY building) council approval is mandatory. The difference is that if a building is heritage listed the alterations/additions must complement the existing structure. If your building is in a Conservation Zone it doesn't mean you can't demolish or extend or that you have to build in a Federation or Victorian style but simply that your new structure does not have an adverse impact on the surrounding buildings.

LACK OF ADVICE/INFORMATION: What critics have tried to imply is that councils have a "hidden agenda" in introducing heritage listings. I can't comment on other councils but Rockdale Council have publicised and encouraged input from community organisations and individuals at every stage of the process. Some property owners complained they were unaware of the seminars being held. Contained in each letter sent to every affected owner was the invitation to attend the seminars.

PROPERTY VALUES: How can people get it so wrong? Take a look at the real estate ads, especially the expensive areas of Sydney. What do you see listed time and time again as selling points - "original features", "ornate ceilings", "federation", "leadlight" "character" etc. There is a definite market for heritage housing - it is large and it is growing. As older original homes become scarce the value of heritage housing increases. If you are fortunate enough to live in a conservation zone this effect is more accentuated. "Oh, that's true for Paddington and Glebe, but it can't happen in Rockdale - it's too late!" Why not? "Paddo" was a notorious slum and Glebe wasn't much better. Besides, take a drive into today's ghetto, Redfern. There's still plenty of run-down housing but everywhere restorations are popping up in the most surprising places. In a decade Redfern will be a sought after area.

Sure, there will be exceptions, as there will be to any rule, but in the vast majority of cases heritage listing will lead to increased property values - and a better suburb to live in.

Bernard Sharah

HUNTER'S HILL OUTING

Six ladies were very grateful to Dora Lenane for organising the Society outing on Saturday, March 19, when we visited Hunter's Hill.

the earlier rain in the morning gave way to a cloudy cool day (ideal for walking). We boarded the 10.25 ferry from Circular Quay which called at Darling Street, Balmain, Longnose Point (Birchgrove) and Valentia Street (Woolwich) where we disembarked and caught the waiting bus to the top of Hunter's Hill opposite the Town Hall and the local museum.

Although not large, this museum contains some choice specimens of bygone days including some beautiful silver and china donated or on loan from local families. There is also information and photos of the Joubert, Brown, Patching and Hening families, among others.

We were fortunate to be shown into the Town Hall where we saw the wallhanging made for the Bicentenary in 1988 - a quilt map made by the local women realistically depicting all aspects of Hunter's Hill - public buildings, churches, schools, flags, the surrounding water and houses.

After our picnic lunch in what was once an old orchard now known as Hillman Orchard we inspected the National Trust property Vienna Cottage next door - a four bedroom slab cottage with its adjacent smaller house for cooking purposes. One room contains a good collection of thimbles.

Our walking inspection of the area took us past many beautifully restored old stone cottages with their metre high stone walls and every now and then vistas of the Lane Cove and Parramatta rivers. Dora was able to give us a brief description of some of these early homes as we followed a predetermined route. The tree-lined streets and leafy lanes remind one of parts of England.

After walking for an hour we felt in need of some refreshment which we had at Stillwell Cafe where Betty had the largest Anzac biscuit we have ever seen! We happily joined the bus at 2.40 outside the Anglican church and were soon back at the wharf ready to enjoy the ferry ride back to Circular Quay.

A most enjoyable outing giving us a glimpse of another part of our city with its distinctly different atmosphere, which was settled in the early days of Sydney.

Margaret Callister

THE MUSEUM OF NURSING

I feel we were the lucky ones those who attended the outing to the Museum of Nursing at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

What a museum! Full records of the nursing staff, with photos of each one and also the early instruments used in different eras from the very start of the hospital.

Records of the first training for nurses in Australia, rules and regulations also the original letters full of advice from Florence Nightingale were on show and badges and medals awarded to nurses also in the showcase.

A most interesting account with photos and memorabilia of the nurses who served in the Armed Forces of Australia from the Crimean War to World War II. A few old uniforms from various eras and many more items of immense interest.

We then took a short walk through Newtown to the very old St Stephen's Church to have a wander through the cemetery, the first burial was in 1848.

The very large sandstone pillars that formed the gateway to the old Devonshire cemetery at Central have been relocated there, victims of the Dunbar that was wrecked at Sydney Heads in 1857 has quite a large monument. The bonus of the day was that we were lucky enough to find the sexton at home who obliged us by opening the church and provided us with historical information.

An enjoyable day was had by all and sorry that some of you were unable to come. We hope to see you at future outings.

Val Garner

UNNAMED LANEWAYS

One of the topics discussed by the Rockdale Heritage Advisory Committee is that of unnamed laneways. There are a great many of these scattered throughout the municipality. Besides providing handy pedestrian access they add character and charm to the locality. Perhaps members have some suggestions for names that recall people and events from Rockdale's past. Now's the time! The matter is currently with the ward councillors for their consideration.

"BACK IN THEM THAR HILLS"

Descendants of people who arrived in NSW in the First Fleet and during the ensuing forty years and who now in general live comfortable suburban or city lives naturally have no personal knowledge of the life style of their early colonial forebears except as passed down in writing and by legend.

I am possibly one of the few who, much earlier this century, lived in close contact with a community possessing a way of life little changed from that of the 1820's, this was located in the valleys and foothills of the Illawarra Range west of Albion Park, on the NSW south Coast.

To inject a snippet of NSW history into the story in explanation of my presence on the scene, I might explain that the first twenty five years of my life was lived on the 1500 acre property at Albion Park known as the "Macquarie Gift", it being a grant from Governor Macquarie to his friend Major George Johnston of the First Fleet.

Johnston's youngest daughter Blanche married Captain G.E Weston of Horsley at prospect, NSW. His youngest son David of George's Hall near Liverpool married Selina Willey.

The eldest Weston son married David's daughter, Esher - cousins - and were given the Macquarie Gift property as a dowry and here over a residence of forty-five years Major Ned Weston bred race and show horses, dairy farmed and cultivated crops.

Eventually their son Alick came into possession hence my existence there as the eldest of his family. It was on this land that the first clover grown in Australia came from a bag of seed given to George Johnston by his lifelong sponsor the Duke of Northumberland.

There has existed a family rumour that the Duke was in fact Johnston's father. Certainly, he was instrumental in obtaining for him a commission, at age twelve, in the 45th company of marines in 1776. In later years George Johnston was twice sent back to England to face court martial and stayed there for periods of two and four years respectively, living for much of the time with ducal family and on each return to NSW brought back livestock, farm implements and seed given to him by the Duke.

The abovementioned slopes of the Illawarra Range in what is now the Macquarie Pass area possessed originally large stands of cedar which in the early 1800's attracted numbers of escaped convicts, emancipees and adventurers who worked at felling, pit-sawing the cedar logs into planks and shipping the timber to Sydney.

Eventually the trees were cut out and the cutters turned to other pursuits, many took up small holdings in the same area, acquired female partners and eked out a living by subsistence farming, splitting fence timber and in operation of illicit whisky stills with maize and potatoes as the base material.

They lived as a very withdrawn community, married within the group and raised large families who in turn lived in much the same way as did their succeeding generations up into the 1900's when I came to know them.

Their mode of speech was probably little removed from that of the first arrivals except that regional differences from various areas of Great Britain had over the years been merged into a more or less common form, and which at times was hard to follow.

One of their popular community activities was the annual corn husking bees. The cobs were snapped off the stalks in the paddock and carted into a barn. Some time later the husking would be an evening event to which I was invited on several occasions.

After some hours of steady work there would be a great pile of husks which became the scene of much horseplay as girls and young men wrestled in its depths. This was one phase of early courtship among those mountain folk.

The husking would be followed by an enormous supper of farm cooking and a dance in the kitchen from which the furniture had been hurled out into the yard. Music was provided by an "orchestra" consisting of a fiddle, concertina and mouth organ, belting out tunes of songs such as *My Lassie from Lancashire*, *The Miner's Dream of Home* and *We Parted on the Shore*, all bearing relation to their ancestors' forced departure from the Old Dart.

The girls and women possessed Amazon qualities and could swing an axe, handle a plough and dig potatoes as competently as the men. It was no trouble for one of them to pick up a struggling, squealing hundred pound pig and heave it up into a cart. Their dances were noisy boisterous romps, and a few twirls with one of those muscular damsels was somewhat akin to being partnered by a combination threshing machine and a woolpress.

One one occasion, it was the first day of the Albion Park Agricultural Show, I visited one of the families to arrange for a fencing job. Riding up to the front of the house I was met by the man and his wife. Seeing none of their numerous brood of teenagers about I enquired as to their

whereabouts and was told by the mother that "our uns be gorn t'show the day, us'uns be goin amorry".

Eventually blackberries and rabbits drove them off their holding, education stepped in and later generations were absorbed in the outside community in ways far removed from those of their grandfathers.

BERT E. WESTON
19TH May 1982.

SOCIETY NEWS

CONGRATULATIONS! from all Society members to Val and Noel Beehag on their Golden Wedding anniversary. Val and Noel were married at Christ Church, Bexley on 26 February 1944.

The Leader published a picture of the happy couple and mixed up the caption with another couple celebrating their golden wedding anniversary. By coincidence (or was it the point of confusion), the other couple's surname was Watkins and it was Watkins Street (Bexley) that was home to the Beehags for many years.

ON THE MEND after undergoing major heart surgery our Research Officer, Arthur Ellis, was released from hospital then hastily readmitted. Thankfully he is out and about and getting back to old form.

WELCOME to Maryanne Hall, Norrene Burns and Ellen Sayer our first new members for 1994.

CARLTON SANDSTONE MANSION UNDER THREAT

McWilliam House, the two storey sandstone house on the Princes Highway at Carlton is the subject of debate between residents, Kogarah Council and the developer, Burcher Property Group.

Burcher Property Group wants development approval to convert the old house into a Macdonald's Family Restaurant. The residents don't want the noise, litter and aggravation that would generate..

Kogarah Council has refused the application but now the developers are claiming if "high intensity" commercial use (such as MacDonalds) is not approved they will consider demolishing the 100 year building. Are they bluffing?

Can any of our members provide some historical detail about the house? The 1895 issue of Sands Directory lists a Patrick J. Lacey J.P. "Sunnyside" at approximately this location. Some expert advice please...calling Arthur Ellis!!