

# *St George Historical Society Inc.*

## *Bulletin*

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

**JUNE - JULY 1994**

### **MEETING PROGRAMME**

**JUNE 14**

Guest speaker: *"THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN"* BERYL SIMPSON

**JULY 12**

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

Members, this is your opportunity to have a say in the running of the Society. All positions are declared vacant. Please nominate.

Meetings are held 8pm every second Tuesday of the month (except January) in the Council Chambers, Rockdale Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale.

Members, please bring a plate.

### **UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY GUIDED TOUR** **Wed. 27 th July 1994**

Explore the campus of Australia's oldest university. Established in 1850, the Gothic revival buildings of the main quadrangle blend with more modern architecture to reflect the University's grand tradition. The stained glass windows, carved cedar and intricate stone work are among the finest in Australia. View unusual objects in one of the University's best kept secrets - The Macleay Museum of Natural History. This is a very exciting tour not to be missed.

**Cost \$ 8.50 (lunch and fares at own expense).**

**Meet at main gate Parramatta Road, 10.45 am. Tour starts 11 am.**

**Enquiries: Dora Lenane 660 2714**

## OFFICE HOLDERS

PRESIDENT: Mrs Bettye Ross 589 0229  
SECRETARY: Mrs Val Beehag 546 2819  
TREASURER: Mrs Margaret Persen 771 5461  
SENIOR VICE-PRESIDENT: Mr Arthur Ellis 529 4879  
VICE-PRESIDENTS: Mr Noel Beehag and Mr Bernard Sharah  
RESEACH OFFICER: Mr Arthur Ellis 529 4879  
SOCIAL SECRETARIES & 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 Street, Blakehurst, 2221

## ROCKDALE'S DRAFT HERITAGE PLAN

The exhibition period for the Rockdale Council's Draft Heritage Plan closed on 27 May. The Heritage Advisory Committee's task now is to evaluate all submissions that have been made during the three month period allowed for public comment. During this time there has been a very vocal and negative campaign run by objectors to the plan. This campaign has largely been based on misconception and fear.

To better inform residents about the Heritage Plan Rockdale Council ran a series of seminars during the period of exhibition. In response to some property owners' concerns about the effect of heritage listing on property values Council invited representatives from two local real estate agencies (Ray White Real Estate and Richardson & Wrench) to address the meeting on the subject. What they had to say was very enlightening. The record price in the local area for a house sale is held by a house in Wollongong Road which was sold on its heritage qualities. Generally speaking, "heritage" houses sold for higher prices and in less time than houses that didn't have heritage value. Recent examples were quoted, one Federation house selling in 5 days.

One particularly interesting comment from Mr Christopher Wilson, Ray White Real Estate, was that people had an expectation that their property is worth more as a development site for villas, flats or town houses. Surprisingly, he said that this is more often not true - that a site is usually worth more sold as a dwelling and many vendors are disappointed in the sale price of their property as a development site.

There have been some recent changes to the composition of the Advisory Committee. Two new members will be appointed by Council to represent the views of property owners. These will be people who don't necessarily have a knowledge of heritage. It is difficult to understand the motivation behind this move by Council when, after all, the recommendations of the Heritage Advisory are just that - recommendation only, which can be either accepted or rejected by the Councillors. It is the Councillors themselves who are ultimately the representatives of property owners and residents.



## A FEW THOUGHTS FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

On looking at our Constitution, which we all received as a result of the Special General Meeting Tuesday April 14, 1993 - and as far as I know this was accepted as is - you'll see in the "Statement of Objectives" that Section B states we should "Promote the compilation of authentic records of Australian history"

Section C says "Undertake the collection of books, records, manuscripts and relics considered to have a bearing on the history of the St. George District"

E states "Foster interchange among members of the Society by lectures, (which we have from Visiting Speakers) readings, discussions and exhibitions of historical interest or value"

Now apart from the photographs on display at Lydham Hall I don't know if any records exist re early Pioneers of the St. George area - other than those compiled in our Booklets Nos. 1 to 10. There must have been more people who contributed to the area's growth than those, and if we find more articles in newspapers and Books and we copy them, what do we do with the information then? Where do we keep it? We are not sharing it if we hold on to it ourselves!

As for "Interchange among members" there are quite a number in this Society who have very early knowledge of the surrounds and much of interest to bring to us. I feel at least every second or third Meeting could be given over to hearing from one of our own Members to bring to us, during a fifteen or twenty minute talk, some details of things they remember. Whether it was the day Peace was declared 1945, and how it affected the local folk, a wedding of some note in the area, a particular fireworks night, when the local Picture Show was opened or when it closed, and people's thoughts on it, or even give us a map and describe some local walks we can take of Historical interest with notes about its route.

These are just my idea but I feel that without a bit more participation and activity, people won't join or wish to join. We must have something constructive and ongoing to show and stimulate new Members. After all if you look around, apart from our treasured Wesley we have no young members and no prospect of them joining to keep alive the ideals of the St. George Historical Society. It will die with us and I feel that's the blunt truth! We must reach out to those who don't know what our Society is about to show them we not only look to the future but can "enjoy the past" in a social, visual and by knowledge imparted from others, sense. BRING A VISITOR TO OUR NEXT MEETING.

Some of the above was covered at our last Meeting, in March, when it was decided to invest in a filing cabinet and hopefully a desk to be placed upstairs for safe-keeping and for use, at Lydham Hall. Anything held or gathered by anyone pertaining to the St. George area could be filed in order for viewing by Members and the public, and also it was decided to look into placing displays on topical subjects in a cabinet in Rockdale Library, which could be changed at times throughout the year or when a special event is coming up. This is not only of interest to those seeing this display in such a much-used public area but is another means of advertising for the St. George Historical Society.

Another thing I want to bring forward is that I felt Lydham Hall should be used more by the Society. I know Visitors to the Home can enter there between 2 and 4.30 pm, Sat. Sun. and Public Holidays, but if the Society wished to use it I expect the same arrangements could be made as Group Inspections make, and that would be at a time that suited Miss Otton. My thoughts on this, and I expect we would have to approach Rockdale Council for permission, was to have small functions, say a Musical Evening commencing 4.45-5 pm. for 2 or 3 hours in the Entrance Hall with about 10 or 12 people, on our own fold up chairs, partaking of cheese, biscuits and wine/sherry or non alcoholic drinks and enjoying some nice, soft, soothing music or songs brought to us by whoever we are able to persuade. Costs would have to be thought of here - it depends who we can get and whether they expect payment or the pleasure of contributing to the evening and the atmosphere of Lydham Hall. We need only have about three of these functions during the year but if a contribution is made by those attending and we are careful to tidy up satisfactorily at the end of the occasion I can see nothing but pleasure, a better knowing of each other socially, use of Lydham Hall and perhaps a small swelling of our funds.

I, among others have enjoyed our Social Outings and feel the above suggestions are an "outreach for new Members" on home ground besides quiet musical evenings for each other socially, with no great effort to get there and to use the Historic Lydham Hall by those Historically minded.

Betty Ross



## FORT DENISON

We first enquired of the Maritime Services Board in 1980 about visiting Fort Denison. Lethargy prevailed until we received the notice from the St George Historical Society for Sunday, 29th May. This was our opportunity. So we bestirred ourselves and accepted.

The weather was sunny and calm and the short ferry ride to Fort Denison very pleasant for the 28 in the Society's party. We were met on the island by a delightful young lady, the National Parks and Wildlife Guide. Our first surprise was to discover that the rocky island was originally 25 metres above sea level and that most of the rock was removed to be used as fill and walls for the Quay. We have seen several Martello towers along the South coast of England but had not previously recognised the Fort Denison Tower as a Martello Tower with sandstone walls 4 metres thick at the base and 3 metres thick at the top. On the lower floor it houses the Tide Room where the tidal movement is continuously recorded for analysis by Flinders University.

The Fort once bristled with cannon. There were, and still are, three 36 pounders in the upper chamber of the tower and prior to the navigation light's installation, there was an 8 inch cannon on the roof of the Tower, capable of rotation through about 120 degrees. Their range was about 1700 metres.

The 360 degree view from the Tower was spectacular, despite some scaffolding required for renovations being paid for by Sydney Electricity.

Traditionally, one of the three southern guns is fired at 1pm and one of the Society's party succeeded in doing this on cue.

For those who are botanically, rather than military minded, there is a 100 year old fig tree which looks very much like an evergreen bonsai growing in a surprisingly large area of lawn not visible from the water.

Structurally and historically, Fort Denison, named after the NSW Governor at the time, was very interesting. The guide was knowledgeable, articulate and enthusiastic. We were advised that there are plans for the earlier residential area of Fort Denison to be converted to a restaurant some time in the future.

The only negative comment is that 2 parties were inappropriately booked for the midday visit, far too many for one guide. However, the guide jollied us along keeping us all in good spirits. The outing was very enjoyable and worthwhile.

**JIM and THELMA PENDLEBURY**

## **BUILDINGS COMING DOWN TO MAKE ROOM FOR THE NEW RAILWAY STATION**

Ed. The following article from *The Town & Country Journal*, 20 July 1901 describes the area now occupied by Sydney's Central Station. Most people interested in the history of Sydney are familiar with the fact that the Devonshire Street Cemetery had to be removed to make way for Central Station. Not so well known, however, are some of the historic buildings that once stood on the site, such as the Police Barracks, the Female Refuge, the South Morgue, a small cottage in the cemetery called the Friends Meeting House (used by the Quaker community since 1834) and the subject of our article, The Convent of the Good Samaritan, which had associations with Tempe House and the St Magdalen's Retreat.

Probably the finest of the buildings on the block which is to be cleared for the new railway station is the convent and chapel of the Sisters of Order of the Good Samaritan, once popularly known as *The House of the Good Shepherd*, facing Pitt-street (sic), near the intersection of Gipp-street. This is a large red-brick building, separated from the street by a low wall, and is strongly built, commodious, and imposing - though plain and somewhat severe looking, in accordance with the usual style of convent architecture, of which it forms a picturesque specimen.

*The House of the Good Shepherd* was founded by Archbishop Polding in the year 1848 - the same year as the Sydney Female Refuge, which adjoins it. With Archbishop Polding, Rev. Father Farrelly also took a prominent part in its foundation. The operations of the institution were originally carried on in the building then known as Carter's Barracks, which had previously been used as a debtors prison and before that again as place where the horses and carts employed in the public service of the colony were quartered. In the course of time, however, the widening scope of the work led to the erection in front of Carter's Barracks of the present structure at a cost of 10,000 pounds. The whole of this sum was soon paid off, and the building has been free from debt for very many years as has also the convent building adjoining it, in which between thirty and forty sisters until lately had their residence. The payment of the building debt was mainly due to the exertions of the Very Rev. D Sheridan, who earnestly devoted himself to the task, and in various ways collected nearly 8,000 pounds towards it. Carter's Barracks, a great square brick building, has during the past few weeks been razed to the ground. It formed the Home of Refuge in connection with the convent, where the inmates lived and in which their laundry work, etc. was carried on.

The house, which was vacated a few weeks ago, was under the management of the Sisters of The Order of the Good Samaritan. They whom the institution is intended to benefit could obtain admission on the recommendation of a clergyman, or by personal application while some were occasionally placed there by friends. The probation term was at first twelve months but nearly a quarter of a century ago it was found necessary to extend it to two years, at which it has remained ever since. At that time the number of inmates was 63 when the place was vacated lately there were about 50. As in the adjoining sister institution they are not allowed to lead idle lives. The whole of the domestic work of the house is done by them. They also have to contribute towards their own maintenance by washing and sewing for the public. This labor of the penitents is a source of a respectable amount of revenue towards the expenses of the house. Formerly, it was supplemented by annual collections in the Roman Catholic churches of the diocese. But no help whatever is received from the Government.



The annual church collections were discontinued some few years ago, and the ambition of the Sisters to make the institution self-supporting was practically realised. Though calls may still be occasionally made on the public, such is not regularly the case. The industry of the inmates is the principal source of income.

It may be thought from the fact that the actual number of the inmates at the Home a few weeks ago was not greater than it was a quarter of a century back that its good work was not extending its bounds. But it must be remembered that the Sisters of the Good Samaritan have succeeded in establishing many branches of their work of late years. The accommodation at the Pitt-street Convent of Refuge would be entirely inadequate now to fulfil all their needs. The most important of the branches is the St Magdalen's Retreat at Cook's River, Tempe, which has now over 100 inmates who carry on an extensive laundry business under the supervision and control of some fourteen or sixteen Sisters of the order. The Tempe Retreat is a much larger establishment than the Pitt-street building. The St Magdalen's laundry is equipped with steam appliances and assisted by the public, a fairly satisfactory revenue is obtained from the labor of the penitents.

Though the stipulated term during which a girl is supposed to remain in the institution is two years, some remain much longer, while others leave before the expiration of that time. The place is not a place of compulsory retirement, and though every endeavor is of course made to dissuade those from leaving who find the seclusion of the surroundings too irksome, they are not, should they insist upon going, prevented from doing so. Some do this. But on the other hand, many girls, with a sincere desire to reform are by no means anxious to return to their former surroundings, and are reluctant to leave when their two years have expired. Should such be the case, they are allowed to remain and many of them stay on indefinitely.

On becoming a "penitent" or inmate of the establishment a girl drops her name, and assumes one which is given her on entering the place by which she is known until she leaves. Her fellow inmates, therefore, need not be aware of her identity or even of what part of the country she comes from. The penitents have to wear uniforms but are never seen by outsiders, as the system of seclusion is complete. Whatever exercise may be necessary for the preservation of health may be obtained in the grounds at the rear of the establishment and a chapel attached to the convent is available for their religious needs. When their term is completed, should they desire it, the Sisters of the convent obtain situations for them, thus starting them afresh, with an opportunity if they will avail themselves of it, of leading a new life. The Sisters believe that of the inmates who serve the term in the refuge the greater number leave quite reformed, while they know that many of them subsequently marry and become mothers of respectable families.

The Sisters of the Order of the Good Samaritan number about 200, at their head being the Reverend Mother. But they are scattered about, the majority of them being at branch convents, of which there are now a great many. There were altogether about 40 Sisters at the Pitt-street convent, and they, under the supervision of the Reverend Mother, entirely managed the institution, attending to its financial government as well as everything else. An important adjunct to the convent was a large day school, with some 300 pupils; this too, was taught by the devoted Sisters, whose whole time was given to various undertakings making up the entire work of the establishment, while outside sympathisers assisted in the work of teaching, visiting the sick and so on.

It could not be expected that this noble work of reclaiming the fallen and restoring stray feet to the paths of virtue would be allowed to cease, with the loss of the building whereon it was carried on - albeit that the building may have had associated with it all the memories and associations of its history and of its worthy progress. The Sisters have been successful in obtaining a large building which is eminently suited, as far as locality and surroundings go at any rate, for their purpose. The building referred to was the residence of the late Sir George Wigram Allen, Toxteth Mansions, at Toxteth Park, Glebe Point, a large and handsome house standing in extensive grounds at a distance from any busy centre of population. Here it is to be hoped that the devoted and unselfish labors of the Sisters will be crowned even with still more success during the years to come than has been the case in their beloved convent in the days gone by.

Ed. Thank you, to Val Garner, for submitting this article for publication. Whilst doing her own historical research, Val usually keeps a watchful eye for anything might have local connections or be of interest to our members. It provides the members with interesting reading and is of tremendous assistance in producing this newsletter.

### **THE ESDAILE COLLECTION - A SUCCESSFUL DAY**

Our photographic exhibition ARNCLIFFE 1910 - THE ESDAILE COLLECTION was a successful and very satisfying venture. The display of photographs of the Esdaile family and the Arncliffe area in the early part of this century drew many people to Lydham Hall. It raised awareness of the Society and generated interest in local history.

Due to the efforts of our President, Bettye Ross, with the sale of Society books, home-made jams etc a total of \$150 was raised! Thank you to the members who assisted with the stall and viewing of the house.

Mr Ron Esdaile, who brought along his own family, acted as representative of the Esdaile members who were unable to attend and afterwards very kindly sent a letter of thanks congratulating the Society on organising the exhibition.

### **CONGRATULATIONS, HURSTVILLE HISTORICAL SOC.**

I recently attended a meeting of the National Trust held at the Centenary Bakery, Hurstville. and all I can say is that all the hard slog on the part of Hurstville Historical Society has been worth it. They have a museum of which they can be truly proud.

Bernard Sharah