

St George Historical Society Inc.

Bulletin

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

AUGUST - SEPT 1994

MEETING PROGRAMME

AUGUST 9

Guest speaker COLLEEN CALLAGHAN will give a talk on the Arncliffe Sewage Farm. While I might not sound the most palatable of subjects, this talk will reveal some interesting historic facts.

SEPT 13

The Golden Days of Radio

Let Will Newton take you back to those halcyon days when the family gathered around the wireless to listen to the likes of Jack Davey, Bob Dyer, Terry Dear and when everyone had his daily diet of serial.

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.

Tour of Historic Parramatta

Sunday 11 September
10.45am

What better way to spend a Sunday afternoon than to take a trip on the River Cat to Parramatta. An air-conditioned EXPLORER bus meets the River Cat at Charles Street Wharf taking Society members on a tour of Parramatta stopping at many places of historic interest such as Elizabeth Farm, Hambleton Cottage, Experiment Farm and Old Government House.

Cost: River Cat

Normal price \$4 Adult, Concession \$2, Senior Card \$1

EXPLORER Bus

Adult \$8, Concession \$4

Meet at Wharf 5, Circular Quay 10.45am

OFFICE HOLDERS

PRESIDENT: Mrs Bettye Ross 589 0229
SECRETARY: Mrs Val Beehag 546 2819
TREASURER: Mrs Margaret Persen 771 5461
SENIOR VICE-PRESIDENT: Mr Bernard Sharah
VICE-PRESIDENTS: Mr Noel Beehag and Mr Wesley Fairhall
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
PUBLIC OFFICER: Mr Noel Beehag
HERITAGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE: B.Sharah
AUDITOR: Vacant

All correspondence to the Secretary, 7 Lynwood St Blakehurst 2221.

The Jewish Museum **Wed. AUGUST 31**

This unique museum gives insight into the richness of Jewish culture and illustrates the history of the Jewish people in Australia. It also graphically documents the Holocaust, which resulted in the deaths of 6 million Jews.

Meet at Kings Cross Station 10.30am and walk to the museum at 148 Darlinghurst Road near St Vincent's Hospital.

Cost: Adults \$6, Concession \$3.
Bookings: Phone Dora Lenane 660 2714.

LYDHAM HALL - VOLUNTEERS PLEASE!

Our Lydham Hall curator, Bett Otton, has been under doctor's orders to rest up for the past two months. This has meant we have had to call on members to assist. Unfortunately, due to many people having prior commitments the load has fallen rather unevenly with Bettye Ross and Val Garner having to cover these duties a number of times.

If any of our members have a couple of hours free on either a Saturday or Sunday between 2pm and 4pm it would be a tremendous help.

MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT IN THE 19TH CENTURY HOME

That extravagant Victorian, Sir George Sitwell, reports his son Osbert, was looking down upon a two-year-old infant slumbering in his perambulator. "I do hope," he remarked in sentimental tones, "that they won't forget to teach the little man to sing after dinner. Nothing makes a man so popular."

Nothing indeed made young men or maiden more acceptable in the genteel drawing-room than the possession of a melodious voice and an ability to play upon the pianoforte well, but not too well. The songs they rendered were as decorous and refined as their exponents. Ronald Firbank, a little after our period, summed up in "Vainglory" the feel of those evenings when, the plush drapes drawn across the windows, the gaslight throwing its warm glow on china-pink faces and silky whiskers, the palms and pampas grass casting gently shifting shadows upon the embossed wallpaper, the hostess suggested: "well, won't somebody go to the piano?"

It was an era of delight in music, when people made their own pleasures. With the growth of education came an insatiable demand for the means to indulge newly acquired tastes and newly developed talents. The music critic of 'The Times', Francis Hueffer, remarked in 1877: "It is no exaggeration to say that with the exception perhaps of natural science ... there is no branch of human knowledge, or of human art, in which the change that the half-century of the Queen's reign has seen is so marked as it is in the love of music." Two sets of statistics will indicate the quickening pace. The United States of America manufactured 2,500 pianofortes in 1829, over 9,000 in 1851, 21,000 in 1860, and in 1910 the annual total was thundering 370,000. Music teachers were needed to provide performers for this army of instruments, and the British census figures for musicians and music masters were for 1881 25,546, an increase of 387 on 1871; in 1901 there were 43,249 and in 1911 the nation supported a melodious 47,116.

Without the pianoforte the astonishing rise of genteel domestic music would probably have been much slower. The engineers of the industrial revolution came to the aid of the musician with the upright or cottage piano. This (and later and to a lesser extent the harmonium, the pedestrian organ and other ingenious American derivatives) was a nineteenth century staus symbol to which the family climbing the social ladder inevitably aspired. Some of the well-to-do even became two piano families. Towards the middle of the century the more developed upright piano began to replace the square, and the more expensive examples attracted the talents of enthusiastic if unrestrained craftsmen in rosewood, mahogany, walnut and other favourite woods. Inlaid with ivory or brass, decorated with marquetry or ormolu, the piano was a testimony, as is the bechromed automobile today, of a family's standing. In its most exotic form, with ball-and-claw feet and luxuriant carved foliage, it could be admired at the Great Exhibition of 1851, but humbler versions could be purchased upon the instalment system for a mere thirty guineas. It should be remembered, however, that thirty guineas was the equivalent of a domestic servant's full annual wage.

For those unable to afford a piano there was on offer the invention of the clever Daniel Hewitt, which provided all the advantages of the instrument without the expense of a case. According to a patent taken out in 1854, the strings of the instrument were attached to the wall of a room. Although ingenious, the idea apparently did not catch on, unlike some of the

other myriad improvements and variations of the period. The scope of the pianoforte was extended until it almost became a substitute for a full orchestra, with stops to simulate cymbals, harp, bassoon and harpsichord. Some machines were fitted with a swell pedal that progressively lifted the lid in imitation of the organ swell. It was inevitable that, in the 1850's, the piano and the organ should be merged into one magnificent "organo-piano", bringing a touch of the cathedral into the drawing room.

The dulcet and eminently respectable notes of the reed organ were to be heard increasingly as the century proceeded. The harmonium, handy version of the King of Instruments, could cost as little as ten guineas. Encased in a heavy cabinet of intricate Gothic splendour it was certain of a ready market in the more devout households where it reinforced the note of sober piety at family prayers. If it could be used upon less serious occasions as well, so much the better. In the song "Maggie Murphy's Home", it is the proud possession of an Irish immigrant family in New York City:

*There's an organ in the parlor
To give the house a tone
And you're welcome ev'ry evening
At Maggie Murphy's home.*

The slowness of the harmonium's speech made the rapid passagework which characterised contemporary piano music out of the question. The instrument found its true role in hymn and song accompaniments. Indeed, it is a revelation to hear some of Sullivan's songs accompanied by the domestic organ and piano together. The passages of quasi-recitative in his more ecclesiastically inclined songs are much more aptly accompanied by the harmonium than by the piano, although both instruments were required in the original setting of "The Lost Chord". Many popular composers, like Sullivan, wrote especially for the harmonium and the larger and many-stopped American organ. Their works were certain of a wide circulation as neither organ nor piano remained decorative and idle in the parlour. They were the hub around which the family's social life revolved.

The new musician, amateur as they may have been, required new music to play upon their glistening new pianofortes and harmoniums. The rude melodies of the street and the farm were naturally ignored in favour of the polite forms of music formerly the preserve of the moneyed classes in the previous century. A fresh public, bringing from its non-conformist origins a muscular morality and distaste for both vulgarity and aristocratic libertinism, developed from that polite music an original and refined type of melody unlike anything before it.

A modest musical ability became essential to polite young men and women, just as it had been three or four hundred years before. In the Tudor period, everyone of any social pretension at all was expected to be able to sing; he who could not read his part in a madrigal was considered not a true gentleman. Through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries music continued as a private pleasure except for sacred music in London until 1672. As a social emollient, however, it still reigned supreme. Samuel Pepys, that hard working civil servant, played several instruments well and could arrange, compose and sing. The following century saw the rise of the professional musician and despite the foundation of many singing societies, some convivial, some, like the Madrigal Society, serious, the amateur singer retired

into the background. The more sober went so far as to warn their offspring of the social perils of music. Lord Chesterfield, for instance, advised his son never to participate in the art, for "it puts a gentleman in a very frivolous and contemptible light". The beginning of the nineteenth century brought a change, an enormous resurgence of amateur performance.

Once more, everyone sang. They sang in their homes, they sang duets, part songs and glees in groups, and they sang in crowds. Hundreds of choral societies were born and nearly as many died in the Britain in the nineteenth century, only to survive as an official-looking stamp on a dusty copy of Messiah in a second-hand bookshop. Choral singing became a national sport, and its history is a fascinating one. One can only pause here to recognise its importance as a force with immense impetus.

Everyone sang, and subsidiary musical industries proliferated. Music teaching, music publishing and even musical medicine boomed. A new interest in the function of the vocal chords led to a stream of books by surgeons. Lozenges, Italian cordials for improving the voice and exercise books all enjoyed wide public favour. Patently (and patented) absurd methods were used, found wanting and discarded. Plums were put into the mouth to stop the cheeks touching the teeth, thus augmenting the sound produced. Weights were loaded on the chest while the enthusiastic indulged in breathing exercises. It seems as if there were almost as many methods to improve singing as there were singers. It was obviously a considerable social impediment to be born tone-deaf.

All this activity, of course, did not guarantee high standards. The fact that the qualities of amateur performance, however well-meaning, have not changed over the years can be confirmed by an item from the Musical Times of August 1893: "The critic of The West Wilts Herald remarks that the two young ladies gave a new recital of a duet and adds: 'It is a pity that Blumenthal did not leave directions as to how flat he really did want it sung'."

It could not last. As the century drew to a close, teachers and others were already beginning to lament an apparent falling-off in musical devotion. One insidious rival was the bicycle. By 1896 the Musical Times was complaining of its fatal fascination: "There are literally thousands of young ladies whose leisure hours, formerly passed in large part on the piano stool, are now spent in the saddle of the 'iron bird' as a lady journalist has poetically described the bicycle." It was alleged that "after bicycling for any length of time, many ladies find their wrists ache so much as to render pianoforte playing well-nigh impossible". It was the same in the United States, and the spring concert season of that year "suffered materially from the prevailing cult of the bicycle". Some authorities saw dangers for the voice, and Madame Mathilde Marchesi, of Leipzig, declared that "the rapid passage through the air may be a positive source of danger". Music, in fact, was suffering from the contemporary manifestations of womens' liberation.

But this was all in the future. During most of the century, music, and especially vocal music, had no rival as a middle-class occupation.

M.R. Turner
from an article published in the *Harden-Murrumburrah Historical Society Bulletin*,
October 1991.

ST GEORGE HISTORICAL

SOCIETY

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE YEAR

ENDING 30TH JUNE, 1994

INCOME

EXPENDITURE

Members' Subscriptions	939.00
Donations	85.00
Sale of Society Books	377.60
" " Badges	9.00
" " Donated Goods - Lydham Hall Stall	52.00
Police Museum Tour - Profit	21.00
Quarantine Station Tour - Return of Deposit	50.00
Mt Wilson Tour Charges	673.00
Sydney Observatory Tour - Profit	13.00
RPA Hospital Museum Tour - Profit	30.00
Bank Interest	16.03
	2,265.63
Balance in Bank 30.6.1993	806.42

\$3,072.05

Quarantine Station Tour	50.00
Postage	354.55
Registration - Annual Financial Statement	20.00
Mount Wilson Tour Charges	620.00
R A H S ANNUAL CONFERENCE (B Ross)	140.00
R A H S Person Accident, Voluntary Workers	85.00
Secretary's Expenses 11.2.92/6.11.93	43.65
10 "Life Member" Bar Attachments to 10 Badges	55.00
Speaker's Gift - December	8.00
Catering Expenses - Christmas Party, Lydham	60.05
Treasurer's Expenses 12.3.92/14.12.93	52.14
R A H S Subscription 1994	65.00
R A H S Public Liability Policy	208.00
Fort Denison Tour Charges	183.00
Buckprint Graphics	85.00
F I D \$1.23; G D T \$9.70	10.93
Outstanding Cheque Presented: 548394	52.65
	<u>2,092.97</u>

Less Cancelled Cheque No. 485066 (Lost)

85.00

I have examined the Books, Bank Statements, Vouchers and Cheque Butts presented by Mrs Persen, Treasurer of the above Society and this presents a true Statement of its financial affairs as at the 30th June, 1994.

2,007.97

Balance in Bank 30.6.1994

1,064.08

\$3,072.05

(Hon.)

John M. McDermott

Auditor M.H. McDERMOTT (F.A.S.A. F.C.I.S.)

Lytham Hall Fund - Raising Committee Income & Expenditure Statement 4.E. 30.6.94

INCOME		EXPENDITURE	
Raffles	115.20	St. George Books Sold	150.60
Donations	182.00	Petty Cash	40.00
Society Books	155.00	F.I.D. & G.D.T.	1.30
Cake Forks	15.00		
Lytham Hall Admiss.	204.80		
C.S.B. Interest (Ak 21190090341)	33.09		
St. George Bldg. Soc. Int. (A/C 111-973-102)	19.15		
Adj. overbanked	0.40		
	723.84		191.90
		Excess of Income Over Expendit.	531.94
	723.84		723.84

Balance Sheet as at 30/6/94

	St. George Bldg. Society	C.S.B.
Balance as at 1.7.93	1666.83	1492.91
Balance as at 30.6.94	1685.98	2005.70
Agreeing with Income Statement \$531.94	19.15 A/C NO. 111-973-702	512.79 A/C NO. 2119-0090-360

I have examined the books, bank statements and Building Society and C.S.B. pass book, presented by Miss B. Ollon, as treasurer of the Lytham Hall Fund Raising Committee and this presents a true statement of its financial affairs as at 30.6.1994.

Mr. M. H. McDermott

Auditor (Hon.) F.A.S.A.F.C.I.S.

8.7.94.

This letter from a Mr E.J. Baker has local detail which may be of interest to our members.

I was born in Bexley in 1933. My family moved to Ramsgate when I was three in 1937. I lived there until in 1961 I went overseas for two years, returning for a further year before marrying and moving to my present address. So my childhood and young manhood were spent in the St George District.

One of my elder sisters, after a break of many years away from the district since age 13, has again returned to the St George District and has now lived there again for quite a few years. Recently she lent me a book on the history of the Kogarah Council called *River, Road and Rail*. You have no doubt seen it.

I was intrigued to learn that the Cooks River had been dammed near Tempe. I did a bit of study, very amateur by your standards no doubt, and concluded that the dam must have been so placed that the small island in the river between the bridges must have been part of the now demolished dam. Indeed, at low water, some of the breastwork of stone, possibly part of the sluice, is still visible.

I happened to mention this to another still older sister who now lives in Brisbane, and she sent me a copy of a similar book on the Canterbury Municipality titled *Change and Challenge*. You must also be aware of it.

From the two books I have been able to deduce that the dam was demolished not earlier than 1936 and possibly as late as 1946 in the works which diverted the river for the airport extension which commenced that year. If it was that late, it seems to me I must have seen the dam, for I started travelling to the city by train to school each day in 1946. Yet I have no recollection of it. It seems to me that the old timber bridge with the tidal gates was in place when I was going to school, more or less on the same alignment as the present one. Certainly the trams went over that bridge, I remember seeing them from the train.

I remember too, riding my bike along General Holmes Drive over the old Cooks River opening bridge and up beside the old Ascot racecourse. That bridge was made redundant by the river diversion and was removed at about the same time. So it seems to me the dam must have been demolished earlier or I would remember it too.

The Kogarah book showed a painting of the dam (printed back to front, for it showed the higher level of water to the east instead of the west) which indicated a substantial wall holding water on the upstream side perhaps 20 or 30 feet higher than on the down stream side. I feel that this must have been a somewhat dramatised impression. That depth of water would have flooded Unwins Bridge to a depth of ten or twenty feet, and there is no sign that there was ever a higher level bridge than the current one, and yet that bridge was in use before and during the dam's existence. It seems more likely to me that the Tempe dam was merely a weir, albeit a substantial one, which was designed only to separate salt and fresh water, a task in which it apparently failed.

I wonder if you could confirm for me the year in which the dam was demolished? Is there anything which shows positively how big the dam was? Nothing hangs on this enquiry but the satisfaction of my own curiosity so if you can't spare the time there will be no great loss.

I don't know if it's of interest to you, but I have memories from my childhood of the old Kogarah steam trams and the trolley buses that replaced them, sadly gone now, for, from the passengers' point of view, they must have been the best form of public transport ever devised, better than the noisy, dirty, smelly, diesels which replaced them.

I remember the Ramsgate Road causeway and the way the bridge timbers rattled at night to the passing of the occasional vehicle, the swamp that was where the golf course is now and the dredging of Kogarah Bay to fill it. I remember Lassiter's house (of lost reef fame) and Mrs. Lassiter driving her milking cows along where Burgess Street now runs below the Chinese gardens that were opposite our house in Hastings Road. I remember the remains of the old pottery opposite the original part of Targo Road and the building of the extension through to Ramsgate Road.

I remember picking up soldier crabs on the mud flats of Kogarah Bay (do they still exist there?) and the old Brighton, Ramsgate, Sandringham and Sans Souci swimming enclosures that seemed to be jelly blubber traps and the filthy old Ramsgate swimming pools with their minor zoo.

You probably know 57 other people with similar or clearer memories and may not, after all, be interested. If, on the other hand, you think I may be able to fill any gaps for you I would be happy to meet with you.

E.J Baker

Society News

At the Annual General Meeting held in July the members endorsed the current team for another year. A new addition, however, was Wesley Fairhall, who has taken on the role of junior vice-president. Welcome aboard, Wesley, and welcome back to the rest of the team, in particular our president, Bettye Ross, who is doing a great job providing the Society with new ideas and enthusiasm.

We're happy to report that Joan Byrne is up and about after an injury that has had her grounded for some time. Neville Moncaster has had some bad luck. Neville and Lena Moncaster do a lot of valuable work for Rockdale Community Aid but recently Neville's 1984 Gemini was stolen which means he is unable to assist elderly people by providing lifts to hospital and shops.

HERITAGE UPDATE

The Heritage Advisory Committee is currently dealing with submissions and objections to the Draft Local Heritage Plan though it has deferred making a decision on the proposed conservation zone in the Frederick St/Herbert Street/ Clarence Rd area.

In the April-May bulletin we mentioned that there was a potential threat to *Sunnyside* the two storey stone house on Princes Highway at Carlton. We are happy to report that it appears some restoration has begun on the building. We don't know exactly what is going on, but the unsightly old weatherboard additions have been removed revealing the form of the original

St. Peter's Anglican Church,
Parish of Cook's River.
187 Princes Highway,
St. Peters. 2044
Telephone: 557 2332

COMMEMORATE 1794.

On the 14th August, St. Peter's Anglican Church, 187 Princes Highway, St. Peters, will commemorate the 200th Anniversary of the first land grants in the Bullanaming area. The land is now largely the Municipality of Marrickville.

The Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Harry Goodhew will preach at the 10.00 a.m. service which will be followed by a \$1.00 brunch and an entertainment called "1794." It was a year in which Europe was in turmoil. The French Revolution was at its bleakest. Britain was close to revolution and at war with France. Poland under Kosciuszko was attempting liberation from Russia. In the infant colony of N.S.W. alcohol was already a problem though starvation loomed. Robert Burns, William Blake and Haydn were producing some of their most memorable works. Samuel Marsden arrived in N.S.W. Jane Austen is writing one of her earliest novels. Mrs. Radcliffe has success with the "Mysteries of Udolpho." An unemployed Wordsworth longs for constitutional change. Coleridge falls in and out of love and thinks about an idealistic community settling in America. Thomas Paine languishes in a French prison. The music of Dibdin, Burns, Haydn, Storace, Handel, songs from broadsheets and contemporary "Methodist" hymns were popular.

In short "1794" will draw on contemporary writing, novels, newspapers, letters, reports, music and song to create a feeling of the times. To assist with catering, please, if possible, let us know you are coming by telephoning either 5572332 or 5587504.



St. Peter's church—designed by Thomas Bird with
later additions by Edmund Blacket.
The unique church building is after
the style of Christopher Wren and other early English architecture.
St. Peter's has a classified listing from the National Trust.