

St George Historical Society Inc.

Bulletin

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

^{NOV}
OCT - ~~SEPT~~ 1994

MEETING PROGRAMME

OCTOBER 11

Up and Down the Sydney Road

a talk presented by
LEN WERMAN

A series of bright and entertaining stories about the characters of Old Sydney. Make sure you don't miss this one! Mr Werman is an excellent speaker, in fact, official lecturer to the Grand Lodge of Freemasons. He comes highly recommended.

NOVEMBER 8

Time permitting we will have 2 items on the agenda:-

Bill Bayliss from the 1788 - 1820 PIONEER ASSOCIATION
will tell us a little about the Association, the facilities it offers
and the activities it's involved in.

THE COOKS RIVER DAM

Arthur Ellis has been doing some research on this subject following the publication of a letter enquiring about the fate of the Cooks River Dam and whether there any remains of this very early (1839) structure.

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.

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
RESEARCH 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.

OPEN DAY AT TEMPE HOUSE **10am - 3pm, 27 November**

St George Historical Society, along with other historical societies in the area has been invited to participate in an Open Day at Tempe House. It will be a good opportunity to publicise our Society and at the same time draw attention to this historic house. If you would like to lend a hand setting up or manning the stall please contact Bernard Sharah on 567 8989. If you've never seen inside Tempe House come along on the day.

GUIDED TOUR OF ST MATTHEWS CHURCH, MANLY **Tues 13 December**

Tour of the church and talk on history of the area.
Tea and coffee will be provided. Cost \$3
Phone Joan Fairhall 546 5555

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I would like to thank the Members for re-electing me as the forthcoming year's President. I have enjoyed my previous year in this position and can recommend to anyone who has not held an Executive position not to be afraid for with the support of the other Committee members as I have had you will find it is very rewarding in that "you get out of things what you put into them" and I have felt a great deal of pleasure at the outcome of some of our aims.

I attended, accompanied by my friend and fellow Member Val Garner, the 224th Anniversary of Captain Cook's arrival at Botany Bay. Also for the first time we had a stall Heritage Week when we combined with Rockdale District Heritage Association at Lydham Hall and reaped extra funds for the St. George Historical Society with sales of goods, jams, chutneys etc. and Society Books. Again with Val (Garner), Val and Noel Beehag I was able to attend the Christian Fellowship Service held in conjunction with the Minister's Fraternal and Rockdale Council at the Town Hall Sunday the 14th August after we had already enjoyed the Service, Luncheon and Play at St. Peter's Anglican Church, Tempe to celebrate the 200th Anniversary of the first Land Grants of Bulamaning. Then Friday 2nd September Joan Fairhall and myself attended Rockdale Council's informative Open Day.

The Social activities have been varied and most pleasant, consisting of a tour of The Quarantine Station, The Sydney University, an outing to the Museum of Nursing, a walk to Historic St. Stephen's Anglican Church and surrounding cemetery, and recently a very enlightening tour through the Jewish Museum and last week a trip on the RiverCat to Parramatta and a 'bus trip of the surrounding area after we went through Elizabeth and Experiment Farms. I missed the Observatory Tour. I'm sure any future social outings can be highly recommend and look forward to seeing you there.

We have applied for and been granted a Display Cabinet in Rockdale Council Library for a period of 12 months and are looking forward to using this as a means of publicising the Society. We are most grateful for this avenue. Councillor Rathbone is applying for space for our Archives etc. to be housed, though this may not be for some little while it is something to look forward to with anticipation.

My one disappointment has been the lack of response to the plea for helpers at Lydham Hall during the last 14 weeks when Miss Otton has had to rest her leg. If help could be offered even once every 3 or 6 months it is a bonus. It is only from 2 to 4 pm Saturday or Sunday. Will you help?

I would particularly like to thank those who have already lent a hand in this direction.

Betty Ross

SMITHSON'S WINE BAR

Written by Brian Madden and presented on air by St George Historical Society on Radio 2NBC FM, 28 May 1985

Smithson's Wine Bar in Stoney Creek Road was a feature of Kingsgrove's life for about 50 years.

James Edward Smithson, was a son of Thomas Smithson, and was born on 26th February 1844, at Leeds, Yorkshire. On 7th May 1867, he married Martha Jane Craven, at St. Mary's Cathedral, Sydney. His wife Martha, had been born on 29th March 1849, at Cork, Ireland. She was orphaned at a very young age, and brought to Australia by her foster parents.

After the marriage, the couple went to live at "Pembroke Cottage", in Stoney Creek Road. Quite recently we talked a little about Pembroke Cottage, known as No. 9 Bennett Street, Kingsgrove.

James Edward Smithson bought land on the opposite side of Stoney Creek Road, and built a stone house there and moved in about 1869. Land records indicate that he bought just over 2 acres, in 1871 and extended his holdings in subsequent years. On his marriage certificate, J.E. Smithson's occupation was given as "tobacconist". However, he developed an extensive farm with fruit trees, vegetables, cows, pigs, fowls, horses, bees, lucerne etc. He was also a fine builder and constructed many buildings in the St George District and elsewhere, including "Holt House" at Sylvania.

Besides his own house, he also designed and built a solid bridge in Stoney Creek Road near Laycock Street, and he built other country bridges. He also added weatherboard additions to the back of his house as the family grew.

In about 1880, they began to sell wine on the property. At first, the wine was sold from a closed in section of the verandah, at the front of the house. A window announced - Smithson's Wine Bar - to all passing along Stoney Creek Road. Business prospered. Christmas periods were particularly busy and saw horses and carriages lining both sides of Stoney Creek Road. Around the turn of the century, a separate building was erected for the wine bar, but it was attached to the house on the western side and the roof alignment was altered to incorporate this room.

The wine bar was about 2 metres forward of the original house, with a verandah in front of that again. The original Smithson's Wine Bar window was transferred from the verandah room to the new bar.

The grapes, thought to be about 5 tons in the 1920's, were brought in fruit boxes by train from Mudgee each year. In the early 1920's, prices were for port and sherry - 2/- a pint, 3/- a quart, 14/- a gallon in stone jars. Muscat was slightly dearer at 2/3 a pint.

All the wines were naturally fortified, no spirit concentrate was ever added.

There were 50 large 100 gallon casks in the cellar and there was a bottling room at the rear of the bar.

James Edward Smithson had 4 sons and 3 daughters were born in the cottage which was to be associated with the wine bar. Charles became the wine maker. A son-in-law, Fred Ball, who had married Ethel, managed the business from about 1920. J.E. Smithson died in April 1926. The wine bar continued until it was sold by auction on 11th June 1934.

The land was acquired by Bexley Municipal Council and became Kingsgrove Park for a time, prior to Bexley Golf Course being established. After Bexley Golf Club built its club house behind the wine bar building, the sturdy old stone house was demolished in the 1950's. The wine press had been sold about 1933, or 34, to a German wine maker in Orange.

When the Smithson family first built their house in Stoney Creek Road, there was an ironbark forest on the flat. This was later cleared and the timber sold. This area became the holding yards for C.J. Stone's slaughterhouse, the land being sold from Smithson.

Next time you are in the vicinity of Bexley Golf Club, spare a thought for the Smithson Wine Bar, which in the early days did a brisk trade. It is known that many families walked great distances some, "to get a little wine for Granny's stomach", being one of well known reasons.

PEMBROKE COTTAGE TODAY

Pembroke Cottage receives a mention in the previous article and perhaps many of you are quite familiar it. If you take a drive down to 9 Bennett Street, Kingsgrove, today you will probably get an unpleasant surprise. The land has been mostly cleared of vegetation and there are large expanses of bare earth. The extensions which have been added over the last century or so have been removed leaving only the original house, the back section of which appears to be just bare walls.

From all indications the couple who now own this property intend to fully restore the house and at the same time make it a liveable residence for their family. And no doubt the end result will look very attractive. But in my opinion, Pembroke Cottage has lost much of its authenticity.

Properties such as Pembroke Cottage present enormous problems for administrators of heritage. Much of what is of value is intangible. I have a photo of Pembroke taken in 1989 and in it I see a charming white cottage, surrounded by vegetation, trees, not ancient or imposing, and shrubs, not luxuriant or exotic - just old fashioned. An old fashioned rural feeling about the whole scene, it could be in the country somewhere - an anachronism in suburban Kingsgrove. It was still like that until recently - but not now.

Sites such as Pembroke Cottage need sensitive treatment and imaginative solutions to problems with proposed use. In this case the couple who bought the property chose a house that was quite unsuitable for their needs. It simply wasn't large or modern enough. Perhaps, a different buyer or an alternate use would have been more appropriate.

The second oldest house in the St George District, a relic of the earliest days of European settlement in this area needed careful consideration. And I know it was given a lot of thought by Rockdale Council, the NSW Heritage and the National Trust. The result today, however, speaks for itself. What ever happens now can only be re-creation not restoration.

Bernard Sharah

OUR PARRAMATTA TOUR

We met at Wharf 5, Circular Quay, on a glorious day for the start of our tour to and around Parramatta. The River Cat takes one hour for the pleasant journey.

The Hopkins Coach Line "Parramatta Explorer" was awaiting and traversed part of the route until we reached Elizabeth Farm House where we ate lunch before being conducted on a comprehensive tour of the house. When the coach returned, we boarded again for the short trip to Experiment Farm Cottage and another well conducted tour.

Then we walked across Ruse Street and down the steep grassy slope to Hassal Street and Hambledon Cottage. We just had time to survey the surrounds before our coach once again arrived.

An extensive tour of Parramatta City, Park and Lake ensued before we were returned to the Charles Street Wharf for journey home. A few members opted for the quicker return by train.

A good day many thanks to our Social Secretary.

Margaret Persen.

SHARE THE LOAD - LYDHAM HALL

We need members to assist at Lydham Hall. Our President, Bettye Ross, in her report calls for volunteers to offer a couple of hours on a Saturday or Sunday. What she doesn't say is that for the majority of the 14 weeks Miss Otton has been unable to carry out her normal duties as curator and guide, Bettye and her friend, Val Garner, have filled the gap. Part of the problem has been the sometimes week to week nature of the relief arrangement thus making it awkward to call on members at short notice.

The Committee at its last meeting decided to work from the basis that our presence will be needed regardless. As Bettye Ross indicated if enough of us make ourselves available for a Saturday or Sunday here or there it will make the task considerably easier.

Please lend a hand by phoning Bettye Ross on 589 0229.