

*St George Historical Society* Inc.  
*Bulletin*

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

DEC 1994 - FEB 1995

*Happy Christmas*  
*to all our members*



**MEETING PROGRAMME**

**DECEMBER 13**

Share the season's spirit and come along to our Christmas meeting. Our good friend, PETER SAGE will put us in the holiday mood with a slide presentation of the cruise ship QE 2.

Please bring a plate - something "Christmasy".

**FEBRUARY 14**

Speaker to be announced in Community Notice Board (formerly "What's On?") of the St George Leader.

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

## 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. Röss, 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.

Joan Fairhall and Dora Lenane would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every member (and their friends) who have attended our popular outings during the year. It is very heartening to have our members, who are not always able to attend our regular meetings, still participating . KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK.

Our outings are planned with a view to please all interests and have been given attention to spreading our outings for Saturdays, Sundays and weekdays. However, we have found Sundays and Wednesdays more suitable to our members and organisers.

We wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and look forward to many more happy occasions together.

### FEEDBACK PLEASE

Although we have some interesting outings planned for '95, we would appreciate some suggestions of places, days and times to help us plan for the New Year.

400 Young Street, Annandale.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR LYDHAM HALL  
Saturdays, Sundays & Public Holidays 2 - 4 pm.

Those listed below have assisted Miss Otton since her need of rest with her leg problem, since June 18 this year. The number of times assistance has been rendered is in brackets.

Alison Edsall (1), Val & Noel Beehag (4), Norinne Burns (1), Joan Byrnes (2), Arthur Ellis (2), Joan Fairhall (2), Val Garner (9), Dr. J. Hatton (2), Dora Lenane (5), Lena Moncaster (1), Mrs. Mendoza (1), Mel O'Shea (3), Margaret Pensen (2), Betty Robinson (3), Bettye Ross (12), Bernard Sharah (5), Jean Woods (2). These dates include to our "Xmas Do" December 4.

Where there are blanks below, please write your name in an empty spot, or 'phone, and return to B. Ross P.O. Box 16, Oyster Bay 2225 (589.0229). Don't let "Someone Else" offer.

1994 Saturday December 10 - Dr. J. & Mrs. T. Pendlebury  
 Sunday " 11 - .....  
 Saturday " 17 - .....  
 Sunday " 18 - Val & Noel Beehag  
 Saturday " 24 - .....  
 Monday " 26 - .....  
 Tuesday " 27 - .....

1995 Monday January 2 - .....  
 Saturday " 7 - Bettye Ross  
 Sunday " 8 - Dora Lenane  
 Saturday " 14 - .....  
 Sunday " 15 - .....  
 Saturday " 21 - .....  
 Sunday " 22 - .....  
 Thursday " 26 - .....  
 Saturday " 28 - .....  
 Sunday " 29 - .....

1995 Saturday February 4 - .....  
 Sunday " 5 - .....  
 Saturday " 11 - .....  
 Sunday " 12 - .....  
 Saturday " 18 - .....  
 Sunday " 19 - .....  
 Saturday " 25 - .....  
 Sunday " 26 - Bettye Ross

## THE TEMPE DAM

Since the earliest days of European settlement in New South Wales, water shortage has always been a problem. By the 1840's this problem was acute.

A dam was placed across Cook's River near Spark's house at Tempe in an endeavour to keep tidal salt water out of upper Cook's River and Wolli Creek. It was planned to run the consequent potable water northward to Sydney town.

Failure resulted. Partly because of probable graft and corruption. The plan was to construct the dam from huge blocks of stone caulked with clay. This writer has retained samples of the dam material retrieved at the time of its demolition in 1962. The dam had been constructed from crushed sandstone "plums", mixed with shell lime and possibly other agents to form a crude concrete. Shortcomings in this rubbish were likely to bring about the dam failure.

As has been observed many times before where it failed as a dam, it served well as a bridge, and played a large part in the opening up of the St George District.

After the dam had served as a bridge for about 40 years, during which time somebody named Favelle was drowned when his horse-drawn cart and he were washed off the dam during a flood, a timber bridge was built. Not to replace the dam, but utilising it as a foundation.

The surface of the dam was cut down to allow the river to run over it and a new bridge was erected on the now submerged dam.

Large diameter earthenware drain pipes were used to support the bridge. These pipes 3 to 4 times the diameter of those we see drainers using for sewer connections to our homes were stood on end on the surface of the dam "3 high", with a massive post standing up inside them and the whole filled with concrete. Many dozens of these provided support for the bridge, which had 2 lanes, a pair of tram tracks and a footpath.

It was possible for boys, including this one, to scramble through a fence to reach the underside of the bridge and walk knee deep in running water, across the river.

Construction of the present bridge "collided" only slightly with the old one, and that at its northern end only. So traffic was impeded only slightly if at all.

When the new bridge was opened it was then time to remove the old one and to root out all the old dam structure.

This work proceeded for many months using large mechanical navvies working in 6 feet of water to remove the obstruction. It was at this time that this writer retrieved samples of the dam construction material from several parts of the job. NO HUGE BLOCKS OF STONE just the crude rubble concrete.

I also took many photographs of the work, including one showing the writers shadow as he stood with camera poised to capture the scene of the first component of the middle span being placed. This placement enabled him to cheekily trespass in a successful bid to be first to walk across the bridge. Other photographs show the navvies rooting out the old dam remnants and the wooden piles which were part of the timber tide gates attached to the old bridge.

Three mud islands stood in the vicinity. One only survives, though barely, in the reach between the railway bridge and Princes Highway approximately opposite *Tempe House*. Its name is *Fatima Island*. Two others were above the railway bridge, at the point of confluence of Cooks River and Wolli Creek. These two were taken out about 40 years ago.

## ROCKDALE HERITAGE PLAN - UPDATE

Rockdale Council's heritage plan is in its final draft stage. All submissions by property owners have been evaluated and either deleted or retained accordingly.

The plan will now go on exhibition until 8 February 1995 to allow interested parties another opportunity to comment, after which, the final list of heritage items will then be voted on by Council.

## YANKEE RAIDERS

In 1839 the citizens of Sydney were alarmed to wake up one morning to find two United States warships had slipped into Sydney Harbour unseen during the night. Captain Charles Wilkes had been engaged in an American exploring expedition in the Pacific and, following a scientific survey of the Samoan Islands, decided to make a courtesy call on Sydney. The visit was very friendly but it revealed the ease with which a foreign warship with less benign intentions could reach the heart of the country.

It was decided to fortify Pinchgut, Kirribilli and Bradley's Head although it took some years to get around to it.

South Head was hastily fortified in 1859 because of a rumour that Yankee privateers were planning a raid on the Sydney banks where tons of gold had accumulated from the goldfields.

The fortifications were strengthened in 1861 during the American Civil War when it seemed that the Northern States might declare war on Britain. Interestingly, Sydneysiders generally sided with the north while in Victoria sympathies lay with the southern states.

Following his visit to Sydney in 1871, Anthony Trollope wrote:

*I was much surprised at the fortifications of Sydney Harbour....I had previously no idea that the people of New South Wales were either so suspicious of enemies, or so pugnacious in their nature. I found five separate fortresses, armed, or to be armed, to the teeth with numerous guns.... Armstrong guns, rifled guns, guns of 18-tons weight with looped walls, and pits for riflemen....*

Excerpt from *Eastern Suburbs Album* (1985) Portia Fitzsimmons

## TOUR OF SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

**12 FEBRUARY 1995**

Our own Opera House is one of the architectural wonders of the world. Here is your opportunity to have really close look at this international tourist attraction.

Meet near Manly Wharf, **Circular Quay** 11am  
After the tour have lunch in the Botanical Gardens

Tour cost: Adults \$9    Concession \$6

## **Journeys through Landscapes** **CONRAD MARTENS *Life and Art***

This is an exhibition well worth seeing. It is a result of 2 year's work by the Curator of Pictures at the State Library, Elizabeth Ellis. The State Library has an extensive collection of Marten's works (thanks mainly to bequests by early patrons of the Library, Dixon and Mitchell). On exhibit are numerous watercolours and sketches, and some of the paintings from Marten's brief experiment with oils, as well as photographs and personal effects.

A fascinating part of Ms Ellis's research was her discovery of Conrad Marten's journal covering the period from leaving England in 1833 until his arrival in Sydney 2 eventful years later. It was filed in the Mitchell Library under the name of the ship in which he sailed to South America, before joining the *Beagle* as an artist (where Charles Darwin was also aboard). Imagine her excitement to find Conrad Marten's journal of that voyage in his own handwriting.

Martens was commissioned by many of the wealthiest men of the colony to paint their grand estates and houses. Like his patrons, however, his fortune evaporated with the severe depression of the 1840's. In the latter part of his life he had to survive on tutoring, until finally securing a job as NSW Assistant Parliamentary Librarian.

The exhibition is FREE and runs until 2 July 1995 at the State Library of NSW.

### **TEMPE HOUSE OPEN DAY**

Our participation in the Tempe House Open Day was a great success - an estimated 350 people viewed the house and grounds and we sold over \$200 worth of books. Lydham Hall flyers were handed out to just about everyone that attended. Many were unaware of Lydham's existence so hopefully we may have more for visitors for our museum in future.

The Open Day created a lot of interest. Visitors responded very positively and were enthusiastic about the house and grounds. Many people had connections with Tempe House, most notable being Society member, Stanley Spark, a descendant of A.B. Spark. Others were just plain curious about the building hidden away from the hustle and bustle of nearby Princes Highway.

Thank you to the members that participated on the day, either by attending or manning the stall. Thanks in particular to Val Garner, Noel and Val Beehag, Margaret Persen, Dora Lenane, Joan and Wesley Fairhall.

We've got to do more of this sort of thing - time's the problem however.