

# *St George Historical Society Inc.*

## *Bulletin*

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL

FEBRUARY - MARCH 1996 Edition



### *Banbury Cottage*

#### **UNDER THREAT OF DEMOLITION**

Built by Thomas Mascord and home to three generations of his descendants, Banbury Cottage, is under threat of demolition. The cottage, at 23 Chandler Street, Rockdale is one of the few remaining pioneer buildings in the St George District and a tangible reminder of Rockdale's rural phase of development. Story inside.

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## MEETING PROGRAMME

### 13 February

Our vice-president, Wesley Fairhall, will give a talk on a subject to be nominated.

**12 March** Beverly Earnshaw will give a talk on 'Welfare' before the advent of state intervention

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

*St George Historical Society  
celebrates  
the  
25th Anniversary  
of the opening of*

**LYDHAM HALL**

**Sunday 18th and 25th February  
12noon till 4pm**

*Join us to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of Lydham Hall's purchase by Rockdale City Council and restoration by St George Historical Society. Clothing and linen of the 19th and early 20th Century will be displayed as well as historical photographs of the Rockdale Municipality.*

*Refreshments of tea/coffee, damper and 'cocky's joy' and cordial complete the occasion.*

**AN OUTING WITH A DIFFERENCE  
*A Walking Tour of Watsons Bay***

***SUNDAY 3 rd MARCH***

How many of our members have been to Watson's Bay in recent days. Well now is the opportunity.

Meet at bus terminus at Alfred Street, Circular Quay to catch the 324 bus at 10.20 am for Watson's Bay. Have morning tea at the Gap while enjoying the beautiful scenery. After morning tea we take a most interesting walk all the way round South Head passing various beaches (including Lady Jane). Picnic lunch or fish and chips at Doyles.

We return to Sydney by ferry at approximately 3pm. Wear comfortable walking shoes and a hat. Cost: at own expense. Donations welcome. Enquiries: Dora Lenane, phone 660 2714.



## NOEL BEEHAG - A TRIBUTE

Noel Beehag, Vice-president of this Society, died on 13 November 1995 after a long and painful battle with cancer.

A successful businessman and loving husband, Noel was a man who gave willingly of his time to worthy causes. An extremely active member of Rotary he worked tirelessly to raise money for the disabled and disadvantaged. He gave not just in monetary terms - he gave of himself. He was Santa to countless children over many Christmases. Noel and Val joined the St George Historical Society in 1990 and became active members from the word 'go' - Noel as Vice-president and Val as secretary. An inseparable couple, they celebrated their golden wedding anniversary in February, 1994. 140 guests attended the celebration held at Bankstown Sports Club, a fitting tribute to a wonderful achievement. Noel and Val were more than husband and wife, they were great companions for each other and their marriage an ideal for others to strive for. The St George Historical Society, friends and the community at large will miss Noel Beehag very much.

*The following eulogy was read at Noel's funeral at the Uniting Church, Bay Street, Rockdale.*

We are here to give thanks for the life of Noel Alwyn Beehag. Noel was born in Rockdale on 11th July 1922 to Sydney and Marjorie Beehag. He was baptised here almost 73 years ago to the day. His great-great grandfather gave the land for this church to be built, the small chape behind the church was the original church. He spent his youth in Rockdale and was educated at Bexley School and then Kogarah Boys High. His first job was at Longshaw's Locksmiths in the city and then he went to Demco Machinery at Surry Hills. He went into the Army from there in January 1942 where he remained for three years. Upon discharge he went back to Demco Machinery, but a better offer took him to Johnston and Gaston who were engineers. An Army mate who had a mixed business in Peakhurst offered it to Noel to take over as he was going walk out and close it down. Noel was always on for a challenge so decided to give up his job and take it on. He didn't know the first thing about the grocery trade, however, he built it up, kept it for two years and sold it at a profit. From there he and Val opened up the florist shop in Bankstown, where they remained for 27 years, retiring from the shop in 1984, but still doing some floral work from home until last year. Noel and Val met in 1940 and were married in 1944. Next February would have been 52 years, but at least they were able to have their Golden Wedding Anniversary. If any marriage was made in heaven this one was. In all those years they never had a cross word between them. Their only sadness was that their three babies never reached full maturity. But that was their own personal loss, they never discussed it with others and their shared sorrow made their marriage stronger.

Upon retiring from the shop Noel was able to devote more time to his community projects like his Rotary Club in Bankstown where he was President amongst other things, later transferring to Kogarah Rotary where he took on Secretary and other offices. Through Rotary he became involved with the Bankstown Handicapped Childrens Centre who later made him a Life Member of which he was very proud. He was on the School Council at Wangee Park Special School, also involved with Bernardo's Homes. He was Santa Claus to many children at Christmas and

the Easter Bunny at Easter - for many years a task which he thoroughly enjoyed. He felt that having no family this was the least he could do. He always enjoyed being involved and taking office in these community efforts. He was Assistant Secretary of the Sydney Birthday Club, Vice-president of the St George Historical Society. In Rotary he was made a Paul Harris Fellow and last year was given a sapphire pin to add to his Paul Harris award. This was just like icing on the cake for him. He was a member of the Kingsgrove RSL Sub-branch. He did all the household sewing and was a keen gardener so we hope he is given a job looking after the flowers in God's Garden - he comes highly recommended. He passed away early on Tuesday morning after a very cruel and painful illness, especially towards the end. May he rest in peace. Goodbye Noel - we will all miss you.

### PARENTS CAN BE TEACHERS

I dreamed I stood in a studio  
and watched two sculptors there  
The clay they used was a young child's mind  
and they fashioned it with care.  
One was a teacher, the tools he used  
were books and music and art;  
One was a parent with guiding hand  
and a gentle loving heart.

Day after day the teacher toiled  
with touch that was deft and sure,  
while the parent laboured by his side  
and polished and smoothed it o'er.

And when at last their task was done,  
they were proud of what they had wrought,  
for the things they had moulded in the child  
could neither be sold or bought.

And each agreed they would have failed  
if they had worked alone,  
For behind the parent stood the school,  
and behind the teacher, the home.



## ROLL ON 1996

With the Festive Season well and truly behind us and one I hope most of you have been able to enjoy, I hope like myself you are looking forward to a peaceful and healthy 1996. We are fortunate here that we are far removed from the war-torn areas of other countries but pray that we shall not forget them and become blasé about our own good fortune.

It is far from our normal summer weather but pleasant enough and we should look forward to some interesting Speakers and some enjoyable Outings no matter what the weather, through our two Members Mrs. Joan Fairhall (Speakers) and Mrs. Dora Lenane (Social Secretary). I can fully recommend both to you and look forward to meeting those, I've not so far met, at functions during this year we've just commenced.

One of the Society's first functions for 1996 will be the Celebration of the 25th Anniversary of Lydham Hall since its purchase and grand Opening on the occasion of Rockdale City Council's Centenary 20th February, 1971. I hope to see Lydham Hall have an Open Day, and Display of 19th and early 20th century Clothing and Linen as well as one of Historical photo's of Rockdale Municipality. This will take place from 12 noon until 4 pm on both the Sundays of 18th and 25th February with light refreshments served through the afternoon, to uphold the occasion - perhaps more elsewhere in the Bulletin on this.

Many of the Society's Foundation and early Members worked very hard for the Society, probably more than we would ever guess, and also in the course of restoration and volunteer work of Lydham Hall, and if we are to follow up their good work we need to offer our services for the Voluntary Hours of opening of Lydham Hall from 2 to 4 pm Saturday, Sundays and most Public Holidays, so if you can make such an offer of assistance for even once every six (6) months it would be a relief for those who are able to present themselves more frequently. The same applies for Special occasions, such as our two Open Days on the 18th and 25th February. All rooms need to be manned by someone in attendance even for one hour during the opening time by Volunteers - remember there will also be Members who will be serving the Refreshments and can't be in two places at once if the event is to be a success. If you think you can assist for an hour on either of these days or any other time please do give me a 'phone call (589.0229 evenings).

This 25th Anniversary will also possibly be included later in the year when it is anticipated Rockdale will be having a Festival to celebrate its 125th Anniversary of formation, and many other organisations of the area have like, but not as great, anniversaries.

The Stall held on Remembrance Day in Bexley Shopping centre was quite a success and thanks go to all helpers, many of whom turned up at Lydham Hall for the Wedding to take place there at 5.30 pm that day. It too was a success and many of the attendees viewed the Hall and made donations. A couple of weeks later we had another couple at Lydham Hall for their Wedding photo's in the garden.

The Christmas Hamper Raffle was won by Mr. Arthur Ellis and the Doll donated and dressed by myself in Heirloom clothing was won by Mrs. Lesley McMullan who resides in Bexley. Both were exciting events and congratulations go to both the winners.

May this year be a joyous and rewarding one,

Bettye Ross - President

## *Banbury Cottage*

Set on a large block of land overgrown with vegetation and situated in a quiet street of Californian bungalows Banbury Cottage evokes a rural quality that contrasts sharply with its neat orderly suburban surroundings. It is evident to the most cursory onlooker that this property is a remnant of a different era.

Before the coming of the Illawarra Railway Rockdale was a semi-rural area of market gardens, orchards, piggeries, boiling down establishments and the like. This was particularly true of flat, low-lying areas adjacent to watercourses which were suited to this type of activity. The length of Muddy Creek was dotted with such small farms.

Pioneer settlers such as the Beehags, James and William, James Wilson and Konrad Frank established farms in what was later to become known as Rockdale. Joining their ranks was Thomas Mascord, born at Banbury, Oxfordshire, in 1822, and arrived in Australia in 1848. In 1857 Thomas Mascord settled first at Spring Street, Rockdale before buying land at Kogarah. This land he later sold to developers anticipating the construction of the Illawarra Railway.

At some time before or during 1868 Mascord selected a tract of land (originally part of James Chandler's grant of 1200 acres) near the point where Muddy Creek crossed the bush track known as Rocky Point Road. Whether he resided here at this time is not known but on a Primary Application (no. 2191) for conversion to Torrens Title, dated 14 December 1868, Mascord states that 'the said land is occupied by me'.

On this gently sloping site Mascord erected a simple brick cottage facing the alignment of Rocky Point Road (Princes Highway). Named *Banbury* after his place of birth it was to be home to four generations of Mascords and their descendants. With his wife, Catherine, they raised a family of 5 sons and 2 daughters. Thomas Mascord was an active and well-known member of the community. He was a member of the Rocky Point Road Trust until its abolition in 1879 and a Trustee of the West Botany Wesleyan Church.

With the coming of the Illawarra Railway there was a surge of development, mainly centering on locations with ready access to rail transport. In these areas farming properties were subdivided and sold for residential or commercial purposes. Farming, however, continued in those areas less favourably located to rail transport which included most of properties lining Muddy Creek. In spite of the boom in real estate between Federation and the First World War much of this land remained unattractive to developers and home buyers alike. Photographs of this area of Rockdale around 1910 show a scattering of small cottages and little else.

After the death of Thomas Mascord in 1913, his youngest son, Edwin, assumed the management of the property. Edwin, born in 1859, was another well-known Mascord, but mainly it was his cricketing prowess that brought him local fame, particularly his fast bowling. He was Secretary of the West Botany Cricket Club until 1885.



After World War I another surge in growth created greater demand for land. More farming land was subdivided for residential development. Following Edwin's death in 1924, and again in 1927, much of the Mascord property was sold for housing lots. Rows of neat Californian bungalows were erected along the newly created Chandler Street. Stanley Mascord, Edwin's son, continued to farm a remaining parcel of 5 acres located near what was in the early 1960s to become Southside Plaza Shopping Centre. The land on which *Banbury Cottage* stands was reduced to the size of a double housing lot, the 1920s subdivisions causing the front verandah of the cottage to face the side fence of number 21 Chandler Street. Up until December 1994 the house continued to be occupied by descendants of the Mascords. Thomas' granddaughter (Edwin's third youngest child) Mrs Gladys O'Reilly lived there with her daughter, Miss Helen O'Reilly.

Mrs O'Reilly died in December 1994 after having spent nearly all of her 90 years at *Banbury*. In June of the same year I had the privilege of meeting this charming lady. Curiosity got the better of my reserve and I decided to meet the occupants of *Banbury Cottage*. At the time, the property had been identified on Rockdale's draft list for the Heritage Local Environment Plan. The owner had lodged an objection to the listing so I was anticipating the possibility of a hostile reception. Nothing could have been further from the reality. I was greeted with the warmest hospitality by Mrs Gladys O'Reilly and her daughter Helen. I was delighted to find that *Banbury* was still very much a farm cottage. True, there had been changes to the house. The once separate kitchen/laundry outbuilding had been connected to the main house by construction of an annexe. The back verandah had been enclosed and the front verandah floor replaced by a concrete slab. But little else had changed, in fact the O'Reilly's had made few concessions to modern living. Certainly, there was a refrigerator and a television, but there was still a fuel stove, a copper and washing tubs. The house seemed to have a sense of continuity that together with the seclusion provided by the dense screen of shrubbery made it hard to believe I was still in suburban Rockdale.

After the death of her mother Helen O'Reilly continued to live at *Banbury* until the trustees of Mrs O'Reilly's estate sold it at auction in November 1995. According to some sources, the real estate agent engaged to conduct the sale has bought the property and intends to redevelop the site. His ultimate hope is that the area will be rezoned for high-rise. The auction received very little publicity and the property sold below market value. Although included as an item of heritage in Rockdale draft Local Environmental Plan its listing was deleted after the trustees lodged an objection. In arbitrary manner Rockdale Council deleted all heritage items where the owner objected without consideration of the heritage value of the property or the validity of the objection. Ironically, one of the main concerns of the trustees regarding the heritage listing was that it would reduce the sale price.

Every effort should be made to save *Banbury Cottage*. Why? Because it is an important remnant of Rockdale's rural phase of development. Certainly, there are other surviving examples of farm cottages in the Municipality - *Forsythe*, in Hannam Street Arncliffe, for instance or James Wilson's Farmhouse. *Forsythe*, however, is an example of a comparatively prosperous landowner's residence whilst *Banbury* is a humble dwelling typical of the period. James Wilson's house is certainly humble and typical but it relates poorly to its surroundings.



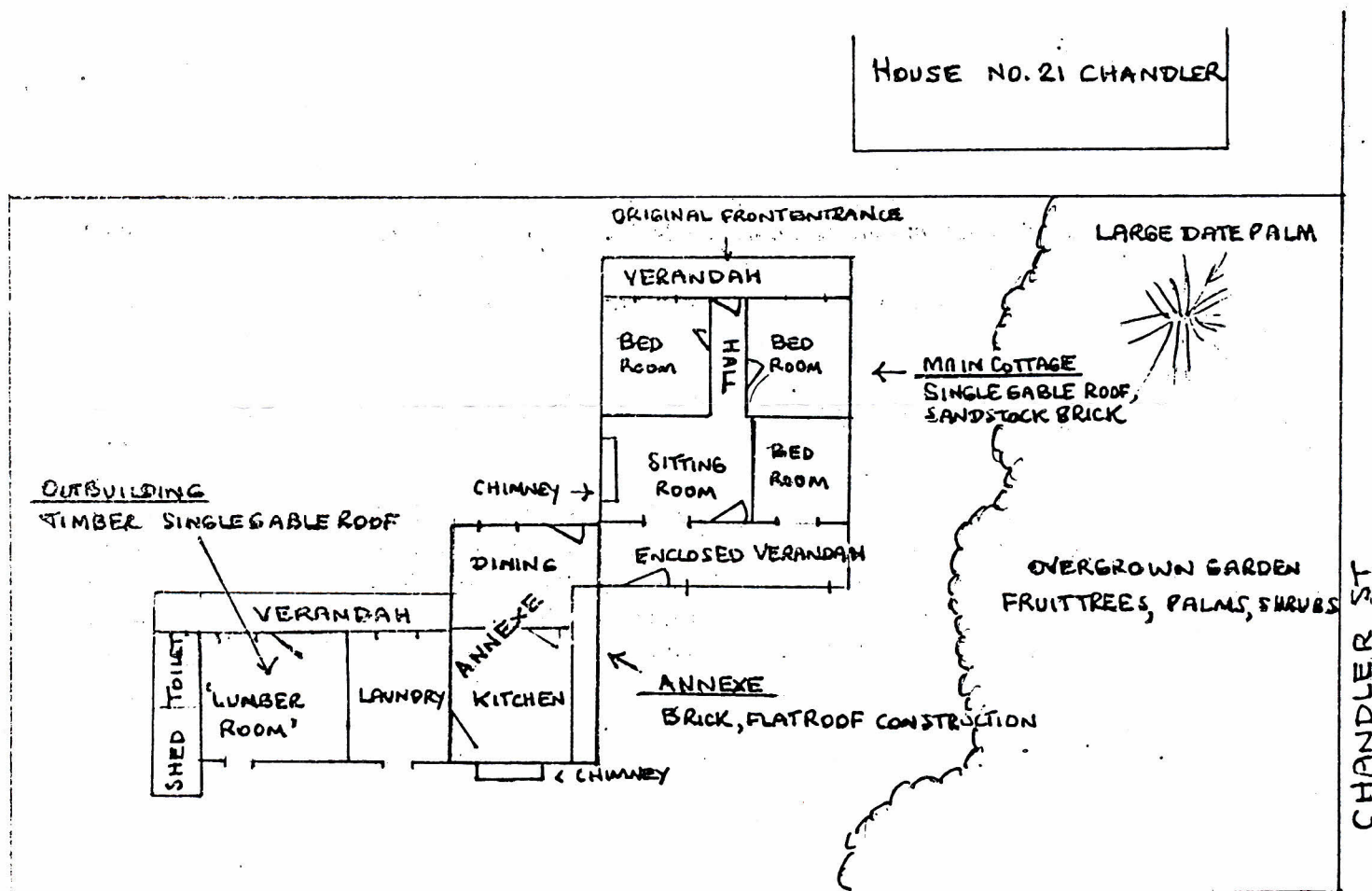
Standing on a patch of grass and overshadowed by a modern 2 storey house it says very little of how people lived 100 or so years ago. In contrast, Banbury, says much about how people lived then. Finally, and not least, the property has had a continuous association with the one family for over 127 years, which is quite remarkable by any standard. I urge you to write to the Heritage Council of NSW to have this building protected by a Conservation Order.

Bernard Sharah

### Acknowledgements

The historical material for this article has largely been drawn from R.W.Rathbone's 'Thomas Mascord - a Rockdale Pioneer', written in 1981 and included in *Early Settlers of the St George District* published by the St George Historical Society. Other sources include *Rockdale: Its Beginnings and Development*, Rockdale Municipal Council, by P.Geeves and J.Jarvis, revised edition 1986 and oral information from Mrs Gladys O'Reilly and Miss Helen O'Reilly.

The diagram of Banbury Cottage is taken from external observation and my own recall of the internal floor plan as it was when I visited the premises last in March 1995 as well as oral information from Helen O'Reilly.



BANBURY COTTAGE 23 CHANDLER ST ROCKDALE 1995

# LYDHAM HALL VOLUNTEERS ROSTER - 'phone 589.0229

Since the last Roster in the December Bulletin a good number of Members came forward and submitted times they were available. My thanks to those folk and also to Dora Lenane who has volunteered to be on the Roster Monthly just as Joan Byrne has and also to Bernard Sharah who is available every 2nd month. I have left blanks for these Members and others to insert the days they are available and look forward to seeing many spots filled.

Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays (unless stated otherwise) 2 - 4 pm.

1995/6	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	WEEK DAYS
DECEMBER	9th Wesley Fairhall	10th Bettye Ross Arthur Ellis	25th & 26th Xmas & Boxing Days - CLOSED
	16th Norrene Burns	17th Dora Lenane	
	23rd Bettye Ross	24th Xmas Eve CLOSED	
	30th Joan Byrne	31st CLOSED	
	6th Lena Moncaster	7th Dora Lenane	1st New Year's Day CLOSED
	13th Wesley Fairhall	14th Norrene Burns	26th Australia Day - Bettye Ross
	20th Bernard Sharah	21st Dora Lenane	
	27th Stella Ericsson	28th Bettye Ross	
FEBRUARY	3rd MARGARET PERSEN	4th ALISON EDSALL	
	10th BERNARD SHARAH	11th Wesley Fairhall	
	17th Bettye Ross	18th LYDHAM HALL 25th Anniversary	
	24th	25th	
MARCH	2nd	3rd	
	9th	10th	
	16th	17th	
	23rd	24th	
	30th	31st	