

# *St George Historical Society Inc.*

## *Bulletin*

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL

**AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 1996 Edition**  
**MEETING PROGRAM**

**11 August**

### **'Future Development of North Arncliffe'**

Construction of the Airport link railway and a new interchange station to the south west of Tempe House will bring about dramatic changes to the North Arncliffe area. Currently dominated by industry the railway will provide new opportunities to revitalise this rather neglected area. Alex Sarno, Manager of Urban Planning, Rockdale City Council, will outline Council's plans for North Arncliffe and the community consultation process.

**10 September 'Show and Tell'**

If you have something of historic interest bring it along and share your knowledge and memories with other members.

Meetings are held 8 pm every second Tuesday of the month (except January) in the Meeting Room 1st Floor, Rockdale Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale. Members, please bring a plate.

### **Rockdale's 125th Anniversary Celebrations**

**2pm - 5pm Sat. 7 September**

Ten community organisations will celebrate various anniversaries this year. Lions, Rotary, Guild Theatre, Rockdale Musical Society, Rockdale Regals, Shopfront Theatre as well as the Airport Hilton, our own Society (35th) and Lydham Hall (25). To mark the occasion there will be an afternoon of entertainment at Lydham Hall on 7 September. Rockdale City Mayor, Bill Saravinovski, will open the proceedings at 2.20pm followed by entertainment provided by the Rockdale Regals and the Guild and Shopfront Theatres. 'Finger food' and champagne will be included in the \$18 cover charge. Limited tickets available through Bettye Ross 9588 0229.

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

## Jack Stead (1901-1996)

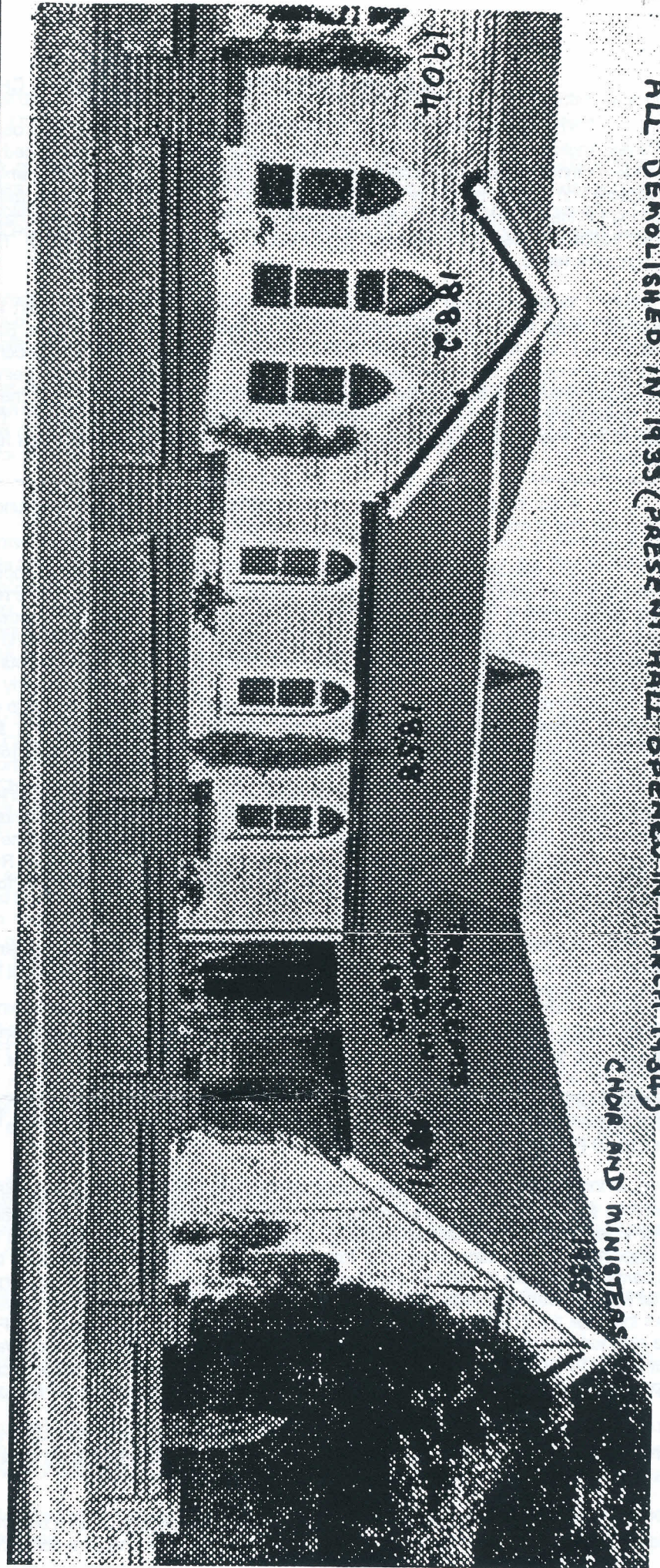
Many will be saddened to hear of the passing of one of the founding members of the St George Historical Society, Jack Stead. We received this letter from his daughter, Mrs Jeanna Strong, dated 23 June 1996.

"May I please advise you my dear father, Jack Stead, passed away 20 June. He did enjoy his years of membership with the St George Historical Society and looked forward to receiving the Bulletin. His involvement in the St George District went back many years. He was three weeks short of his 95th birthday. He was born in Arncliffe, went to Arncliffe Public School and married in Arncliffe and lived there until 1972 when he and his wife Marjorie followed me and my family to Queensland where we lived for 14 years before returning to Sydney. As you may know father had many an enjoyable experience in his boyhood at Lydham Hall where his uncle, David G. Stead, lived there, especially when David had his zoo. The funeral will be Friday 28th June at Woronora."



1901 WEATHER BOARD HALL (PULLED DOWN LARGER HALL BUILT IN 1910 WITH ADDITIONS IN 1912.  
ALL DEMOLISHED IN 1935 (PRESENT HALL OPENED IN MARCH 1934)

CHOR AND MINISTERS



## ROCKDALE UNITING CHURCH

The following article was written by Mrs Rose Munday, a descendant of the Bowmers, one of Rockdale's earliest pioneer families.  
Our thanks to Mrs Munday for permission to reproduce this transcript.



## A SHORT HISTORY OF ROCKDALE UNITING CHURCH.

The very early settlers in this area south of Cook's River used to cross the river by boat to attend services in St. Peters Anglican Church, until a dam was built across the river. A toll was placed on this crossing. It was the Wesleyan Methodist community, who had settled on the rich alluvial flats of Muddy Creek, who first erected a house of prayer in the Municipality. In 1855 they made a call to Newtown Circuit to provide some means of Public Worship and Christian Teaching for these early settlers and their children. The first response to this call came from two brothers, James and William Beehag. These two young men were born on a farm in Essex, England. They brought with them a true and deep religious experience.

Their first effort was to gather together sufficient children to start a Sunday School. They built a "bush house" with rough timber, bags and ti-tree bushes on William's property in West Botany Street, Arncliffe, which was then called Muddy Creek Road. It was here William Beehag held the first Sunday School and Worship Services were also held, the Preachers coming from the Newtown Circuit. Other sites were tried, one being on Iliffe's property, which was along Rocky Point Road towards Banksia. The next site was on Mr. Quirk's property (he was a Catholic) in the Rockdale Park area. Then early in 1858 two sites were offered by James and William Beehag. The present site of one acre from Bay Street corner was given by James Beehag for a Church Building with provision for a Cemetery (as was the custom in those days).

A contract to build a stone building, 30' x 20', was let for 220 Pounds. The stone was quarried from the nearby hills. The surrounding ground was just bush, rock and swamp.

The little church, known as the Rocky Point Wesleyan Church, was opened on 26th December 1858 by Rev. Richard Amos, a missionary from Tonga, even though the floor was unlaid and the roof not covered. It is reported that the fittings for the building were made from the packing cases and discarded woodwork from an old ship. The roof was covered with wooden shingles, no doubt from the Casurina trees which grew around the swamp. "B" Burney type oil lamps were used for lighting. Services were held at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m., during daylight hours because of the difficulty of travelling over rough bush tracks. Public Meetings were held in the Church during those early days. The inevitable Tea Meeting was held on the following Monday, a custom which was followed for years and years to come. Mr William Beehag had retired as Sunday School Superintendent prior to the opening of the new building and Mr Canham succeeded him as Superintendent until Mr John Andrews took over in 1863 and remained there until 1896.

For the first 30 years it was an outpost of the Newtown Circuit, which then included preaching places at Ashfield, Botany, Camperdown, Botany Bay, Canterbury, Moorefields and Peakhurst. The Rev. W.A.Quick, who came from England in 1855, was the Superintendent Minister of the Circuit during this time. Mr. Donald Finlayson, an early Local Preacher, tells of Sunday Appointments, walking from Newtown to Peakhurst or Rocky Point in the morning, then on to Moorefields for the afternoon, on to Canterbury for an evening Service, and then to his home at Newtown, walking all the way over rough difficult roads.

As the very early history of the Wesleyan Church in this area was part of the Newtown Circuit, and records were reported to be destroyed by fire, there is not much information available about that period. The 1858 Church building roof was re-shingled in 1880 and new fencing and gates were necessary.

Mr. John Andrews, another of the early Local Preachers, started a Day School in the Church in 1860 and continued until 1884. For the last 2 years, 1883 - 1884, it became a Public School. When the Congregation outgrew the 1858 Church, a contract was let for 600 Pounds to build a new Church; this was in 1871. In 1882 an addition was put on the original Church, which gave more room for the Day School. It was interesting to read that in the 1870's a chapel keeper was employed and, because of the increasing demand for the use of the building, his salary was raised from 6 to 10 Pounds per year.

West Botany Street Church was built in 1886, which took 8 teachers and 40 scholars from Rockdale Sunday School. In 1886 the Church was separated from the Newtown Circuit and then became known as "Rockdale" and became part of a new circuit which included Kogarah, Arncliffe, Hurstville, Bexley and West Botany St.. The Rev. Thomas Parker was appointed the first Minister and the following year, 1887, the Parsonage was built at a cost of nearly 1000 Pounds. Gas came to Rockdale in 1888 so the Church properties were connected to gas lighting. 1892 saw another division in the Circuit with Kogarah, Hurstville and Peakhurst forming a new circuit. 1892 also saw the Transepts added to our Church. About this time the Trustees rejected the laying of the city water services to the Parsonage because Church Finances were strained through the financial depression which was affecting all New South Wales. I haven't yet read which year the water supply WAS connected, no doubt it is in the Minute Books which are in the Archives. The lovely trees in the present car park are said to have been planted by Mr. John Bowmer during his term as Mayor of Rockdale.

In 1901, at the turn of the century, all branches of the Methodist Churches united to form the "Methodist Church of Australasia". The local name then changed to "Rockdale Methodist Church" from "Wesleyan". From this date the system of "Pew Rents" was abolished and seating became free to all.

In March 1904 another addition was made to the original Church building. This year also saw the opening of Bexley Church. The Sunday School at Rockdale had 235 scholars and 31 teachers at this time. 1907 saw the erection of



a weatherboard building for infants use. This was later demolished and the materials used in the erection of a new larger Primary Hall in 1910 and by 1912 it had to have a further addition of an Assembly Room and Cloak Room.

In 1908 the Jubilee of the Church was celebrated and a short history of Methodism in the area was incorporated in Jubilee Hymn Books. 1910 saw a further division of the Circuit with Arncliffe and Bexley leaving. In 1911 the corner site at Rockdale was sold to the Bank of New South Wales. 1912 saw the first Ladies' Church Aid formed, with the Minister's wife, Mrs. Meek, as President. The same year saw the inauguration of the Sunday School Library with the purchase of 77 new books.

One source of information says Electric Lighting was introduced to the District and installed in 1923, whereas the Sunday School book of 1915 says all buildings were lighted by electricity, so I don't know which is correct. The first Floral and Industrial Exhibition was held in 1927. This was later called the Flower Show.

The need for a larger Sunday School Building was felt around 1925, but it wasn't until 1933 that the building was commenced. The original plan was to demolish the old stone Church but, because it was the oldest of its type in the area, they decided to retain it and demolish the weatherboard buildings. The lovely hall with its folding platform costing 2500 Pounds plus 500 Pounds for furnishings, was opened on the 24th. March 1934. The old Church buildings were completely re-modelled and officially opened on 21st. December 1935 for the use of the Beginners and Primary Departments.

1936 saw the old grave headstones moved from the front to form a "Remembrance Wall" on the southern side of the Church grounds. At this time a new brick fence was built and shrubs were planted on the Bay St. frontage. The Old Chapel was placed at the disposal of the National Emergencies Services during the Second World War, when it was used as a First Aid Post. A number of our Church members served in the Armed Forces during both the first and second World Wars, and the Honour Rolls for both wars, also the West Botany St. Honour Rolls, are hanging in the Bay St. Church at the present time. The Honour Rolls for the previous Frederick St. Congregation are still hanging in the Frederick St. Church.

In 1952 the Sunday School changed from afternoon to morning school, and the enrolment more than doubled. The year 1955 saw the Choir and Minister's Vestries added. The Church also underwent improvements, with a new floor and ceiling, more comfortable seating with just a centre aisle, 9 stained glass windows and a relocation of the choir seating. A Sunday School Choir was formed in 1954 for the purpose of assisting in the Morning Worship Service; Mr. Don Evans was the conductor. June 1977 saw the start of the Uniting Church but the Rockdale Congregational Church had already joined with Bay St. approximately 2 years earlier to form one Congregation.

I haven't mentioned anything yet about the organ. I am not sure which year the original "Harmonium" was purchased but one was purchased in 1874 for 18 Pounds 18 Shillings. It was sold in 1877 and an American organ was purchased costing 45 Pounds. In 1898 the first pipe organ was purchased for 135 Pounds. In 1908 parts of the 1898 organ were incorporated in a new pipe organ. In 1980 money was raised to clean, repair and restore this fine instrument which has been in use again since 15th. November 1981, and is still in use to this day.

A Hammond electronic organ was used for a number of years before the pipe organ was restored. This was given to Arncliffe Church and subsequently destroyed in their fire. West Botany Street's Yamaha organ came to Bay Street following the closure of that Church at the end of 1981.

In February 1981 the West Botany St. Congregation joined with Bay St. for worship and in 1982 the two congregations became one, after a final service in November 1981. The West Botany St. Church was sold to the Traditional Catholics.

To mention a few well-known names. Mr. Ray Elder's name first appears as Superintendent of the Sunday School Junior Department in November 1911. He would have been 18 years of age at that time. His name appears again as Superintendent of the Junior Department from 1922 to 1925. He became Assistant General Superintendent in 1955, at which time there were 61 names on the Sunday School staff.

Georgene and Neville McKenzie-Hicks, Pearl and Doug Bonfield, and Marge Walker were leaders in the Sunday School from 1955.

Mrs. Taylor, Beverley Verrell's mother, was a capable leader of the Rays in the early 1950's with 22 members.

This reading is taken from the Sunday School Centenary Book; it says, "The Sunday School Motto is 'Pray, Plan and Prepare' and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength we shall continue in the endeavour to make the School worthy of His Great Name and a Way of Salvation to the young life committed to its care".

There is no doubt that Rockdale Church has been blessed with a great number of fine dedicated people working to spread the Christian Message.

*Prepared by Rose Munday for a "Talk on Church History"  
given to Rockdale Fellowship in August 1991.*



## **Heritage LEP Update**

The Department of Urban Affairs and Planning has now returned Rockdale Council's Draft Heritage Conservation Plan stating that 'the Heritage Council may have difficulty recommending the plan to the Minister. This is because properties deleted from the Plan need to be justified by heritage considerations and not on other grounds.

Since receipt of this report Rockdale Council at its meeting on 24 July resolved to:-

Pursue gazettal of the current list submitted to the Heritage Council (this contains all items where no objection was received from the property owner)

Have the Heritage Adviser in consultation with the Heritage Advisory Committee reassess all those items deleted from the plan solely because of an objection from the property owner. In short, Rockdale Council is in the predicament of having advised owners that nominated heritage items can be deleted simply on the basis of written objections. This is not the case at all, ultimately the decision rests with the Minister.

Rockdale Council has a responsibility to the State and the community generally to ensure that buildings and sites of historic importance are adequately protected. A number of Councillors quite irresponsibly chose to ignore this and in so doing misled the very people they purported to represent. Over 100 property owners have been incorrectly advised by Rockdale Council that their properties have been deleted from the Heritage Plan. In fact they are still included until the Plan is authorised by the Minister.

Certainly, many of the items included in the list could be regarded as marginally significant, and deleted without much debate. However, there are a number of other properties which are quite significant and should not be deleted under any circumstances. For instance, some of Rockdale's earliest pioneer dwellings were amongst the deletions.

### **Rockdale to Bexley Heritage Walk - a successful day.**

Thirty five people braved a bitterly cold wind to take part in our walk which started at Rockdale Station and ended at Lydham Hall with afternoon tea. Courtesy of Rev. Terry Oades, we inspected the Bay Street Uniting Church including the original 1858 chapel. Some attention was given to the buildings on the opposite side of Bay Street which will be demolished to make way for a high rise commercial/residential development. One of the shops in this group, the former St George Co-Operative Society Building has our tour leader intrigued (if anyone can shed some light on this or any other buildings in the vicinity it would be appreciated). The tour proceeded up part of Frederick Street and Harrow Road. St Elmo, Dunvegan and the Kenwood-designed houses were inspected externally. All in all it was a good response to an event that was deliberately kept low-key. In the past our history walks have attracted large numbers and whilst this has been good in one way it makes organisation and management much more difficult. Our thanks to Rev. Terry Oades, Mrs Rose Munday, Cr. Ron Rathbone and Joan Byrne for their assistance.