

St George Historical Society Inc.

Bulletin

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1996 Edition
MEETING PROGRAM

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8 OCTOBER

The Tourism Plan for Rockdale

Rockdale City Council is preparing its 'game plan' for the year 2000 when the Olympics will be held in Sydney. The prospect of hundreds of thousands of visitors arriving at nearby Mascot airport presents enormous commercial possibilities for the city of Rockdale. In attracting tourists and their dollars to this area Council will need to promote Rockdale as a worthwhile place to visit. Any visitor to any town wants to see the things that make that place unique. What makes Rockdale unique? Most obvious is its location on Botany Bay but another aspect is its history and its architectural heritage, something which has been considerably undervalued. At the Society's October meeting our speaker, Mr John Brandenburg, Manager Property and Recreation Development, will give a talk on Rockdale's blueprint for this growth industry.

12 NOVEMBER

'Pleasant But Very Colonial'

Lefayre Palmer, a descendant of the Palmers on early colonial New South Wales, is writing a book based on the diary (1888-1889) of Helen Campbell, wife of the last owner of Duntroon, the military college. She will give a talk on this subject for the Society.

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. Visitors are welcome.

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LYDHAM HALL LEAKS!

Like a sieve! There has been a problem with the roof over the 'Blue Room' for some time and this has frustrated efforts for its refurbishment. During Heritage Week water literally poured through the ceiling. After being advised that Council had fixed the roof the Lydham Hall Committee made plans for repapering the walls of the Blue Room. It is just as well that the intended repapering did not proceed as on the weekend before the Celebrations for the 120th Anniversary of Rockdale Council the Blue Room was flooded again. Council have assured the Society that the repairs will be attended to promptly. [ed.] As I write, rain is pouring down yet again. Let's hope Council have solved the mystery of the persistent leak.

Kokoda Walk and Yaralla House

11 am Sunday
10th November

An outing with a difference. Meet at Rhodes Park for an interesting walk on the newly completed 'Kokoda Walk' track around the banks of Brays and Yaralla Bays through the beautiful grounds of the historical *Thomas Walker House* then continue on to the grounds of *Yaralla*, the former home of Dame Edith Walker. Bring a picnic lunch. You will need a hat and walking shoes. Contact Dora Lenane 9 6602714

The Villas of Woollomooloo A Tour of the Gardens

23 October
10am Wednesday

Some of the grandest villas of early Sydney stood on land now occupied by the Australian Navy, in present day Potts Point. The houses have long since gone but partial restoration of their magnificent gardens has been achieved by careful research, tedious excavation and sheer determination. The man behind the project is Jack Gibbs, 'one of nature's gentlemen'. Jack will lead a tour of the area to show visitors what has been achieved over the past 20 years. Don't miss out! Before you go, get some background on the history of the site by reading the article in this bulletin on *Clarens* and HMAS Kuttabul.

Meet at 10am at Kings Cross Station to catch 311 Bus to HMAS Kuttabul
Enquiries : Dora Lenane. Ph. 9 660 2714

Clarens

1844 Clarens was occupied by Alexander Kelly on a yearly lease
1847 bought by George R. Griffiths
1853 bought by James Martin
1889 bought by George Matheson MLA
1891 bought by Octavius Charles Beale
1895 bought by Mr D. Mitchell
1897 bought by R.L. Faithfull, Surgeon and renamed *Wilga*
1922 bought by Mr H. Stewart-Dawson and divided into two flats, *Wilga* and *Strathisla*
1935 became Charlemont private hospital
1941 acquired by the Department of the Interior

James Martin married Isobella Long from *Tusculum* in 1853 and moved into *Clarens*. The house stood on a plateau which descended in a steep incline to the waterfront, in 1856 James commenced the landscape construction of his garden in the manner of a replica of an ancient Grecian Garden for ancient Greek history was one of his favourite pursuits. His chief advisers were Professor Badham, School of Greek, Sydney University and Governor Young, at this stage the actual builder is not known but he was indeed a master craftsman. The garden was completed in 1868 at the cost of £20,000.

James Martin was born 14 May 1820 at County Cork, Ireland, the Martin family arrived in the Colony on the *John Barry* 6 November 1821 invited by Governor Brisbane who arrived on the same day aboard the *Royal George*. Governor Brisbane was impressed by the skills of James' father, John Martin, in caring for and the training of horses at *Castle Hyde*.

After being educated by a number of tutors at Parramatta, James was enrolled at Mr Timothy Cape's School, when Mr Cape was appointed headmaster of Sydney College he transferred his own pupils there which is now Sydney Grammar School. Another noted Australian who was a pupil at the same time was Thomas Alexander Brown, who later became one of our most famous novelists, Rolf Boldrewood. He later wrote about James - 'Martin was always *facile princeps* among us - in every class, in every subject. He may not have posed as a too industrious worker, whatever his method, he mastered every department of knowledge which he essayed with unvarying success...'

When Governor Brisbane's term ended he asked his successor, Governor Darling, to grant John Martin 400 acres, a horse and some cattle. This was granted just prior to the 1828 census which records Martin as a publican at Parramatta owning 400 acres, one horse and seven cattle.

When James entered Parliament members expressed their concern that he had no place in the house as he had not had a tertiary education. He went on to become Prime Minister of the Colony and later was appointed Chief Justice. Sir James and Lady Martin raised a family of sixteen at *Clarens*.

James and his wife moved into *Clarens* in 1853, he commenced to landscape the garden in 1856 in the style of an ancient Grecian garden embellished with sandstone statues and gazebo which the family called the Temple of the Winds, two sphinxes at the foot of the second set of stairs which were moved to *Tresco*, the residence of the Flag Officer of Naval Support Command, also the Choragic Monument which was relocated to the Royal Botanic Gardens during the construction of the Garden Island Dockyard. There were 32 Grecian urns in the garden, none of the originals remain apart from the relics dug out during the removal of hundreds of tonnes of sand by the gardeners and sailors.

The Choragic Monument is a replica of the only remaining example in Athens of many such structures in what was known as the Street of Tripods. In Athens this monument is known as Lysikrates Monument and was erected in 334 BC as a thanksgiving offering to the god, Dionysis. Lysikrates of Kikina had won a drama contest with a chorus of boys at a Bacchus

festival and was presented with a tripod which was eventually mounted on top of the monument. The frieze depicts Dionysis turning pirates into dolphins.

In 1942 during the construction of the dockyard a large portion of the lower section was quarried out to build an electrical sub-station which was subsequently covered in sand. Until 1975 the area was a virtual rubbish dump when Jack Gibbs commenced at Kuttabul as Head Gardener. Marvelling at the remains at what had obviously been a magnificent garden, he began researching its history coupled with the other navy heritage buildings in Wylde Street, Potts Point.

Against incredible odds and sheer determination over 20 years, partial restoration was achieved which many had said would be an impossible task, resulting in a passive recreation area within an historic site. Sir James Martin spent £20,000 (\$40, 000) constructing the gardens, a conservative estimate of the value in today's currency is in the vicinity of 15 million dollars - surely a National Treasure.

HMAS KUTTABUL

HMAS Kuttabul stands on what were the sites of three old homes in Wylde Street, Potts Point - *Moncur Lodge* (later *St Mungo*), *Como* and *Clarens*, which were built between 1840 and 1844.

Moncur Lodge and *Como* were demolished by developers about 1939. A street was formed and named Collins Avenue and the two estates sub-divided into nine allotments which were sold but never built on.

Clarens, later named *Wilga*, was then later again divided into two flats and called *Wilga* and *Strathisla*. Then about 1936 it became a private hospital, *Charlemont*, until the Department of Interior acquired it and most of the other properties on the eastern side of Wylde Street around 1941. *Charlemont* was occupied by WRANS who operated the Sydney Communications Centre, which was also situated on the site during the latter part of World War II.

After the war it became sailor's accommodation for personnel employed at Naval Headquarters, Garden Island Dockyard, ship in reserve, Gunnery Instructional Centre and Sydney Shore Patrol, and was nicknamed 'Charlies' by the sailors. The present barracks were commenced in February 1964 and completed in October 1966. *Charlemont* was gradually dwarfed by the new building, and finally succumbed to the demolisher's hammer when Kuttabul was completed. The ground floor administration block stands on the site of Collins Avenue and the north/south wing cuts through the front of the old house.

HMAS Kuttabul's prime functions are to provide accommodation and administrative support for naval personnel in the Sydney area, other than in commissioned establishments, and accommodation and facilities for ships of the fleet.

The barracks provide accommodation and recreational facilities for over 400 sailors. Facilities which are available include a squash court, tennis court, small gymnasium, sauna rooms, laundry, hairdresser and a club for Junior Sailors. The Port Jackson Club has a bar, television, billiards and one of the best harbour views in Sydney.

Jenner House

Architect officially Edmund Blacket but believed to be designed by Horbury Hunt for Lebbeus Hordern, brother of Anthony Hordern. Originally called *Stramshall* then only two stories high.

The site was number one allotment on the northwest boundary of the sub-division of the Macleay estate.

Sold to John Thomas Neale in 1876 and renamed *Kurragheen*, the Aboriginal name for the Potts Point. Thomas Rowe added the third storey for Mr Neale. After Mr Neale's death his wife renamed the house *Lugarno*.

1914 sold to Miss Erie McDonald and developed and operated as Jenner Private Hospital until 1956.

From 1956 part of Jenner's life was spent as a 'wet' canteen known to sailors as 'The Still on the Hill'.

Since the tours began it has become a case of 'Jenner revisited' for some of the visitors, 8 tonsilectomies, 4 births, one birth occurred while the grandfather was in hospital suffering from cancer, he died two days after his grandson was born. One lady recently was rather startled when she recognised the building as her fiancé was admitted to Jenner in 1941, 5 weeks before their planned wedding. When he was 2 years old he accidentally gouged his eye with a stick. In 1941 his remaining eye was injured by a flying nail whilst he was erecting barricades in the eastern suburbs. At Jenner they operated to save his sight. At a critical stage of his recovery it was required that he have reasonable quiet which proved to become a problem with the construction work on the dockyard site. The nursing sister on duty went down through the garden, climbed over the fence onto the building site, sought out the foreman and asked if they could reduce the noise for a specified period. They complied with the request.

Jack Gibbs kindly submitted this information on HMAS Kuttabul and its associated buildings.