

St George Historical Society Inc. *Bulletin*

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL

DECEMBER 1996-FEBRUARY 1997 Edition

The president and committee of St George Historical Society
wish all our members a

Happy Christmas

and invite you to get together with friends at our

Christmas party

at

Lydham Hall

Sunday 15 December

2.30 pm

Ladies - please bring a plate. Men - please bring soft drink, chips.

Research your Scottish Ancestry

10am - 4pm

Sunday 1 December

Lydham Hall

Honour St Andrew's Day by researching your Scottish ancestry. Entrance fee of \$3 includes a Scottish afternoon tea and assistance with researching the NSW descendants of your Scottish ancestors. Birth, Death, Marriage and Probate indexes, Musters, Census and Shipping Lists will be available on microfiche as well as other research aids. Enquiries 9 5890229 evenings.

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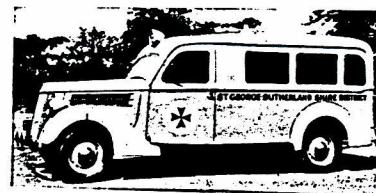
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The following excerpt is from a souvenir booklet entitled 'Rockdale: Trolley Bus Celebrations 3rd July 1937' published by Rockdale Municipal Council.

St. George District Ambulance

THE history of the St. George District Ambulance, the headquarters of which are at Rockdale, goes back to 1902, when the Rockdale Division of the Civil Ambulance was formed, a hand litter for the transport of patients being presented by Mr. McCormack, of Harrow Road. As the Division had no premises of its own at that time, this litter was kept at the Rockdale Fire Station. Eventually a weatherboard building was erected in the Tramway Arcade on the site of the present overhead bridge, but the requirements of the Railway Department made another move necessary. A piece of land was secured in Bay Street, next to the Masonic Hall, and here, what was then an up-to-date ambulance station, was erected. It was about this time—1918—that the first motor ambulance in this district was placed on the road, the body for which was built by members in their spare time. About this period also the St. George District Ambulance, as it is to-day, was formed. The service has grown in that comparatively short time from one man and one waggon to a permanent staff of

26, with seven waggons and 60 volunteers. The area covered is the St. George District, the Sutherland Shire, and portion of the Bulli Shire, an area of approximately 400 square miles, and a population



*The type of vehicle used by the
St. George District Ambulance.*

of 200,000. The present superintendent, Mr. P. W. Stell, was appointed in 1912. For the year ended June 30, 1936—the latest report published—the number of cases transported to and from hospitals was given as 5508, or an average of nearly 106 per week.

MEETING PROGRAMME

10 DECEMBER

As is traditional with our Christmas meeting Peter Sage will present his superb travel slides. This time his subject his *South America*.

11 FEBRUARY

Rockdale Municipality has traditionally fostered the arts, music in particular, and there have been many local musical and theatrical groups over the years. One of the most well-known and longest established is The Regals and Coral Hesford will talk about their 50 year association with Rockdale.

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.

Lydham Hall Museum's 26th Anniversary

10am - 4pm
Saturday 22 February 1997

19th Century and early 20th Century Clothing Display

In response to popular demand our display of 19th and early 20th century clothing and linen will be re-exhibited at Lydham Hall. Afternoon tea will be available.

•It's Only a Leg!•

This excerpt from the inspiring life story of Harry Dumpleton has a local flavour. Dumpleton, who lost his leg in a tram accident at age 13 and went on to overcome this tremendous handicap with courage and humour, spent much of his childhood at Bexley and Arncliffe. His family lived at Mimosa Street Bexley before moving to a two-storey shop in Arncliffe where they established a second-hand furniture business. Dumpleton later become a lay preacher at the West Bexley Methodist Church and throughout his life did much to encourage other more severely disabled people to achieve their ambitions. Ed.

'You did a good job in England, Mum. But you had to come out to Australia to finish it properly.' This was something that Harry proudly declared to his mother from time to time as he grew up. His mother had had eight children in England and he, the ninth and last, was the only one born in Australia. This event occurred on 20 March 1914, in a tiny semi-detached timber cottage in Pemberton Street, Botany, a suburb of Sydney.

Of the eight children born in England, four had died of childhood illnesses before Harry's parents migrated to Australia in 1913. The journey took six arduous weeks. During that period, Harry's only sister Florrie, who is the eldest in the family, was violently sea-sick all the way. As assisted migrants the family had very limited conveniences and the ship was grossly over-crowded. Because the family's financial position was poor, Harry's father had secured a job as baker on the ship. This meant he had little time to spend with his family both before the journey began and throughout the journey. Apart from Florrie, there were three other brothers who made up the balance of the Dumpleton family. They were Sid, Bill and Tom.

As a skilled baker, Harry's dad soon found a job. There is deeply ingrained into the male of the Dumpleton species a strong desire to 'be your own boss'. This led Harry's father to find a disused bakery in Erskineville and, by forceful negotiation, to obtain the right to re-open it and start his own business. The family moved into the residential part of the building. Situated in McDonald Street (where the building still stands [1981]), the Dumpletons had moved into a what would have been broadly classified as a 'slum area'. In spite of this they found a kind of solidarity about the area which had many advantages. Most of the people were desperately poor and, without the week's credit at the corner grocery store, they would have found it difficult to handle things for their families.

There was much that was depressing about this area. But against this were hidden qualities that Harry, even though he was only about five or six years old, was influenced by. Here in this quite ugly environment there was an intense sense of unity among the people. Neighbourliness meant being neighbourly - in other words, being available at any hour of the day or night to give help or succour to those about you. There was also a fierce kind of loyalty which provoked every dweller to defend the suburb and its people against anyone who would speak ill of it. Sometimes this kind of defence erupted into violence. And violence was a permanent resident of the area. So too were greed, gambling and drunkenness.

After a couple of years, Harry's family moved into larger premises and bakery on Erskineville Road. By this time, society in general was feeling the pinch of the depression. Harry's father, like most businessmen at that time, was under-capitalised and constantly struggling to meet his obligations. This set of circumstances led to his mental breakdown and a total collapse of the business.

Harry's eldest brother, Syd, was then about nineteen. He tried desperately to carry on the business but was eventually forced to abandon it and to help move his family out to the grandparent's home in Bexley. Harry's Dad was then in a mental hospital where he stayed for about six months. Harry was about nine when the family left Erskineville. He took with him the habit of a soiled environment and several acquired habits which were less than commendable. One of these was stealing. Like most of the kids, he had learned from the adults in the district, more by example, than by precept, that this was the right way to 'get on'. Later this skill led him to the Children's Court and may well have pushed him along a pathway to crime. Fortunately, this didn't happen.

Harry also took with him the germ of a thought which flowered as he grew into his teenage years. This was the resolve that if he ever married and had kids he would never let them grow up in a place like Erskineville. This was a resolve he clung to steadfastly and despite many difficulties, managed to fulfil his resolve. The whole 'Dumpleton family' was literally squeezed in the tiny weatherboard cottage out in the country at a place called Bexley. This was the grandparent's home who were themselves trying to eke out a slender living. As a professional gardener, Grandpa not only grew vegetables for the enlarged family but kept a beautiful garden which frequently won district prizes.

So for Harry, his blurred picture of a smelly, sooty place called Erskineville receded in his memory with the help of the bright fresh air of his new home situation. Among his treasured memories of that time were the trips the family used to make out to 'Grandpa's' on rare occasions when they could get out of Erskineville. This meant a steam train trip from Erskineville to Rockdale and all the excitement of the chugging, puffing steam engine with the prospect of getting cinders in your eyes when you stuck your head out the window. The train journey was no more than six miles and yet, to Harry and his brother, Tom, it must have been as exciting as a man's first trip to the moon. Once out of the train at Rockdale they would scramble over the bridge and bundle into Iffland's horse bus.

The three mile journey to Mimosa Street (which was the terminus of the route) was another exhilarating adventure. With the clip clop of the horse's hoofs and the smell of the manure when the horse paused for relief, they each strained at the windows to make sure they missed nothing on the way. The pinnacle experience of the journey came when they reached Mimosa Street and piled out of the bus. From that moment it was a mad race down the hill to Grandma's little cottage and a scramble to see who could be first at the letterbox. No, they weren't after letters. The prize they were competing for was a large, green, slimy frog; this mysterious creature seemed to be always there when they came to visit Grandma. Not to find him there was a major disappointment for them.

Eventually Harry's father came home from the hospital, faced the challenge of finding a job and remaining his life. He, too, had habits that clung to him tenaciously like barnacles to a ship long overdue for dry docking. Harry's father was an inveterate gambler. This, in essence, had been the reason for his business failure in Erskineville and in the coming years it proved to be the same reason for similar failures. Harry's mother was, of course, the one who carried the heaviest burden for this weakness. The story of her fortitude and dedication to her family would make a beautiful story in itself. Although she had borne nine children, she was a short, slender person with a gentle manner and an intensity of courage that seldom showed. These qualities were crowned by an overwhelming compassion for others in need.

Harry and his brother, Tom, just two years older than he, were never surprised at this kind of incident. Coming home from school they might find an extra boy about their own age in the home. The only explanation they would receive from their mother would be, 'Johnny's mother is sick. He'll be staying for tea and sleeping here tonight. You two boys will have to sleep together.' Harry's mother was a proud, beautiful hen who always had room for a few more chickens underneath her feathers. Two boys, either rejected or orphaned from their families, extended their night's stay to several years and became part of the family. By then, Harry's elder sister Florrie had moved to New Zealand. This meant that the Dumpleton family was 'all male' except for Mum. Later, a cousin Lena made her home with them and also grew to be part of the family until she married.

Like bricks in the hands of a skilled bricklayer the weeks swiftly built up into a high wall of years leading to a fateful day on July 13th, 1927, when Harry lost his leg. In retrospect, Harry now sees that incident not as an unjust tragedy but as a turning point in his life that led to so much that has been beautiful. Through it, he believes, God led him not only to the point where he achieved victory over the bad things he had learnt in Erskineville, but which led him to a pathway of service.

Excerpt from 'It's Only a Leg!', written by Harry Dumpleton under the pseudonym Hugh Drake, published by Better Communications Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1981.