

St George Historical Society Inc.

Bulletin

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL

MARCH-APRIL 1997 Edition
MEETING PROGRAM

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11 MARCH

'Aston'

This unusual art-deco house in Bay Street, Rockdale has an interesting history. It was the home and surgery of Dr Leslie Watson, reputedly the first gynaecologist associated with the St George Hospital and probably the first to specialise in this field in the St George area. Dr Watson at one time owned the Pacific Hospital at Brighton. He was an innovator in his field and one of his surgical procedures was demonstrated at the internationally renowned Mayo Clinic. The house itself is a wonderful amalgam of inter-war architecture and was regarded as a showpiece in the 1930s. The garden, which was quite lovely in its day, was designed by Paul Sorensen, 'Australia's Master Gardener' and creator of 'The Everglades' at Leura. Bernard Sharah will give this illustrated talk.

8 APRIL 'The Southern Railway'

This new railway line will link the international and domestic airports with the suburban rail network. There will be new stations at Green Square (Alexandria), Mascot, domestic and international airports and North Arncliffe where an interchange will provide access to the Illawarra Line. Construction will be carried out by Transfield Bouygues Joint Venture and a representative from this company, Ms Kathy Jones, will give a talk about this exciting project.

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 NEWS

Despite a disappointing turnout for the **26th Anniversary of Lydham Hall** it was a good opportunity to get together with members of the Society. Saturday the 22 February was a very hot day and perhaps this provides some explanation for the poor response from the public. Thank you all members who contributed their time, in particular we are indebted to Bettye Ross for organising the 19th century clothing and linen display. Thank you also to Heather McLaren who made up badges for volunteers on the day. The badges will come in handy for future use.

Rockdale Council has commissioned a **conservation and museum management consultant**, Mr Ian Bowie, to give a report on Lydham Hall. Since December there have been two meetings with members of the Lydham Hall Local Committee and three reports by Mr Bowie. Some of the recommendations of the consultant are quite challenging. For instance, the proposal for an entrance carriageway in front of Lydham Hall would take up part of the street and provide an impressive approach to this historical house, something which it lacks at the moment. Another suggestion is that Council purchase the Mabel Holbeach Collection from the National Trust. . The collection, which forms the nucleus of the house museum, is on loan from the National Trust. Both of these recommendation involve large expenditure on Council's part and may never be adopted. However, Council must eventually decide whether to purchase the Holbeach Collection as there is always the risk that the National Trust will cancel the long-standing loan arrangement.

La Perouse Museum and Bare Island

10.30 am Saturday

15th March

As this is our first outing for 1997 let us make it one to remember.

Explore: Bare Island, see and hear the stories and history of this unique island.

A Visit to the museum will also be an interesting experience and a stroll around this beautiful peninsula is well worthwhile.

Meet: at 393 Bus stop in Eddy Avenue around 10.15 and 10.30am

Cost: own expense - donations to the Society gratefully accepted.

Contact Dora Lenane 9 6602714

Banbury Cottage - garden destroyed

After so much work was put into saving for posterity this very significant house it comes as quite a shock to learn that the garden has been wilfully destroyed. Last year the Heritage Council of NSW placed an interim Conservation Order on Banbury Cottage and a Conservation Report was carried out by architects Tropman and Tropman which confirmed that the site was of high regional significance. It was the last of the Muddy Creek farmhouses in a high degree of intactness. Four generations of one of Rockdale's pioneer families, the descendants of Thomas Mascord, had lived here until 1995. Since then it has been unoccupied and earmarked for redevelopment by the new owner, who has been lobbying Rockdale Council to rezone the street for high-rise residential housing. Council deferred a decision on rezoning for a period of two years. About a fortnight ago a bobcat made short work of all the original vegetation apart from some mature palm trees. The latest news is that the owner wants Council approval for a child care centre on the site. We will keep you informed.

'Belmont' Restored

And now for some good news. If you are driving down Wollongong Road, Arncliffe, stop for a moment outside number 215, where a two-storey Victorian villa has undergone a transformation. Formerly hidden from view by a hideous early 1970s cream brick extension this historic home now stands in restored splendor. The unsympathetic extension has been demolished and all original detail meticulously copied from its identical twin, *Fairview*, at 197 Wollongong Road. Both houses were built in 1884 by two Irish brothers, Thomas and Alexander Milsop, who made a fortune on the Kurrajong Goldfields near Forbes. Alexander, the owner of Belmont, was the first mayor of Hurstville.

My Grandfather, Samuel Schofield

My maternal Grandfather was Samuel Schofield who came to Australia under guardianship many long years ago at the age of twelve. After seeking gold in New Zealand and California, he returned to Sydney and established a farm and residence at the corner of what is now Princes Highway and Ashton Street, Rockdale. Prior to that he sought gold in many places in New South Wales and Victoria, and as I can recall him relating to me once how he was 'held up' by a bushranger. He finally settled down and purchased land in what is now Princes Highway and Ashton Street (he was born in Ashton in England). His farm extended to Beach Street on the southern side and to Muddy Creek on the northern boundary. My Mother often told me she often went fishing in that creek and went rowing at times. Muddy Creek was ultimately 'canalised' during the depression of the '30s, when unemployed were given so many hours work depending on their marital status and number of children.

Until her death, my Mother was the oldest living pupil of Arncliffe School. That part of the roadway [where Arncliffe Public School stands] was then known as 'the pinch'. She also related to me an incident when a man and his wife were returning from Sydney in their sulky when a flash of lightning caused the horse to become unruly and galloped into a nearby waterway and both were drowned. Hence the name of Spring Street, Arncliffe. Frequently my Mother used to walk home for lunch and then return to class. It was not until the death of my wife that I moved out of the St George District.

Grandad was also responsible for the siting of Kogarah School, and was able to procure seven acres of land then owned by the Swedish Consul who said that 'If you can get six others to give a sovereign each you go and select seven acres of my holding' and that was how Kogarah School came into being. There was some criticism (isn't there always?) and grandfather was unpopular for the chosen site being so far from the then Kogarah Township which was then close to where the St George Football oval is now situated. The railway was not then in existence. When asked why he had chosen that site, his response was that the site was at the crest of a rise, and during wet weather it would be naturally drained and the children would always have a dry playground.

After some years Grandfather left his Rockdale farm and moved to Wyong Creek where he created a citrus orchard some miles west of Wyong township, and his residence there is still evident and occupied. My Grandad died at the age of 98, and until the day he died he could read the newspaper without spectacles, and believe me, he could recite Shakespeare by the page...

Ray Mitchell

Ed. I wish we had more letters like this one. Ray Mitchell, I hope you don't mind us publishing your letter but this is wonderful material. Thanks for taking the time to write to us. We are also very fortunate to receive a letter from Alan Chapman, whose recollections of Rockdale in the 1920s is also published in this bulletin. Thank you, Alan, we enjoyed your letter very much. Alan also donated a photo of the Rockdale District Boys' Band 1933 (First Appearance) of which he was a member. Unfortunately, it does not photocopy very well and so cannot be printed in this issue. Nevertheless, it will make a valuable addition to our photographic collection.

Rockdale in the 1920s

My family moved to Rockdale 1925. We lived in a flat above my uncles' shop, Fieldhouse and Baker Footwear Makers at 492 Rocky Point Road, now known as Princes Highway.

At the time Rockdale was the top shopping centre on the Illawarra Line. After electricity became available a 'white way' was created between Bryant Street and Bay Street. A 'white way' was a row of lights placed underneath the shop awnings. Later on Hurstville became the major shopping centre. There was a speed limit of 15 miles per hour through the town from Bestic Street to Skidmore's Bridge. This bridge which was just down from Lister Avenue covered a section of Muddy Creek. Telephone services were manual, either attached to the wall or handset known as Dolly Varden. You rang the exchange by a handle attached to a box gave the number to the exchange who connected you to the person. After completion of the call you rang off the phones which had a [separate] mouthpiece.

If you went swimming at Brighton-le-Sands (Lady Robinson Beach) you swam in 'the old baths' which were opposite Brighton Hotel. The Hotel at the time was being used as Knox's School. The baths were segregated. Women on one side and men on the other. There was a platform stretching into the bay with a wooden wall along its length and below water level was a row of steel bars so bathers could not mingle. On the men's side in the dressing sheds was an area set aside to nude sunbake. Later on, sensibility prevailed and mixed bathing was allowed. Rockdale Municipal Council built another swimming pool further south. The old baths were demolished and the site is now occupied by a restaurant. On the foreshores of Botany Bay there was a picnic area known as 'Shady Nook'. It was an attractively grassed area with Norfolk Pines. At the foot of the Grand Parade was a building called San Juan, an amusement centre which later became housing units.

The Chinese had a lot of market gardens in the Rockdale, Brighton, Arncliffe, Kogarah region. They extended from Bay Street to Wickham Street, both sides of West Botany Street and down to Moate Avenue at Brighton. In the vicinity of Moate Avenue was the old Brighton Racecourse. Nearby was Jim Erskine's dairy farm and other dairies. Across from Farr Street south, Annabels had a dairy and an ice works. (The boy Annabel used to do a lot of flying. In fact, he died in a plane crash). A lot of this area was a swamp with plenty of leeches.

A tram service ran from Rockdale to Brighton. Fares were three pence for adults, a penny for children under 14 years. The tram line was single track from Rockdale to Farr Street where there was a loop. Buses also ran to Brighton from Rockdale. The buses left from King Street and went via Bryant, West Botany Street, Bestic Street, Moate Avenue, Bay Street to the Grand Parade.

There were two picture theatres in Rockdale - the Imperial, which later became the Rex, near Bryant Street (Dalrymples owned this one) and the other further south was the Acme, managed by Fred Edson. There was also an open-air theatre on the east side of Princes Highway near Bryant Street. There were two dance halls in Rockdale on the western side of the railway - the Palais Grand in Frederick Street and the Castle Palais in Railway Parade. There were others including Rockdale Town Hall.

East Side

CE @ AV. Penrose Town hall Bryant St. Whitehurst Tailor Meads Milk Bar Bike Shop Vacant Block Page Cake / Restaurant Watts Jeweller S.R. Buttle Grocer Tollands Millinery Martins Deli Milk Bar The Grand Hotel Lane Way Price Barber Fish Shop Fieldhouse @ Baker Footwear Makers Adams Cake Funeral Parlours King St	Fruit Shop Costello Dick Stone Butcher Brooke's Newsagent Dan's Menswear Moran @ Cato. Grocer Jolley's Lady's wear Bay St. Bank N.S.W. Tuckers Shoe Store Fish @ Chips Shoe Repairer Fruit Shop Mont.de .Petit George SMITH Saddlery June Russel Ladies Hairdresser Mills @ Brighton .Grocers Laidlaw Hairdresser Fire Station Milk Bar Acme Theatre Garage Charlie Bray Milk Bar House Shops Salvation Army Vic Hickman Car Hire Lister Ave Dr Meeks // Dr Lofberg 1925/35
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West Side

Ice works House St Johns Timber Yard Shops Milk Bar Imperial Theatre/Rex Lupton's Photo Winspeare @ Polldore Hardware Shop Eizenberg Hardware GEEVES Ave Mc'Iraiths Grocer Shop Commerical Bank Gillespies. House of Tone Wine Bar. Herbert .Hairdresser Knapp's Butcher Wentworth. Tailor. W.H. Soul & Patterson Chemist Selfridge/Coles. Store Astridge Lane Lofberg. Chemist	Post. Office Keen's .Milk Bar. Gregory's Butcher. Hopcroft Tailor//Fruit Shop. Napper's .Smallgoods. Zarkin's Milk bar. Tramway Arcade. King's Fruit or's Smith's Florist Fish Shop Whitchard's Railway Station 5 WAY's C'Vealth Bank. Cake Shop./above Dentist KEAT'S Ave. Royal Hotel. Vincent Cane Shop Napper's Produce. Cairncross Building Material's Motor Bike./Bike Shop.(Snowy ?) Garage. C.V. Holland G.M.H. Dealer KEAT'S. Ave. Ambulance Station
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