

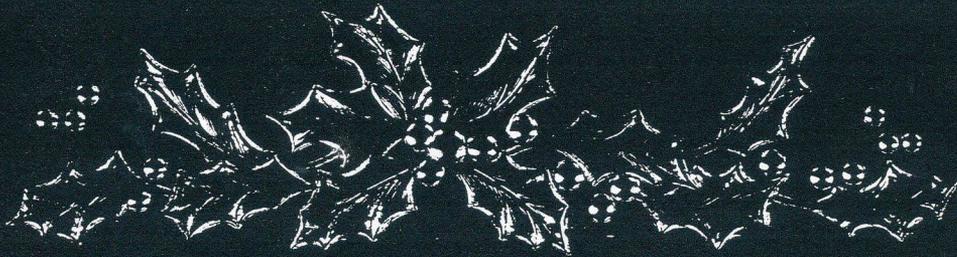
*St George Historical Society*

*Inc.*

*Bulletin*

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 1997 Edition



CHRISTMAS WISHS



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## **NEXT MEETING**

### **04 NOVEMBER St. George Historical Society's Role in the Local Area.**

Mr. John B. Brandenburg of Rockdale City Council's Property & Recreational Development department, will speak to the St. George Historical Society about our role in the affairs of the Rockdale Area, particularly in relation to the functioning of Lydham Hall

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.

### **09 DECEMBER Christmas Meeting and Slide Presentation.**

Once again, we have been most fortunate to secure Mr. Peter Sage for our Christmas meeting. Mr. Sage will present a slide show on an as yet undisclosed topic. There is no doubt however, that the evening will as in previous years, prove both entertaining and educational.

Members, please remember to bring a plate of festive goodies on the night.

## FROM THE EDITOR...

I trust that this year has been good to the majority of our members and their loved ones. To Mr. John Curran, Mrs. Dora Lenane and other members who have been or remain unwell, we extend the Society's best wishes for a happy and holy Christmas and a healthier 1998.

Please make a special effort to come to the Christmas Party night on December 9, 1997 and our annual Lydham Hall function detailed in the What's On section of the journal.

As mentioned in the previous journal, I am new to the job and aim to make the Society's journal interesting, informative and a pleasure to read. To achieve this goal however, I require and welcome your constructive feedback as to the articles published in this bulletin and would **especially** value contributions or suggestions as to future topics.

Please do not be inhibited in putting pen to paper as I will if requested to do so, assist in the preparation of your material for this publication.

Remember readers; this is **your** Bulletin!

Kind regards,

Wesley Fairhall

Christina Stead, the most famous resident of Lydham Hall, would have turned 95 years' of age in 1997.

To commemorate her birth and noteworthy life, this the final Bulletin for 1997, will feature an article used with the permission of the Australian Women's Weekly magazine dating from November 17, 1976. The article was titled :-

**“ Ranked with the immortals - CHRISTINA STEAD ”**

## Working at white heat, 20,000 words a day can pour from her pen, yet the last thing on her mind is publication. This notable Australian writes because it is in her. Now returned from abroad she granted KAY KEAVNEY one of her rare interviews

IF you saw her in the streets of the Sydney suburb of Hurstville, you'd hardly give the elderly woman a second glance.

You might notice her firm walker's stride and erect back. You'd never guess, though, that this was Christina Stead, whose life and works your descendants might be studying a century from now.

Overseas, where she lived, loved, adventured and wrote for nearly 50 years, they compare her with the immortals: George Eliot, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Proust.

Few writers, let alone Australians, have been so praised in their own lifetime as this 74-year-old widow.

And none was ever harder to interview!

She's courteous, urbane, articulate (in several languages) but even pricklier about privacy than her friend and admirer, Nobel Prizewinner Patrick White.

As she said in her deep voice: "All I'm interested in is the work."

This interview was a rare privilege.

She'd granted few since she came home to live in a specially built-on wing of her union-official brother's house in Hurstville. And she'd block with a straight bat the minute you got too personal.

Example:

I ask about William Blech, brilliant, colourful, cosmopolitan, the banker, writer (as William Blake) and confirmed radical, her first boss when she reached London.

They had a marvellous love story — he and the half-starved girl from Sydney who typed his letters by day, and by night, in a drear London bedsitter, wrote her first book because she thought she was dying and had things to express. The last thing on her mind was publication.

Her boss managed to read it, saw "mountain peaks" in it. They got married in Paris. They were lovers and boon companions till he died nearly 40 years later.

I say, "You must have vivid memories of the first time you saw him?"

She says, "Very." My pen poises

expectantly. "But," she adds pleasantly, "I'm not going to tell you what they are."

End of subject.

Fair enough, though. She *has* told us in "the work" where Teresa and James Quick meet in "For Love Alone," my favourite of her dozen or so books.

All were torn out of experience, direct or indirect. ("People tell writers everything.") transmuted by creative genius. She never did think about publication. ("I write because I can.")

She wrote straight on to the same typewriter for 30 years, toting it round Europe and the US (even Hollywood, where she drew a nice salary without ever writing a screenplay, and absorbed material for her book on the McCarthy era, "I'm Dying Laughing.")

She wrote anywhere, in hotel rooms or on kitchen tables, while William pounded away on another machine in another room.

She might never have published but for

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THE AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S WEEKLY—NOVEMBER 17, 1978

## CHRISTINA STEAD

FROM PAGE 71

William. But even he never saw a line till a book was finished.

The books just dribbled into print, sometimes decades after she wrote them. Even now, she has "works" thrust heedlessly away in trunks.

Anyway, in all essentials she's Teresa, just as she's Louisa Pollit in "The Man Who Loved Children," her acknowledged masterpiece.

US literary pundit Randall Jarrell wrote of it: "It seems to me plainly as good as 'War and Peace' or 'Crime and Punishment'." American poet Robert Lowell called it "a classic, a big black diamond of a book."

"In a manner of speaking," she admitted, "the Pollits are my family."

"Time" magazine called the Pollit father "a champion male chauvinist boar." Christina's father was a brilliant self-made marine biologist, a socialist (she still is). She was his eldest, born in Rockdale, NSW.

He married again after her mother died, and produced a big second family. Christina loved them but, crushing dreams of becoming a writer, had to drudge for them. The family was poor ("I knew only poor people.").

She was 26 before she got away. She saved in secret, with travel the lodestar. A teacher, she became a secretary for the

extra money. "It took me six years," she said. Her endurance was incredible. She walked from her Rockdale home to her city job, and literally starved herself.

She even worked on the boat that took her to England, nursing an alcoholic. When she landed, she was so weak she feared she was dying. But she went job hunting. She had to. And met William Blech.

Very soon the arid years were over. The future was rich, though the Blechs never were.

### When William was too ill to read her book . . .

"He was widely considered a financial genius," she said. "But he was too honest and good-natured to make fortunes for himself. He had a gift for friendship and wonderful talk. "We moved around a great deal, always entering the life of the particular country. I never cared where I lived, so long as I was with him. And he felt the same."

She only wrote when an idea beset her. ("Ideas grow inside you like pinetrees. Some grow bigger than others.") For long periods, she wouldn't write at all. At white heat, it was sometimes 20,000 words a day.

She never re-read a book when it was

finished. Slowly, but awesomely her reputation grew.

In 1967, she was put up by Australia for the \$10,000 Encyclopaedia Britannica Award — and rejected, on the grounds that she'd ceased to be Australian. "Ironically," she said, "we always wanted to come here, but the problem was money. When William was ill (he died in 1968) he wanted to bring me back to my family."

William grew too ill to read her still-unpublished "I'm Dying Laughing." She read it aloud to him. When he died, the springs dried up.

She lived on alone in England, which she never liked. ("I think it's the Thames clay. It gets into everything. A country needs a hardrock base, like Australia's.")

At first for brief visits, now permanently, she did come home to the city (now greatly changed) which she evoked and preserved so perfectly in "Seven Poor Men of Sydney."

Is she writing again?

"Nothing at the moment," she said, closing up. "I changed countries and that cut me off quite a bit." She stood up. I risked one more very personal question: Does she regret not having children?

"No," she said after thought, and smiled. "The books are the children." ☺

## ***WHAT'S ON.....***

### **Annual Christmas Get Together at Lydham Hall**

**DATE: Sunday 30/11/97**

**TIME: 1.30 P.M. to 4.00 P.M.**

This is an enjoyable occasion by which members (and friends) unable to attend the monthly evening meetings, can meet, chat and partake of light refreshments in the period charm of historic Lydham Hall.

The day affords an excellent opportunity to invite a friend to enjoy the beautiful surroundings

**COST:** Free.

**CONTACT:** Bettye Ross on telephone number 9589 0229 or Joan Fairhall on telephone number 9546 5555 to advise of your attendance.

**LADIES, PLEASE BRING A FESTIVE PLATE OF CHRISTMAS GOODIES AND GENTLEMEN SOME CHRISTMAS SNACKS OR DRINKS WOULD BE MOST WELCOME.**

### **Explore Leichhardt**

**DATE: Wednesday 19/11/97**

**TIME: 10.00 A.M.**

This should prove to be an interesting day organised by the Church of England Historical Society. The outing will include an easy walk to view some of the interesting sights of the local area. We will be given tours of All Saints' Anglican Church as well as the Uniting Church, formerly a Methodist Church.

**MEET:** 10.00 A.M. All Saints' Anglican Church at 126 Norton Street Leichhardt.

Take or buy your own luncheon which can be eaten in the Senior Citizen's Centre.

**COST:** \$5.00 donation to the Church of England Historical Society.

**CONTACT:** Joan Fairhall on telephone number 9546 5555 or just turn up.

Some proverbs to ponder:-

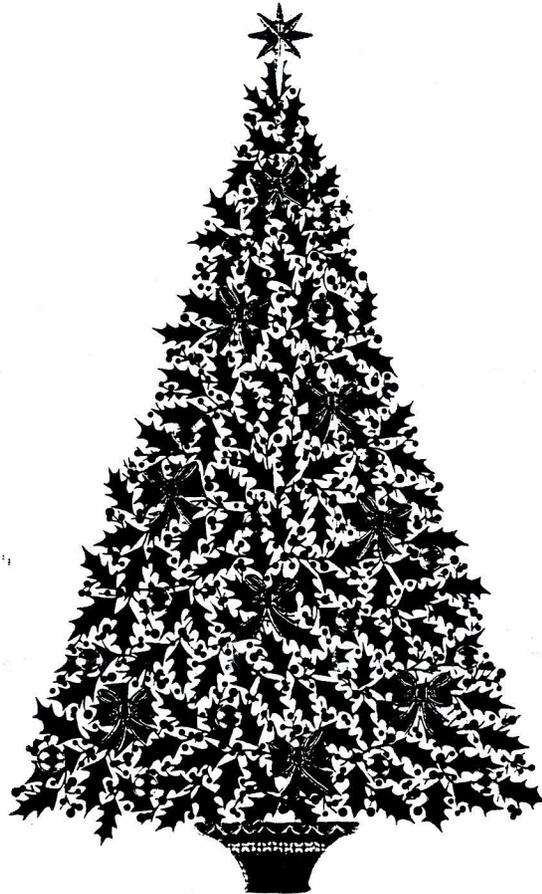
"A man as he manages himself, may die old at thirty or young at eighty";

"A ploughman on his legs his higher than a gentleman on his knees";

"A father is a treasure, a brother is a comfort, but a friend is both";

"Of wine the middle, of oil the top and of honey the bottom is best"; and

"All who joy would win, must share it; happiness was born a twin."



Season's Greetings