

St. George Historical Society Inc. Bulletin

PROUDLY SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL

JANUARY – FEBRUARY 2002 EDITION



Arthur Ellis,

1916 – 2001

VALE

PRESIDENT	Mr. Wesley Fairhall	(02) 9546 – 5555
SECRETARY	Mrs. Valda Behag	(02) 9546 – 2819
TREASURER	Mrs. Dora Lenane	(02) 9181 – 2121
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VICE PRESIDENT	Mr. Richard Henke	(02) 9587 – 8307
RESEARCH OFFICERS	Mrs. Bettye Ross	(02) 9589 – 0229
	Mrs. Pamela Herrick	(02) 9529 – 4879
SOCIAL SECRETARIES	Mrs. Dora Lenane	(02) 9181 – 2121
	Mrs. Joan Fairhall	(02) 9546 – 5555
PUBLICITY OFFICER	Mrs. Joan Fairhall	(02) 9546 – 5555
BULLETIN EDITOR	Mr. Richard Henke	(02) 9587 – 8307
LYDHAM HALL COMMITTEE	Mrs. Bettye Ross	(02) 9589 – 0229
	Mrs. Gloria Henke	(02) 9587 – 8307
	Mr. Bernard Sharah	(02) 9567 – 8989
PUBLIC OFFICER	Mr. Robert McGarn	(02) 9587 – 4469
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Meetings are held 8:00 PM the 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.

JANUARY - APRIL EVENTS AGENDA

MONTHLY GUEST SPEAKERS

- Tuesday February 12th 2002** Bettye Ross will speak on “Facts - some known and some unknown, before and after colonisation plus some local facts too!”
- Tuesday March 3rd 2002** Wesley Fairhall will bring a display of Carnivorous (Insect Eating). Plants and speak about their care, culture & captivating appeal. Come along and see both the weird and enchanting.
- Tuesday April 9th 2002** Judith Dunne, well known historian and authoress from Parramatta, will whet our appetites for a forthcoming bus trip to Parramatta. We will visit sites of historical interest, as well as hear about those others no longer in existence or unable to be viewed on the day.

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We would like to congratulate Mr Ronald Rathbone OAM for his Australia Day Award. It was the first award given by Rockdale City Council as a Local Government Award for Long Service.

This award was two very handsome medals, a lapel pin and a Certificate listing his achievements.

Congratulations also go to Mrs Bettye Ross who received a Certificate from Rockdale City Council to acknowledge her nomination for the Citizen of the Year Award 2002.

UP AND COMING EVENTS

- February 24th, 2002** "Lydham Hall" the historic house owned by Rockdale City Council was officially opened as a museum February 22nd 1971.
- The Anniversary of this event will celebrated on Sunday, February 24th 2002 by the naming of a room in memory of the late Arthur Ellis.
- Lydham Hall will be open on this day from 12:00 pm till 4:00 pm and light refreshments will be served.

THANK YOU PETER

We again would like to thank Peter Sage for his delightful talk and slides on the History of Sydney's Trams, which he gave on the evening of our Christmas Meeting.

PRESIDENTS REPORT

I must confess that it almost seems "wrong" for me to be writing this report, as in my unexpected absence, our Vice President Richard Henke ably chaired most of the meetings in the latter half of last year. Aside from this 'extraordinary' duty, Richard has worked consistently well in the production of the Bulletin; as any editor would attest, sourcing and presenting articles in an aesthetically readable manner, takes time and much effort. Thank you Richard for a job well done. If every member contributed one article be it a few lines of personal memoirs or a more lengthy document, it would make the Editor's role muchness frantic.

The Committee has also been fortunate in having our Treasurer and joint Tour Officer Dora Lenane and Secretary Val Behag keep the finances, minutes and correspondence respectively on track. Ladies, thank you both for your efforts in 2001. As always, the indomitable Bettye Ross has been to the fore with suggestions for Lydham Hall activities, not to mention co-ordinating group bookings, the Lydham Hall Roster and Society fund raising events and raffles! As can be seen, we are heavily indebted to Bettye for her dedication. I would also like to personally thank Gloria and Heinz Henke for their generous donation of time and labour in functions at Lydham Hall and elsewhere. Naturally, all members who attend our meetings would think it remiss of me not to convey our heartfelt gratitude to the Refreshments' Coordinator' Alan Stahl. Finally thank you to all members who attend the meetings, help with supper, chauffeur other members and friends or volunteer for Lydham Hall duty, you are highly valued and needed,

As you will read elsewhere in this Bulletin, the guest speakers will present a varied range of topics. Please come along and if possible bring a friend, EVERYBODY is welcome! Please also support one or more of the planned excursions in 2002, at least one of which will be conducted by a respected historian through historic Parramatta Thank you Joan Fairhall for organising these outings.

I sincerely hope and pray that 2002 is conducive to members' health, happiness and involvement at meetings, Lydham Hall functions and excursions. To members who are ill, housebound or unable to attend meetings for other reasons, may I wish you in particular, better fortune in the weeks and months ahead. If any members were personally impacted by the recent bushfires, and need some material things or even just a chat, please feel free to call me.

In conclusion, I extend my best wishes to all,

Wesley Fairhall

President

HERITAGE WEEK FOR 2002

This year Heritage Week is between April 20th till April 27th and the theme for Heritage Week this year is "Bridging the Gap". Lydham Hall will be open on Sunday, April 21st, 2002.

Our view on bridging the gap is between the younger and older generations.

DO YOU KNOW

If it had been Three Wise Woman instead of Three Wise Men, they would have asked for directions, helped with the birth, cleaned up the Stable, cooked a casserole, bought more practical gifts.

A TRIBUTE TO ARTHUR ELLIS

(1916-2001)

It was a familiar sight - an exultant Arthur Ellis standing before members of the St George Historical Society announcing the results of his latest research. Adopting a triumphal gesture he would hold aloft his irrefutable evidence. As to previously held notions about the past - these were scornfully dismissed by Arthur as 'utter rubbish!!'. Sadly, St. George Historical Society members will never witness this scene again. Arthur Ellis died on 3 November 2001.

He was born Arthur William James Ellis at Redfern on 19 April 1916, the third of Thomas A. Ellis and Elsie Cronin's five children. For many years the family home was a brick cottage opposite the stone quarry in Dowling Street, Arncliffe and it was here that Arthur spent his childhood and early adolescence. Along with his brothers and sisters he attended the Catholic school at St Joseph's Convent in Forest Road Arncliffe and later, Marist Brothers, Kogarah. He also attended Arncliffe and Bexley Public Schools.

In 1926, when Arthur was only ten years old, his father was killed while cycling to work at the Tempe tram depot. This event placed an enormous burden on his mother, Elsie, who was left to support five children. To provide some income she returned to the boot factory where she had worked before her marriage to Thomas. Hilda, the eldest child and then aged fifteen, had to assume responsibility for looking after the younger children - Austin (13), Arthur (10), Norma (6) and Thomas (4).

At age 14 Arthur left school to supplement the family income. It was arranged that he be employed as a farm labourer on a sheep and cattle station at Tenterfield. During the Great Depression of the 1930s he travelled widely throughout New South Wales taking whatever work was available - farm labourer, drover or jackeroo. He enjoyed this period of his life as he was allowed a considerable amount of freedom and had more time to himself. He read voraciously and developed an intense interest in socialist politics. He returned to Sydney and found work in a variety of capacities, one of which was sail making. Although he held no formal qualifications Arthur was 'jack of all trades'. In the early 1950s a former boyhood friend, Stan Burrage, employed him as a plumber. He remained in this trade for the rest of his working days and was an active and life-long member of the plumbers' union.

In 1942 he married Norma Alice Rose and in 1949 they moved into a newly constructed Housing Commission cottage at 1 Sunbeam Avenue, Kogarah. This was to be Arthur's home for over forty years. It was here also that Norma and Arthur raised three children - Stephen Brian (1944), Rhonda Christine (1945) and Amber (1955). However, Arthur's family life was again disrupted by tragedy in 1961 when Norma was diagnosed with breast cancer. She died the following year when the youngest daughter, Amber, was only six years old.

Despite being a very practical man Arthur possessed a sharp intellect and enquiring mind ideally suited to historical research and analysis. In this regard he was outstanding. In the early 1960s he received a great deal of encouragement from William 'Bill' Foster, principal of James Cook High School, a man for whom Arthur maintained lifelong admiration.

When Arthur was posed a historical question (that interested him) he did not rest until it was resolved to his satisfaction. He acquired more historical knowledge of the Rockdale district than perhaps any other person. Arthur was a familiar figure at the Mitchell Library, the State Archives and the Land Titles Office. He knew his way around the Land Titles Office and the location of its historical treasures better than most of its staff. Arthur was aided in his research by possession of a remarkable memory. He became a walking, talking history of the area retaining an astonishing amount of minute detail about who lived where and how the area looked before more recent development took place. Perhaps just as importantly, he was also a wonderful storyteller who could bring the past to life with idiosyncratic and, at times, highly amusing anecdotes about the district. He loved an audience and gestures when giving a talk were pure theatre. He would take on the role of many characters in his stories and act out their parts. These were the characters of the area - the heroes and villains and 'colourful local identities'.

While in no doubt about his own ability Arthur often expressed admiration for other researchers and historians who 'knew their stuff'. 'Oh I'm not as good as so and so at old title research- she's a wiz!' Arthur would say. But heaven help any historian who didn't have the facts straight. Because of his own high standards Arthur had little patience for poorly researched history. Speakers at St George Historical Society meetings sometimes expressed trepidation about Arthur's presence. 'Will Arthur be there?' they sometimes asked. He certainly kept them on their toes.

Arthur always maintained that it was his suggestion that Mabel Holbeach's fine collection of mid-Victorian furniture be used to furnish the St George Historical Society's proposed museum at Lydham Hall. Arthur knew Mabel Holbeach from his childhood days. In his youth Arthur had been a stableboy at the Richardson family home, Wickham, in Rocky Point Road (now Princes Highway), Arncliffe. His duties included fetching water from the well, tending to the horses and transporting his employer, 'Sandy' Richardson from place to place (usually the Bonnedoon Golf Club). Mabel Holbeach was a housekeeper at Wickham and on the death of Sandy Richardson the house's beautiful collection of mid-Victorian furniture was bequeathed to her in acknowledgement of many years of faithful service. The furniture now represents the core of Lydham Hall's museum display.

Arthur's historical research was not confined to dusty archives. He enjoyed walking and was often outdoors looking for physical evidence of the past. Even in later life Arthur was a remarkably vigorous and agile man for his years. However, declining health inevitably took its toll and on 3 November 2001, at age 85 he died. Arthur's body was cremated at a private ceremony at Sutherland Crematorium on 7 November 2001.

Arthur Ellis's contribution to the St George Historical Society was enormous. He had been a member for 32 years, most of those as research officer. He served eight terms as president and a number of times as vice-president. He also represented the Society for a great many years at RAHS conferences. In September 1997 Arthur was granted Life Membership of the Society. With few exceptions he was a major contributor to every history of the Rockdale district. In fact, he was almost invariably the first point of reference for anyone wanting to know more about Rockdale's past.

As well as his love of history, Arthur was passionate about the environment, so much so that he joined the Franklin River Dam Protest in Tasmania in 1982 at the age of 66.

Arthur Ellis' story is one of overcoming adversity. His formal education was brief and his economic opportunities limited. But through self-education and a passion for knowledge Arthur Ellis became a well-known and widely-respected figure in the field of local history. St George Historical Society members, Rockdale residents and all enthusiasts of local history will sorely miss him. Vale, Arthur Ellis.

Mr. Bernard Sharah
Senior Vice President
St George Historical Society Inc.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am most indebted to Arthur Ellis' son, Stephen, for providing much of the information included in this eulogy. I also wish to thank Joan Hatton, Pamela Herrick and Bettye Ross for their valuable contributions.

IN REMEMBRANCE

A Mayoral Minute was held for the late Arthur Ellis on Wednesday January 30th 2001.

It was read by Rockdale City Councils, Director of Corporate Development, Mr John Logue and was based on the the tribute above which was written by Mr. Bernard Sharah.

The Passing of Arthur Ellis was noted with deep regret and secondly the Interpretation Room at Lydham Hall is to be named "The Arthur Ellis Room" as requested by the Lydham Hall Committee.

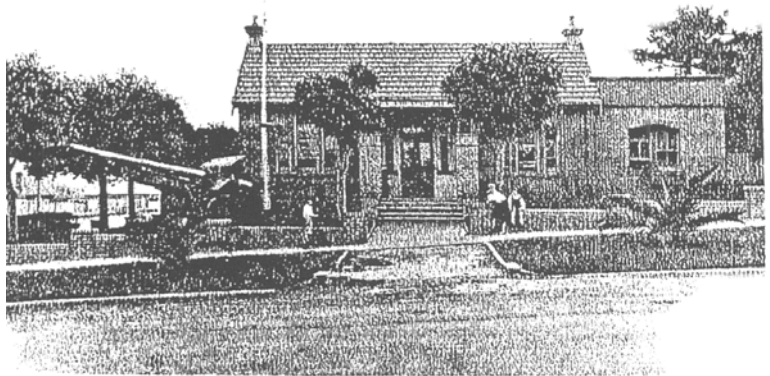
Mr. Stephen Ellis and his wife received a Certificate and Flowers after the reading. Mr Steven Ellis is son of Arthur Ellis.

BEXLEY METHODIST/UNITING CONGREGATION TURNS ONE HUNDRED

The end of the 19th Century and the commencement of the 20th was a time of excitement in Australia. For years men of political vision had struggled with the idea of creating a nation out of six independent colonies, steeped in self interest. At the same time, and even for longer, Methodist men of vision had struggled with the idea of creating a single, national Methodist Church from the three independent denominations which traced their spiritual ancestry back to John Wesley.

On January 1st, 1901 Federation came about and the Commonwealth of Australia was formed. On 1 January 1902 the Primitive Methodist Church, the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the United Methodist Free Church united to become the Methodist Church of Australasia.

At the local level, the Borough of Bexley was proclaimed on June 28th, 1900 with a population of approximately 3,000 people. Determining the location of the Council Chambers was the main item of business for the new Council during the first half of 1901. Finally two blocks of land were purchased on the corner of Queen Victoria Rd and Northbrook St and the building was ready for occupation in November 1901. Residents of Bexley who worshipped at the Rockdale Methodist Church in Bay St were ready to branch out themselves and on January 8th, 1902 the Rockdale Methodist Quarterly Meeting unanimously agreed to commence Services in Bexley and the first Services were held on January 26th 1902 in the brand new Bexley Council Chambers (now Jack & Jill Pre-School). The Rockdale Minister at the time was Rev JW Moore and a layman, active in the establishment of the new Congregation, was Mr HG Barringham.



The Bexley Council Chambers, now the Jack and Jill Kindergarten

Referring to the Bexley Congregation it was reported on February 15th 1902 in "The Methodist"

"We commence here with good prospects of establishing, in time, a flourishing cause, by the blessing of God." In fact,

"Notwithstanding the heat of the day the attendances were good - about 50 in the afternoon and not so many at night, but still a good attendance."

The Sunday School was opened on the same day, meeting at 10 am and 2 pm, the latter immediately before the afternoon church Service. Mr Thomas Brent was the inaugural Superintendent and he was assisted by Mr William Pike.

It was not long before the need for a church building began to occupy the thinking of the congregation. A report in "The Methodist" on August 20th, 1902 supports this.

"The cause here is progressing favourably. There are now 35 children on the Roll of the Sunday School. The afternoon congregation is increasing and the evening congregation is well sustained. A choice allotment has been secured as a site for a church... Having a frontage to Gladstone St, of 66 ft. with a depth of 200 ft, nearly opposite the Rockdale College."

A Church Building Fund was launched and by October 1902 an anonymous donation of £100 had been received. Various means were used to raise money in addition to straight out donations e.g. a "Lantern Lecture" and a 'Tamasha' in the Town Hall, Rockdale. At the time of the dedication of the church only £100 of interest bearing debt remained."

In 1903 Rev JW Moore reported having negotiated a loan of £102/13/6 covering the price of the 2 blocks of land in Gladstone St, ('secured earlier') and associated expenses. In the same year, having considered stone and weatherboard as the possible building material, it was resolved

"That we have a brick building, the cost not to exceed £350, that the matter be placed in the hands of Mr F Board, Architect, for plans and specifications and that Rev M Maddem be requested to see to the same and that we apply to the Sustentation Fund for a loan of £300 for building puposes."

Contrary to the resolution, a tender of £400, by Mr S Gillett, was eventually accepted and the two foundations stones were laid on April 23rd 1904 in the presence of the Lord Mayor of Sydney and the Presidents of the National and NSW Methodist Conferences. There was a very touching moment in the Service. An invitation was given to place contributions on the stones while children sang the "Sunbeam Song" and then

" ... Suiting the action to the word, (the children) laid a contribution on the stone which they had raised at a Doll Fair on the previous Saturday."

Altogether. £55 was raised "a goodly and generous response indeed."

The Minutes of the Borough of Bexley dated the May 16th 1904 state

"HG Barringharn, steward of the Methodist Church and E Barringharn, Secretary, 'Methodist Band of Hope', gave notice that these bodies would not require the use of the Council Chambers after June 22nd ."

The new church was dedicated on Saturday, July 2nd 1904 and the opening Services were held on 3 and July 10th 1904. It was a typical brick Church of the period; rectangular, with a small porch at centre-front with a door on each side. The back wall was made of weatherboard to allow for future extension, which was taken advantage of in 1908. This room described as a "Vestry Improvement" provided the Sunday School with some of the additional space it required. (It was not until 1914 that the weather-board Sunday School Hall was built.) Mr DT Brown prepared the 'Plans & Specifications' for the Vestry, Mr JL Lewellen submitted the successful tender of £67 and two other laymen, Mr Alfred Taylor and Mr William Berryman provided `3 doors and 7 or 8 window frames and 3 full length seats. Mr Fiddick offered to The New Church make tables and trestles, if timber were provided.



By 1924, the provision of considerable additional space was unavoidable and this led to the erection of a second, larger church on 2 adjacent blocks which has been described in an earlier issue of the Bulletin. This present Church building, inadequate in size for some of the congregation's community Services, nevertheless has served the congregation well for 76 years bringing them into their Centenary Year.

Rather than a single Anniversary Service, the Congregation has devised a year of celebration including several very special Services and 4 Concerts involving choirs and soloists. Anyone who would like to receive a brochure may contact the author on 9587 6619.

Source: Article written by and Illustrations provided by Dr. James N. Pendlebury.