

St. George Historical Society Inc. Bulletin

PROUDLY SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL
MAY - JUNE 2003 EDITION

Memories of Aqua Flora Park



“Recollections of bygone happy days!”

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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.

MAY - JUNE EVENTS AGENDA

EVENTS

- May 9th BUS TRIP – Auburn Botanical Gardens & Fairfax Printers Chullora**
 You are to meet at 9:00 am at Ormonde Parade, Hurstville
 Bring a picnic lunch to be eaten at the Auburn Gardens, it is also believed that there is a Kiosk in the gardens, after which we will proceed to Fairfax Printers, where we will be taken on a tour of the building. Cost \$20.00
 For further information contact Joan (02) 9546-5555 or Dora (02) 9181-2121
- May 13th Speaker for Meeting – Peter Sage**
 Peter Sage will conduct a slideshow and talk on “Colonial Tasmania”. A tour of Australia’s Island State, with emphasis on its 19th Century Colonial Heritage.
- June 10th Speaker for Meeting – Betty Goodger – “Passages Out”**
- July 28th Mystery Bus Tour of Historic Homes - Cost \$20.00**
 You are to meet at 9:00 am at Ormonde Parade, Hurstville. Bring a picnic lunch.
 For further information contact Dora (02) 9181-2121 or Joan (02) 9546-5555



CORRECTION



In our last Bulletin we had an Article on page 4 titled “MEMORIES OF THE WAR TIME YEARS 1940 to 1945 IN ARNCLIFFE.” At the end we had this typed. “Betty Williams, who was the sister of Majorie C Mercer.” It should read “Betty Williams, who is the sister of Majorie C Mercer.”

Sorry Betty

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

In what seems like no time at all the end of my term as president is fast approaching.

There have been some positive gains in the last year. The Arncliffe Heritage Walk held on 30 March was well attended and the reaction of participants was very encouraging. As a result we gained some new members. I would like to wish our new members a warm welcome and trust that the St George Historical Society fulfils their expectations. There will be more walks in the future and we will be endeavouring to maintain a high level of interest in local history and heritage.

Lydham Hall remains the main focus of our activities and Heritage Week and this year's theme of 'Fresh Water, Waves and Wanderings' was well received by visitors. And of course there were outings to places of historic interest, such as Richmond, Windsor and the Sydney Hospital museum

These are positive signs but many challenges remain. These include an aging membership, small attendances and the ever-increasing burden of insurance. But what must be remembered is that such problems are not confined to the St George Historical Society. They confront a great many community organisations.

This is not to say that we should simply accept the situation and do nothing. On the contrary we must be continually seeking ways to improve the organisation and attract new members. I believe one such way is to develop a stronger sense of purpose by becoming more active in heritage issues. A case in point was our efforts to save the Victorian shop at 25 Forest Road, Arncliffe. Whilst not succeeding in persuading Rockdale councillors to conserve the building we at least gained a higher profile for the Society and demonstrated our resolve to protect buildings and sites of historical significance.

In closing I wish to acknowledge the tireless efforts of our committee without whose dedication and hard work the Society would almost certainly not exist. I am referring in particular to the Henke family, Bettye Ross, Dora Lenane, Joan Fairhall and Val Beehag. On behalf of all the members, a big thankyou to these people.

Kind regards,
Bernard Sharah
President

FACTS FROM THE 1500's

Next time you are washing your hands and complain because the water temperature isn't just how you like it, think about how things used to be.... Here are some facts about the 1500s:

Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May and still smelled pretty good by June. However, they were starting to smell so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odour.

Baths consisted of a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children-last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it-hence the saying, ***"Don't throw the baby out with the bath water."***

Houses had thatched roofs, thick straw, piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the dogs, cats and other small animals (mice rats, and bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof-hence the saying ***"It's raining cats and dogs."***

There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could really mess up your nice clean bed. Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That's how canopy beds came into existence.

The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt, hence the saying ***"dirt poor."*** The wealthy had slate floors that would get slippery in the winter when wet, so they spread thresh on the floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on, they kept adding more thresh until when you

opened the door it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed in the entry way - hence, a **"thresh hold."**

They cooked in the kitchen with a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot. They ate mostly vegetables and did not get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner, leaving leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight and then start over the next day. Sometimes the stew had food in it that had been there for quite a while-hence the rhyme, **"peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot nine days old."**

Sometimes they could obtain pork, which made them feel quite special. When visitors came over, they would hang up their bacon to show off. It was a sign of wealth that a man **"could bring home the bacon."** They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and **"chew the fat."**

Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with a high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food, causing lead poisoning and death. This happened most often with tomatoes, so for the next 400 years or so, tomatoes were considered poisonous.

Most people did not have pewter plates, but had trenchers, a piece of wood with the middle scooped out like a bowl. Often trenchers were made from stale pieces of bread which was so old and hard that they could use them for quite some time. Trenchers were never washed and a lot of times worms and mould got into the wood and old bread. After eating off wormy mouldy trenchers, one would get **"trench mouth."**

Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or **"upper crust."**

Lead cups were used to drink ale or whiskey. The combination would sometimes knock them out for a couple of days.

Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up-hence the custom of holding a **"wake."**

England is old and small they started running out of places to bury people. So they would dig up coffins and would take the bones to a **"bone-house"** and reuse the grave. When reopening these coffins, one out of 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying people alive. So they thought they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night (the **"graveyard shift"**) to listen for the bell; thus, someone could be **"saved by the bell"** or was considered a **"dead ringer."**

THE TICHBORNE DOLE

In olden days in England, a certain Lady Mabella, on her deathbed, asked Lord Tichborne to give her the means to bequeath a dole of money to anyone who asked for it on the day of Annunciation. Sir Roger promised her only the proceeds of as much land as she could go over while a firebrand was burning. However, a miraculous degree of strength came to her and she crawled around 23 acres, still to this day called the Crawl. On her deathbed the lady warned her family against any departure from the promise. She predicted that the family and its estates would die out because a generation of seven sons would be succeeded by seven daughters, and the mansion would crumble if they stopped the Tichborne Dole.

It became tradition to bake 1400 loaves for the dole, and give twopence to any applicant in excess of the number that could be served bread. After centuries, when vagrants assembled in large numbers on the Tichborne estates, by 1796 the number of these paupers caused the dole to be discontinued.

In 1803 the mansion was ruined; the baronet of that day had seven sons, the eldest of whom had seven daughters, and the owner of the estates became a Doughty instead of a Tichborne.

Source: **"Facts from the 1500's"** and **"The Tichborne Dole"**... Internet... Author for each... Unknown

MEMORIES OF AQUA FLORA PARK AND THE SANS SOUCI DISTRICT

‘Recollections of bygone happy days!’ by Lew Bond

This publication has been funded by the New South Wales Bicentennial Council to celebrate Australia’s Bicentenary in 1988.

FOREWORD

Due to Australia’s Bicentenary, there is a strong new national feeling about our past and a real appreciation of the efforts of our pioneers. Every year, thousands of people visit our art galleries, museums, historic homes and the many collections made by our forebears. One of the most popular of these pleasures is found in visiting gardens provided by nature and tended by man.

These brief notes are an attempt to describe the pleasure grounds conceived and constructed in Sans Souci more than fifty years ago by one pioneer, Mr. Albert Royce. Sadly, they have now vanished. A little early local history is thrown in for good measure. Hopefully, this may assist readers to gain an appreciation of Aqua Flora Park and its relationship with the Sans Souci district.

The statutory requirements limiting the retention of some records to just six years has increased the difficulty of researching old documents. Consequently, most of this monograph was only made possible by the kind contributions of many public-spirited persons. It is therefore as accurate as personal reflection and painstaking research can make it.

The Municipality of Rockdale is a fortunate community having rich heritage and legacies. May progress continue in the future whilst, at the same time, retaining it’s beauty and peacefulness for residents and visitors alike.

Lew Bond

1988

AQUA FLORA PARK, SANS SOUCI THE SANCTUARY OF MR. ALBERT ROYCE

In the 1930’s, there were a number of pleasure grounds scattered throughout Sydney. They were small in comparison to today’s standards and would not have been rivals to the Botanic Gardens or Taronga Park Zoo. Nevertheless, they delighted thousands of visitors. Aqua Flora Park at Sans Souci was unique for two reasons. It was the only park displaying a huge collection of native orchids and seagulls were successfully bred there in captivity.

Very little publicity was given to Aqua Flora Park. An occasional advertisement in two early newspapers ‘The Propellor’ and ‘The St. George Call’ which circulated in the St. George District attracted attention. Many visitors, however, learned of the pleasure ground by word of mouth.

After delving into old newspapers and talking to older ‘locals’ who remembered a particular visit to the park, some information came to light. Some people took snaps with their ‘box brownies’ and many a little Mary or Johnny feeding a kangaroo or monkey has turned up in the pages of a dusty, well-worn family album. They bear testimony to former happy times.

It is hoped that, as the reader turns these pages, a little nostalgia may come flooding back. Perhaps halcyon days will be relived in one’s memory.

EARLY DAYS IN SANS SOUCI

The area known as Sans Souci is fairly flat ground bordered on the East and South by Botany Bay and the Georges River and on the West by Kogarah Bay. The peninsula, in the early days, was forested with eucalyptus and cedar trees. It was due to the settlers, who were mostly timber getters and bark strippers, that one area near where the present Sans Souci Hotel is situated became known as Stripper's Point. Sans Souci was named after the palace of the German Emperor near Potsdam and is French for 'without care'. Subsequent to 1840, a Mr. Robert Cooper built a hotel at Rocky Point, Sans Souci (near the northern approach to the present Captain Cook Bridge). During the period 1866-69, this hotel was leased by William Rust. The hotel was surrounded by beautiful pine and cedar trees and, together with its water frontage, must have been charming and appealing. Even though situated in such lovely surroundings, the passing trade was not very lucrative and the hotel passed through many hands. In 1867, whilst still the licensee of the Sans Souci Hotel, Rust purchased about 140 acres (approx. 57 hectares) about half a mile away at Sandringham. Here, probably between the years 1870-71, he built the 'Prince of Wales' hotel. Sandringham was named by him after the famous Royal English residence at Sandringham built during the same period for Edward, Prince of Wales. By a coincidence, Sandringham was the birthplace of William Rust. Sandringham is now a section of Sans Souci.

This structure, known in more recent years by locals as 'Lousy Les' or 'Mick Moylan's' was demolished in 1960 and a new hotel, the Sans Souci Hotel, erected on the site.

Thanks to their remoteness and rusticity, both hotels became popular hideaways for honeymooners. They were also patronised by city sportsmen who came from Sydney on horseback. This must have been a marathon ride over one hundred years ago.

William Rust was also associated with the 'Sir Joseph Banks Hotel' at Botany, a famous hostelry which attracted the elite of early Sydney. It is thought that he may have managed this hotel; however there is no documentary evidence that he was ever the licensee. Adjoining the hotel, which was built in 1840, was a private zoo with elephants, bears and scores of horses. The amusements (including dancing, cricket, archery and bowling) attracted many visitors. A miniature train system, the tracks traversing the extensive grounds, must have delighted children and adults alike.

It may be of interest to some readers to hear how a journey to Botany Bay was described more than 100 years ago. The flowery, poetic style has long since given way to plain English; however it is not difficult to imagine the 'excursion' to the 'Sir Joseph Banks Hotel' in 1882.

BOTANY

During holiday season, is often made accessible by steamer, skirting 'round the rough and rugged rocks' but on ordinary occasions we may take the tram-car, 6d (equivalent to 5 cents), which runs at short intervals from the terminus, Bridge St., direct to Botany; or we may hire a cab, and so take a more extended drive round the historic region of Botany Bay. We pass through Redfern and Waterloo, thriving suburbs, almost part of the city

On the road are large kerosene works just beyond Waterloo. Market gardens have usurped the place of the bright epacris and the varied boroniae. We know most of the wildflower regions of the colony, but none to compare in variety and richness with Botany, as it was. Midway on our journey a signboard 'o'er the road' announces the welcome halfway house. Arrived at the Bay we pay our respects to Captain Cook's companion by drinking a health in the 'Sir Joseph Banks Hotel'.

At this place of public resort are well-kept gardens, quoit grounds, skittle alley, dancing pavilion-in fact, all the surrounds necessary to brush away the cobwebs of the city from the brains of excursionists: (Illustrated Guide to Sydney 1882, Gibbs, Shallard & Co.)

"AQUA FLORA PARK"

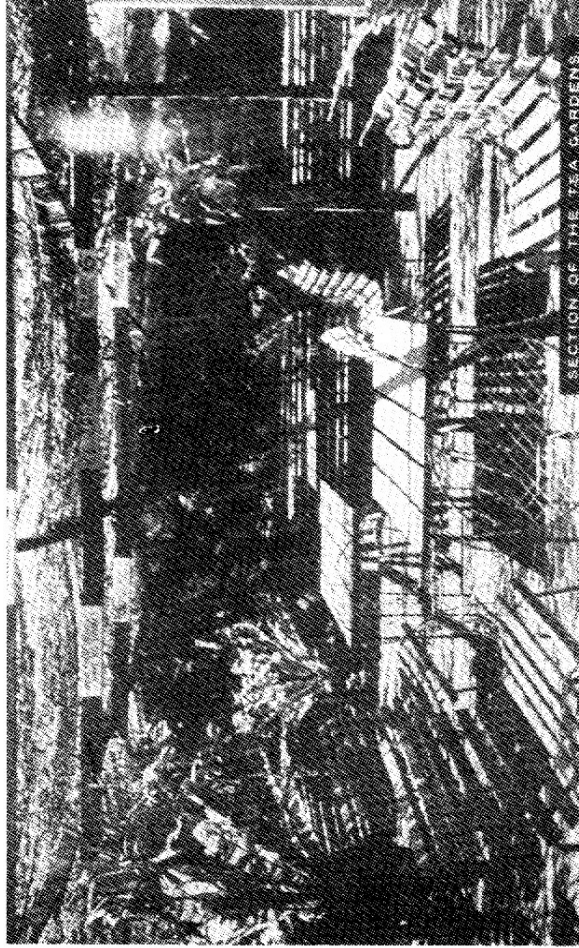
SANS SOUCI ★

Spend an enjoyable afternoon at the above Park where there are Native Birds, Kangaroos, Monkeys, etc.

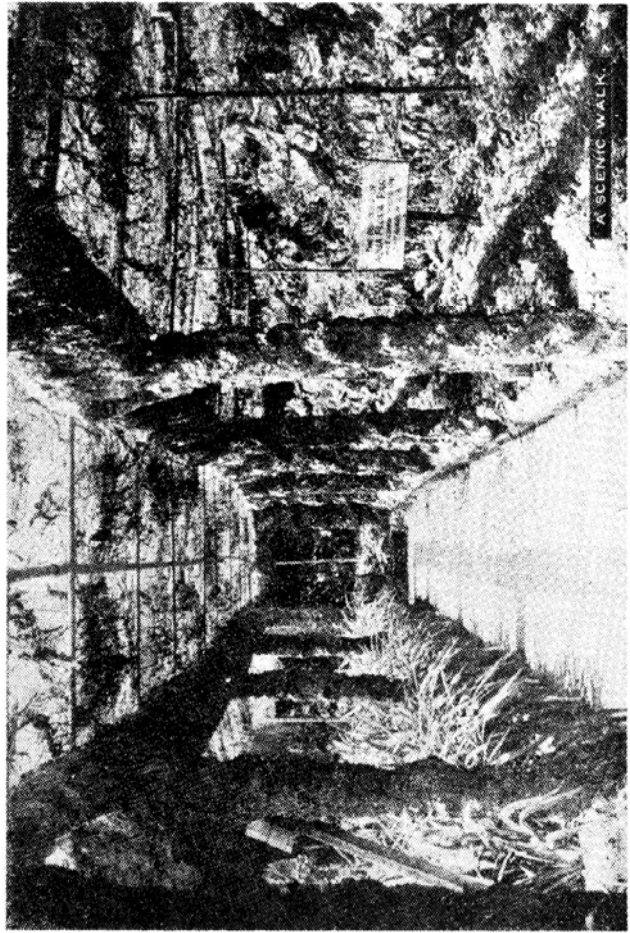
★ Afternoon Tea Served. ★ Up-to-date Milk Bar. ★ Open Daily.

LX 5357.

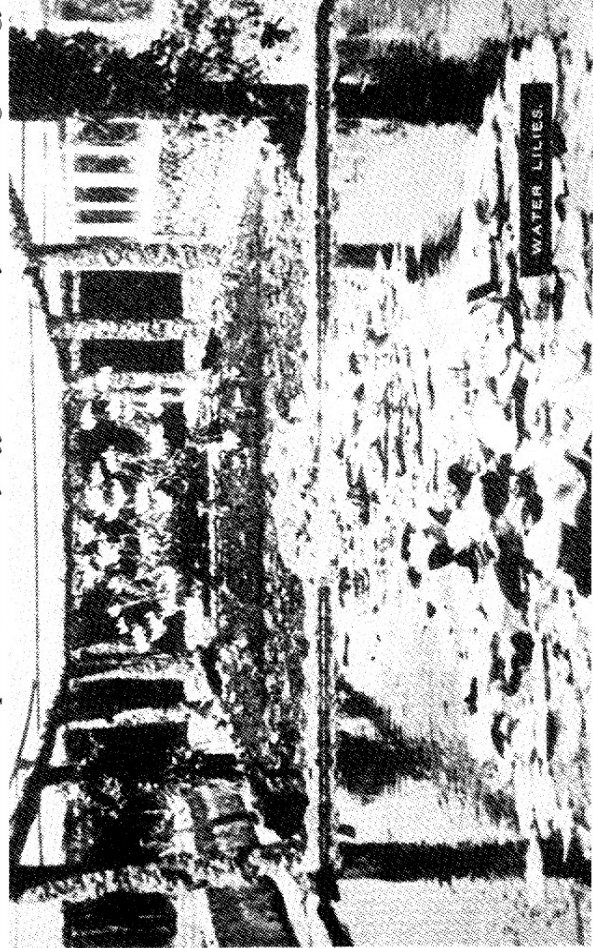
An advertisement for Aqua Flora Park regularly found in local newspapers. Note the prefix to the telephone number displayed at the bottom of the advertisement.



The bracken shaded refreshment area which was a favourite stop-over for tourist coaches. One of the advertising signs is quaintly worded 'Our Soft Drinks Have No Equal' which is very different to today's marketing strategy.



This is the scene which first greeted visitors at the entrance to Aqua Flora Park.



The spectacular display of water lilies which housed fish until the aquarium was built.

The old edifice is still standing, commanding excellent views of Botany Bay. The extensive grounds used to border the beach as did the lawns of the 'Sans Souci' and 'Prince of Wales' hotels. Later, the many rooms of the hotel were divided into flats.

The suburb of Sans Souci did not really go ahead until 1887 when a steam tram line from Kogarah to Sandringham was opened. Development quickened from then on and many new houses were built.

Two further guides described the Sandringham and Sans Souci areas in 1930 and 1937 respectively. From the New South Wales Bookstall Co. 'Guide to Sydney and Pleasure Resorts of New South Wales' published around 1930 we read;

BRIGHTON-LE-SANDS, SANDRINGHAM AND SANS SOUCI

Brighton-Le-Sands is the chief centre of that great stretch of beach on the west shore of Botany Bay known as Lady Robinson's Beach. The means of access is by rail from Central Station to Rockdale, thence by tram to the beach.

There is an excellent swimming bath and the Brighton Hotel is well appointed. There is first rate fishing and boating.

Sandringham is about three miles further south along the shore, and to reach it from town, take the train to Kogarah (one stop beyond Rockdale) and thence tram to Sans Souci and Sandringham. The tram ride is pretty and may be taken as a pleasurable trip.

The line makes a big loop, taking Sans Souci on the way out and Sandringham at the far end of the circuit.

The hotel and pleasure grounds at the last named have a delightful situation, and parties can obtain all facilities required. These places are at the mouth of the George's River. Boats may be hired and generally the fishing is good'.

Wisons published their 'Sydney and Suburban Street Directory' (the forerunner of Gregory's and other street directories) every year. The 1937 edition gave only scant mention to Sans Souci. This edition would have been the last to talk of trams as the old 'puffing billies' were replaced on 3rd July, 1937 by the silent running, pollution-free trolley buses. There had been many complaints of noise and smoke pollution associated with the old trams. From the pages of Wisons' directory, I quote;

'SANDRINGHAM AND SANS SOUCI . . .

Near the mouth of the George's River are reached by tram from Kogarah Station to the beach (4d.)(2.); good fishing and boating also bathing. Delightful picnic grounds. Steamers call at wharf on Sundays and holidays for Brighton-le-Sands and Kurnell.

There are public shark-proof baths and an excellent reserve of six acres at Sans Souci'

The reserve was the area adjacent to the old 'Prince of Wales Hotel'. It is now covered by the car park adjoining the present day 'Sans Souci Hotel'. These picnic and fairgrounds were so popular that people came in hundreds from all over Sydney for an enjoyable day's outing. A local photographer of the day, Joseph Brokenshire, has captured the scene so well in one of his many superb photographs taken throughout the peninsula. The century old Morton Bay Fig. (4d is equivalent to 3 cents). Norfolk Island Pine trees are now the only visible reminders of days past.

Trolley bus maintenance and parts gradually became more costly and this very efficient means of transport serving residents of the peninsula came to an end on 15th August, 1959 when they were replaced by diesel buses. Many residents still rue their passing.

These descriptions make it easy to imagine that Sans Souci was a naturally beautiful area. It attracted many people to settle and of course much development took place. During the first

two or three decades of the 20th Century, many fine homes were built along with schools, shops, churches, dance halls, boat sheds, swimming baths and more. The region was blest with many open spaces which our civic forefathers in their wisdom had developed into fine parks and sports fields.

The suburb is still charming. However, in a few cases, man's so-called 'progress' conflicts with, rather than complements, nature's way.

The steam and later, electric train service from the city together with the tram service from Kogarah to Sandringham provided a good transport system. People did not mind spending up to an hour commuting to the city to work and another hour to go home when the pleasures of swimming, fishing, sailing and boating were at their front door.

And now we continue through those peaceful and leisurely years to the 1930's.

THE CONCEPT AND FULFILMENT OF A DREAM

A man of vision was Albert Royce, who in 1930, lived at 74 Cook Park (a lovely reserve along Sandringham Beach.)

Mr. Royce was a chocolate manufacturer. His factory was at Earlwood while he also conducted a milk bar at Dulwich Hill.

It was while he lived in such lovely surroundings that he conceived the idea of constructing a nearby park where he could breed birds and animals to show to the public and where he could display rare orchids and plants that were so dear to his heart. He had in mind something of a miniature zoo which both local residents and visitors to the area could enjoy without the necessity to travel to Taronga Park Zoo.

Perhaps his thoughts originated from the zoo and gardens that William Rust had managed at Botany over 70 years earlier. If so, it was an ambitious plan for the keeping of animals and maintenance of Mr. Rust's venture would have resulted in heavy expenses.

Mr. Royce was a determined and energetic man and his dream was destined to succeed. In the 1930's, there was still much land on which to build and he chose an area adjoining what is now called Clareville Reserve.

In 1928, Rockdale Municipal Council purchased land facing Clareville Avenue from a Mr. David Bloomfield. This was then known as Clareville Pleasure Grounds. Later, in 1936, Council bought a further six lots in Waldron Street from a Mr. Henry Devlin. Mr. Royce leased this land and, on 29th March, 1931, set to work with a stout heart to develop his dream. After more than two years back-breaking work, Aqua Flora Park was opened to the public in September, 1933.

From the brochure, 'A Message from Paradise', I quote;

'Once there was a useless paddock, sandy and drab with shrubs and grass. Albert Royce bought the paddock, and for a hobby, spent his weekends preparing the land. Time passed and the gently nurtured land was at last ready to be beautified. Thus, on March 29, 1931, Aqua Flora Park was born:'

It had much to offer.

The area that comprised Aqua Flora Park was bounded on the North by Clareville Park, on the West by Waldron Street, on the South by Norwood Street, and on the East by Clareville Avenue. It was approximately 3 acres and was a good site. It was remarkably level, only 150 yards from Sandringham Beach and the steam trams ran along Clareville Avenue providing transport for visitors. Very few had motor cars in those days and people really knew what their legs were for. It was considered nothing at all to walk four or five miles to work and back, six days a week.

Visitors to the site today will be hard pressed to find a vestige of evidence of the park. The only living things remaining are a dozen coral trees regularly planted in two rows in Clareville Reserve which formed a shady avenue adjacent to the entrance to Aqua Flora Park. There is a short length of galvanised water pipe protruding from the ground at the trunk of the coral tree nearest to Waldron Street and this relic may well have been part of the water reticulation system which was needed for the park.

Picnickers still pause for a rest at Clareville Reserve and stroll through the 'shady nook'. The swings and slippery dip are always popular with children. Children attending the Pre-School Kindergarten adjacent to the park are indeed fortunate.

The Sans Souci Boy Scout Hall was built a few years ago and this building was almost adjacent to the entrance to Aqua Flora Park. An interesting fact is that a resident who assisted in the building of the hall well remembers locating the 3 inch main water pipe which served the park from Clareville Avenue. This same pipe now supplies water to the Scout Hall.

The entrance to Aqua Flora Park was gained under a large arch constructed from a heavy timber beam bearing the name AQUA FLORA PARK.

Patrons passed under the arch and through a small gateway where a girl collected the admission price of sixpence. Many of the older nearby residents well remember Mr. Royce's generosity of letting 'locals' in for free.

The park was conducted as a family business and it is doubtful if more than half a dozen persons were employed throughout the existence of the park at any one time.

Of course the initial planning, building and laying out the various sections involved many workmen. More than one resident, however, remembers Mr. Royce, who was of small stature toiling with a pick and shovel when extensions were required. Bulldozers were unknown in Australia in those days.

Most of the various animal houses, bird flights, fish tanks, columns and supports for roofing etc. were constructed from rough cast concrete. This form of construction for such projects was common in those days. Indeed, much of Taronga Park Zoo still bear traces of stucco finished cages and buildings.

Once through the entrance, visitors found themselves in a delightful 50ft. long fernery where they were shaded by a lovely canopy of Woolly Butt tree ferns and giant stag horns. Hundreds of flowering bulbs added colour to the lovingly tended garden beds.

Before the visitor actually entered the park, he would have passed a very long public hall called Clareville Hall, part of which was on Mr. Royce's property. This hall was only one of a number of halls in the district which were favourite haunts of the young and not so young alike. They would attend Saturday night old time dances which were so much an important part of social life in those days. Clareville Hall was of the old weatherboard style with a hipped corrugated iron roof. It was very spacious and many lodge 'do's' were held there. It was demolished in the mid 1930's.

After the hall was demolished, Mr. Royce built an enclosure of 50 fish ponds. These ponds were built (approximately) on the site of the rear portion of the hall which was so long it's western wall fronted Waldron Street. Spacious fish tanks, which were all dug by hand, contained about 10,000 fish including giant golden carp. Some of the fish were obtained from a nursery at Bexley.

Next to the fish ponds was a large display of orchids. They formed a vast colony of over 30,000. As well as indigenous plants there were exotic orchids from India, Burma and Siam. These were gay, fragile-looking flowers whose ancestors came from steamy jungles. The display was claimed to be the largest and most unique in the Southern Hemisphere. It stirred the imagination of all who came to admire and all who returned to renew their acquaintance.

Mr. H.L. Hooper, an elderly gentleman now residing in Banksia, remembers the day Mr. Royce employed him to deliver plants, reptiles and a few animals to stock the park. He helped to erect the high wire fences and shelters and cages for the animals and birds. He remembers bringing many plants from a nursery at Blakehurst run by two brothers, Bert and Jim Dent. Woolly Butt tree ferns were obtained from a nursery at Helensburgh conducted by one of the Dents' brother-in-law. The reptiles (carpet and diamond snakes) were purchased at Wyong.

Only a small number of kangaroos, wallabies and emus were brought to the park. Mr. Royce bred most of his animals at the park.

Government regulations applied at the time to all sanctuaries where native animals were kept in captivity. A veterinary 'surgeon, Mr. N.B. King, was the Quarantine Officer responsible for the inspection of all animals and birds housed at Aqua Flora Park. The quarantine laws were administered by the Department of Health in Canberra with a Chief Quarantine Officer in each state.

All overseas animals were admitted into 'A' Class zoos (such as Taronga Park). After undergoing quarantine there for prolonged periods, some animals were allowed to be released to 'B' Class zoos and circuses such as Sole Bros., Wirths Circus, etc. to be kept under approved conditions. Some other premises were allowed to register as 'B' Class zoos for animals which were bred in Australia. Aqua Flora Park came under this category (as was Ramsgate Baths where some monkeys were exhibited) and was licensed to keep animals provided they were not allowed to escape or farmed out without permission. The monkeys were prolific breeders and some were transferred by permission to other 'B' Class establishments.

All 'B' Class zoos were inspected yearly and, if approved, their license was renewed. A license cost £50 (\$100.00) per year. Despite a few escapes by monkeys and kangaroos, the park was approved as satisfactory from a hygiene and safety point of view. A small fire did occur on one occasion; however, all the animals in danger were rescued before they were injured.

As the years passed, improvements were made. Aqua Flora Park was still young and eager to stretch out and grow big.

Shaded by a canopy of ferns and bracken was a spacious area where brightly coloured tables and chairs tempted the visitor for afternoon tea. Light refreshments (such as sandwiches, pies, sausage rolls, cakes etc.) were always available and were home made by Mrs. Royce on the premises. Devonshire teas were particularly popular. Freshly baked hot scones, strawberry jam and cream with a pot of tea cost 1/1 (10 cents) It has been said that the best ice-cream sundaes in Sydney were served here. There was an up-to-date milk bar where a milk shake could be bought for 4d. (3 cents) and other soft drinks for 6d (5 cents).

Where else could a couple of pleasant hours be spent on a Sunday afternoon strolling the quiet pathways, pausing to refresh with a cup of tea; all for 1/6 (15 cents) including admission?

In time, Aqua Flora Park came to be well known and Pioneer tourist buses would pause at the park. They were full of sightseers who would stop for twenty minutes or so for morning tea on route down the South Coast.

There were numbers of small Indian Rhesus and Macaque monkeys which had their own special enclosure. Probably the only surviving relic which links the park is in the form of a 4ft. high rough cast cement fence which today forms a boundary fence between the properties of two residents. This fence was formerly part of the monkey enclosure.

Many tales have been told concerning the monkeys. People, especially children, have been photographed with them. Mrs. E. C. Green, a resident of the district for many years, remembers her husband losing his spectacles to the quick hand of the monkey. He had to wait until feeding time at 4.00 p.m. before they could be retrieved.

On another occasion, a monkey escaped over the fences and was later found in the ceiling of a nearby house. It is understood that Mr. Royce often had to chase these mischievous monkeys who had found a way out.

There was always excitement when a kangaroo escaped. Mr. Royce would have to work hard to recapture the animal. Once a large red kangaroo escaped and lots of local children helped to round him up. He was eventually caught at Dolls Point. Doubtless, the children were rewarded with penny ice-creams.

Later another escaped. The animal decided to go for a swim and made straight for nearby Sandringham Beach. Mr. Royce had to borrow a rowing boat from a fisherman to recapture the kangaroo.

There were a number of large flights and aviaries for birds which housed parrots, galahs, cockatoos and pheasants together with other natives such as kookaburras and lyre birds. The enclosures were located on the southern side of the park and were flanked by Norwood Street. Two or three peacocks strutted around the grounds at will and sometimes visitors would see their beautifully patterned plumage if they were lucky.

Occasionally, peacock plumes which had been shed by the birds could be found along the pathways. Children would retrieve these feathers and use them in various ingenious decorative ideas. A large water area was set aside for a number of black swans which, as with all other areas, was left as natural as possible.

As at many such places, there was always a large python on hand with which one could have their photograph taken; the reptile draped over one's shoulders or any other pose so desired.

The aquarium contained approximately 100,000 gallons (450,000 litres) of water which gave life to giant pink and white water lilies and hundreds of fish.

A few figures concerning the park may be of interest. There were hundreds of native birds including over 200 fan-tailed pigeons. The annual water consumption was about 900,000 gallons (4,050,000 litres). About 200 tons of cement, 600 tons of sand and ashes and 100 rolls of wire netting were used in the construction of the park.

Mr. Royce, as previously mentioned, bred so many animals and birds in captivity. He was reputed, however, to be the first person to have been successful in breeding seagulls in captivity.

Aqua Flora Park prospered for many years throughout the war years and was continually being improved with additions of more animals, fish, birds and plants.

The park was still attracting large numbers of visitors in 1952 when Mr. Royce died. Mrs. Royce continued managing the business for another two or three years when she decided to cease trading. It must have been a difficult decision to make to see her husband's enterprise suddenly cease. And so, after over 22 years Aqua Flora Park was closed in stages between October 1955 and April 1956.

All the animals, birds and reptiles were given good homes. Some went to other zoos and sanctuaries while other birds, plants and fish were sold to private buyers.

By now, bulldozers were used extensively and what had taken many years of toil and sweat to build, was destroyed in a matter of days.

The picnic grounds that gave so much pleasure to thousands of visitors have now completely vanished. Today, the landscape is covered by neat, middle class cottages and attractive gardens. The setting is not as serene as it was in those earlier days. Many screeching white cockatoos occasionally fly over head ...perhaps the offspring of Mr. Royce's original flock!

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Mr. F. Jones	Mr. N.B. King	Mr. V. Meyer	Mrs. J. O'Reilly
Mrs. B. Perkins	Mr. R. Rigoni	Mrs. E.L. Stone	Mrs. B. Sweet

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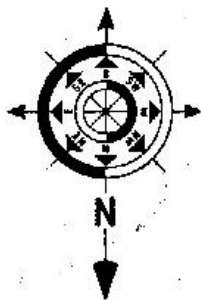
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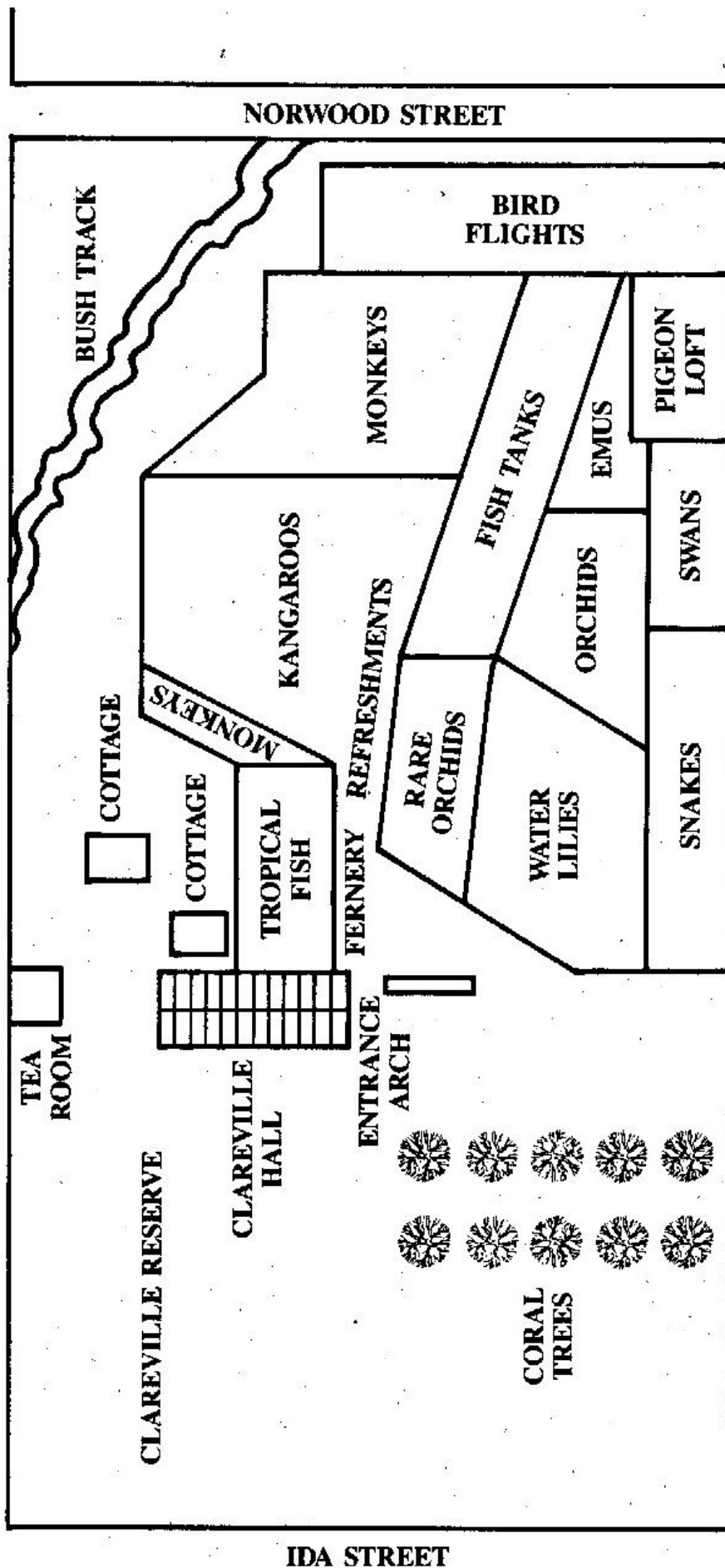
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TO PRINCE OF WALES HOTEL →

CLAREVILLE AVENUE



NORWOOD STREET

IDA STREET

WALDRON STREET

SKETCH OF AQUA PARK IN THE EARLY DAYS