

St. George Historical Society Inc. Bulletin

PROUDLY SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL

JULY – AUGUST 2004 EDITION



Celebration of Authors

Christina Stead

Brian Madden

Anastasia Cuddy

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Meetings are held 2:00 PM the third Saturday 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.

JULY – AUGUST EVENTS AGENDA

July 17th

Annual General Meeting

Being the Annual General Meeting it is the time when the executive committee is elected. We are thankful for the work of the current executive committee and wish the new committee all the best for the year to come.

Jul 18th

Christina Stead Day

12:00 pm – 4:00 pm at Lydham Hall. 18 Lydham Avenue, Bexley, NSW 2207

\$ 4.00 for Adults \$ 2.00 for Children

On this day we celebrate the Birthday of Christina Stead our famous International Authoress who lived at Lydham Hall, our local Historic Building.

A video of an Interview with Christina Stead will be shown on this day.

Light refreshments provided

SUBSCRIPTIONS

As of July 1st, 2004 is the beginning of our new financial year. This also signifies that it is time for subscriptions for the year 2004 – 2005 to be paid. For those who have not paid the subscription, post your subscriptions to our Treasurer Mrs. Dora Lenane at 5/19 Collingwood Street, Drummoyne, NSW 2047 or phone her on (02) 9181-2121.

BOOK LAUNCH

Canterbury and District Historical Society invites Members and Friends of the St. George Historical Society Inc, to the launch of the societies latest book "*Kingsgrove : The First Two Hundred Years*" by Ron Hill and Brian Madden, at 4:00 PM on Wednesday 11 August, 2004 at the **Kingsgrove RSL Club**.

This date has been selected because it is the 200th Anniversary of the date of the land grant by Governor King to Mrs. Hannah Laycock. She called the grant "**King's Grove**".

The book will be launched by Professor Ian Jack, the President of the Royal Australian Historical Society.

Kingsgrove RSL Club is in "**Brocklehurst Lane**" off "**The Avenue**" Kingsgrove, behind the Shopping Center and close to the Railway Station. There is undercover parking at the Club.

The book has 208 pages with 125 Illustrations. Copies will be available for the purchase after the launch and the authors will be present to sign copies.

For catering purposes, please notify Brian Madden on (02) 9718 – 4538 if you will be attending.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Another year has come and gone. One of the changes that we have made in the past twelve months has been the move from night to daytime meetings. The change was made in order to meet the needs of members who were finding it increasingly difficult to attend the night meetings.

In making this move we followed the example of other historical societies who had made the same change. It is difficult to gauge the success of the move but most importantly it has retained key members who would be otherwise unable to attend.

The year has also seen an increase in the number of groups visiting Lydham Hall.

One of the most important of these was a visit by the Historic Houses Trust. More recently a large tour group from Wollongong were treated to a bus tour of the area and a visit to Lydham Hall which included a light lunch. We would encourage all of our members to spread the word about our wonderful museum at Lydham Hall. The more visitors we have the more we justify our presence there.

The Society has also made a grant application for restoration of the portraits of Joseph Davis and Granny Oakes. Both these portraits are very significant. Joseph Davis was the original owner of Lydham Hall and one of Rockdale's most notable pioneers. Rebecca Oakes was the first legitimate child of European parentage and through marriage has links to one of Rockdale's local families - the Richardson's of Tempe House and Wickham. Both portraits are in a state of deterioration.

You may recall that last year the St George Historical Society received a grant from the Royal Australian Historical Society (RAHS) for the indexing of the Society's bulletins since its inception in 1961. In order to fulfill the grant requirements the Society has considerably more work to do. It requires the categorisation of all published articles under six main headings. It's a relatively straightforward task but it will take many hours. A team has been established to help with this task but we need more people. If you would care to assist please contact Betty Ross on

On behalf of all members I would like to express our thanks to the hard working committee members, without whom the Society could not carry on its important work.

I would especially like to thank Bettye Ross, Dora Lenane, Gloria and Heinz Henke, Wesley and Joan Fairhall, and Val Behag.

Warm regards to all members,
Bernard Sharah

Anastasia Cuddy

(nee Annie Macinante)

I have lived in Hurstville since 1926. Married Henry Rowe Cuddy in 1946 and moved less than a kilometre away to Waratah Street on the border. Our 'wedding breakfast' was held in the Tuck Shoppe.

REMEMBERING HURSTVILLE

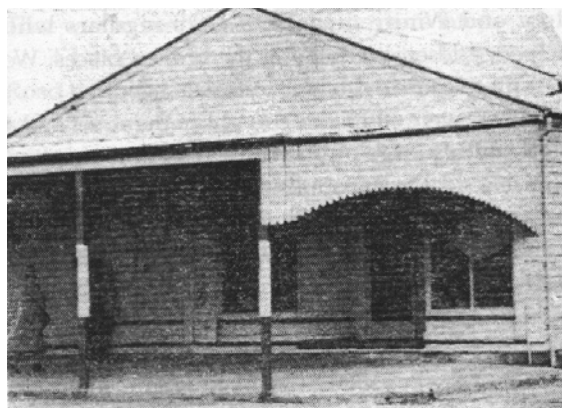
When I, Anastasia Cuddy nee 'Annie' Macinante, first journeyed to Hurstville in 1926 it was by steam train to a very orderly station with gardens and to what my young eyes seemed to be an immense tank with a great hose like an elephant's trunk which supplied water for the engine's boiler.

My father had bought (from the Russell Family) a school tuck-shop-cum-mixed business in Forest Road, No. 51 right opposite Hurstville Domestic Science and Primary Schools.

The little weatherboard shop, a familiar landmark until my mother's death in 1965 was filled with memories. So many names, later prominent in the area and beyond, were scratched into the green paint behind the old wooden front door, along with a few arrowed hearts.

'Poppa Mac' as my father was affectionately known, used to make toffee apples that sold for a penny, the apples came from Brabham's fruit shop where the famous Jack was a family member.

There were also one penny toffee sticks, butterscotch, aniseed, raspberry, coconut and oh, the honeycomb! The making of the honeycomb involved a critical moment for adding the cream of tartar, which caused it to bubble and rise. When the cook miscued or misread his thermometer, we kids cleared out... flat honeycomb.



Hurstville Public School's Tuck Shop in Forest Road

There was always a seventy pound hessian bag of sugar in the corner of the kitchen and a kerosene tin sized tin of glucose. We had a stout table with a marble slab about three inches thick on top of it and removable boards, one inch by one inch high of solid iron around the table to form a mould into which the boiling toffee was poured for setting and cutting into shapes. When half-set, we used a special cutter, which had a series of spaced blades with handles at each end and was operated like a rolling pin.

Chosen friends joined us on Sunday mornings to wrap the sweets in greaseproof paper, here and there, unhygienic perhaps but exciting, a threepenny piece would be hidden inside the wrapping of a 'lucky apple toffee'. Nell Jones from the shop next door and Winifred Masters were regulars who helped, and enjoyed eating the broken pieces. We are still friend's to-day at 84 years of age.

There were still horse troughs in the street and a blacksmith's forge on the corner of Hill Street and Forest Road. On the opposite side of the road in the grounds of St. George's Church of England you could wander around the little graveyard and pick yourself a fragrant bunch of freesias growing among the tombstones. A child care centre now occupies the site – so much for white sacred sites.

On the way down The Avenue you might be passed by Johnny Fry with bloodshot eyes and dropping false teeth as he urged his unwilling horse to move up a gear or two. He drove a hard bargain when it came to buying up empty bottles. Having lumbered down from the cart he would count them over carefully then check them over again for chips or cracks before sliding them into a potato sack and grudgingly hand over a few pence. It didn't surprise us that he died a wealthy property owner.

Matt Ryan was the milkman who measured out the daily pints of milk into the billy can hung on the back gate; the clatter of the horse's hooves, the rattle of the milk scoop against the can at three o'clock in the morning was accepted, if not enjoyed. Here and there the early risers were able to gather up the odd shovelful of manure for the garden as a bonus.

At this time Allawah station had not been built. That was to be a big event many years later.

A bus ran from Hurstville station along Forest Road to Rockdale station, not often, but slowly and safely. In my mind's eye I can still picture that bus with wooden sides halfway up, probably a wooden roof and the open space in between covered with roll-down canvas blinds if it was cold or wet. The passengers sat around on three sides with two facing each other. My father used to have the bus driver collect the meat pies for the tuck shop from Sargents in Rockdale and they were carried in an elaborate hot-box which he has soldered together out of flat galvanised iron, with trays inside, and the exterior painted with Silverfrost. This was strapped to the bonnet of the bus so that the heat from the engine kept the contents warm. The Iffland family who at that time ran the service eventually sold out but the new owners named it the Pioneer Bus Company. However, the name Iffland will always be remembered and I particularly remembered a little redheaded girl named Jean who used to buy a tomato sandwich from our tuckshop every day without fail.

Friends traveling to Hurstville by road were told after you traveled across the Cook's River, with its swampy surrounds and nearby orderly Chinese gardens, the next landmark to look out for was the brickwork's chimneys, as these three sentinels could be seen from a long way off.

Nobody worried about pollution then as the brickwork's kilns burned through the night and smoke from the chimneys blew wherever the wind took it. Parents continually warned their offspring to stay clear of the brick pit, it was a long fall into the muddy water. The former brick-pit site is now shared by Containers Ltd., and a splendid park named after the Kempt family, Mr. Kempt having spent all his working life as an employee of the Hurstville Council.

Where the Commonwealth Bank is now situated in Forest Road was once the site of the Government Savings Bank, dramatically closed during the days of the Jack Lang Government. The thirteen shillings that I had saved in my school savings account was eventually recovered – but oh the heartache in the meantime!

The school buildings are not greatly changed from the days when Miss Edwards ruled 6A class and indeed, unofficially the entire primary school like a Black Orpington hen with a brood. She hovered around the school gate, one eye on her watch, finger poised to direct the bell ringer waiting at the foot of the tower—and woe betide the latecomers. As though by

divine right, only the girls in Miss Edward's class were allowed to ring the bell—and how we envied them as they swung on that rope!

We had splendid teachers. Mrs. McGilvray was a wizard at arithmetic, Miss Mary McCaughtry for English and typewriting and the diminutive Miss Lillian Boyne, so gentle and concerned for our future, taught us all we needed to know about shorthand.

I was old enough to know what the great depression was all about. When good proud people's hunger drove them to join the dole queue at the Scout's Hall in Durham Street they were given a voucher to collect about ten shillings worth of groceries, usually from Mrs. Piercey's weatherboard shop nearby on the corner of Lily Street. Not so long ago the memories, goodwill and gossip were buried under a small group of townhouses.

There were many local families that my mother used to supply freely with bread and milk. Every morning I would be sent on a ten minute walk with a bowl of oatmeal porridge for an old lady who was destitute; the small weatherboard cottage she lived in still stands in Lily Street—for how long?

Wireless, or radio as it was otherwise known, had just started and my father quickly became involved in making his own set beginning with a crystal set and earphones and then progressing to the battery powered valve sets. Each week he bought the *Wireless Weekly* studied the printed circuit, then built a newer and better version with all the bits and pieces salvaged from the previous one. I remember cardboard cylinders meticulously wound with perhaps more than a hundred lines of fine cotton covered wire and special gadgets made of black bakelite. In the case of the crystal sets there was always a crisis when the testing time came. No one dared to move for fear of dislodging the cat's whisker—a very fine wire that had to be set in contact with an active section of the crystal—no contact, no sound. On the valve sets persistence had its reward, for on one occasion a turned in station turned out to be Radio Saigon. We didn't understand a word until the call sign was given and then the achievement was applauded. But many a night we slipped discreetly to bed and left father in a state of utter frustration with the "big silence".

By 1927 he had graduated to a five-valved set housed in a large paneled oak cabinet, which when plugged into a power point produced excellent sound from a double-sided cone speaker. This set proved to be such a very valuable instrument (at this time very few people had got past the gramophone with its simple wind-up handle and didn't trust power points) that it prompted my mother to demonstrate its capability to the headmistress, Miss. Edith Eckford. On the day the Duke of York opened the Federal Parliament House in Canberra, the headmistress marched the entire school population across Forest Road to the then paddock adjoining our shop so that they could hear the broadcast on our set. One still remembers, as part of the ceremony, the tremulous but ever sweet singing of the ageing Dame Nellie Melba.

Radio went on to play a very important part of our lives then, as it still does today. It was to prove a particular boon to the isolated families in the bush as when the pedal radio was developed it also brought them education and the Flying Doctor.

Alf Sattler set up the Queen's Theatre, really something special with its Wurlitzer organ, statues and balconies. The school celebrated Empire Day there with the singing of patriotic songs and speeches by the local aldermen. The loudest cheer was always for Alderman Hill, whose vocabulary did not include the letter aitch (h) once. Come nightfall there were bonfires and crackers (fireworks). Many a good letterbox was blown apart by a doublebunger or basket bomb. The "Queens" became the Civic Theatre, then Hopalong Cassidy, Rin-Tin-Tin, the Cowboys and Indians with all the rest were rolled up inside the silver screen forever and it

became Frisco Furniture on the corner of Rose Street until recently when another change took place.

When we were sick Dr. Cooley was sent for. He would arrive impeccably dressed, complete with bowler hat and black bag. It was all very formal, from the tidying up of the whole house to the basin of warm water and clean towel for his hand-washing. He would sit beside the bed briefly, check the pulse, wave the stethoscope about the chest, inspect the tongue and seldom ask more than one question, "What did you have for breakfast?" That was evidently the clue to all disorders.

When my younger sister had to have her tonsils out the operation was carried out on our kitchen table.

Local kids would spend Sunday afternoons sitting on our shop step playing a game which was to be the first to identify the make of cars as they appeared at the top of the hill as they rounded Croydon Road corner. There were Chevrolets, Willys Knights, Oaklands, Dodges, Essex, Overlands, Rugbys and Austins, as well as the first car Ford. We never owned a car, but we did have a telephone, a polished wooden box about twelve inches high and eight inches wide attached at a suitable height on the wall of the shop, two large batteries inside and bells on the top. The receiver hung on a hook on the side and on the other side was a handle that one turned to summon the exchange girl. However, the penalty for such a luxury was that we children were permanently on the run relaying messages to neighbours sometimes streets away.

In my youth there were strong youth groups living happily with their own band of followers. The St. George Church of England, the Methodists led by the Rev. Albert. Morris – ecumenical before his time—the Congregational Church on the corner of Wood Street Bexley where the Bexley Band and the St. George Eisteddfod had their beginnings under the auspices of Mr. Alex. Christenson. The Salvation Army was always there in Dora Street, and St. Michael's Catholic Church in Croydon Road.

St. Michael's at this time had a procession of ailing priests. First Father Morris died, a little later Father George. Herlihy, a dynamic personality and he was followed by the gentle Father Timothy Kenny. Father John. Sherin was the next to arrive from the Golden Grove Parish and for a long time many of us would have been glad to arrange for his return. A saintly, but severe man. Maybe the contrast was too dramatic after having Father Tom Dunlea as administrator in the interim.

The beloved Father Tom could be seen jogging past our shop at about ten minutes to seven in the morning, his coat tails flapping, his collie dogs running ahead, maybe a couple of altar boys in tow on his way to celebrate the seven o'clock mass at St. Raphael's South Hurstville. On the return trip he would stop in to buy ice-creams for the altar boys and as many children as he might have collected on the way. He will always be remembered as the founder of Boy's Town at Engadine.

Jim Walsh who was an ardent supporter of Boy's Town, organized the procession, of which I was a part, from the house in Sutherland from which Father Dunlea and boys were evicted to a site in the National Park where the Army was camped. The soldiers and the rest of us helped erect tents loaned by the Army. Clive Evatt was there and C. O. J. Munro, the Member for Cronulla.

Jim Walsh was a well know and respected Tailor and Mercer in Forest Road near MacMahon Street. He shared the trade with Allen Brothers on the opposite side of the road.

Yvonne Allen and her brother were tuck shop customers. Yvonne had lovely hair, long curls, the envy of us all. Allen Brothers still trade in Westfields.

It was Jim Walsh, Harry Newman – whose Estate Agency became the Rivoli Hall in Diment's Way – Les Percy, a couple whose names escape me and Jack Ward who formed the original board of directors of the St. George Co-operative Building Society. This Society subsequently became the St. George Building Society and is now the St. George Bank. These few men met every Monday night in a room above the Commonwealth Bank in Forest Road. No perks, no free meals. Jim Walsh used to take, for his tea, two small sandwiches and two Arnotts biscuits.

These same townfolk with many others, including the local vet, Ted Merryfull, quickly banded together when World War II was upon us to act as air raid wardens in the Volunteer Defence Force. Ted Merryfull became a vet by experience gained in the bush at Araluen where his two sons were born. The younger, Joe Merryfull, joined the RAAF and became a Pilot of the Sterling Bomber, 'B for Beer'. He was awarded the British Empire Medal for his work in the invention of the Window Launcher – a device that was used to launch aluminium foil from the plane and which appeared on enemy radar as a group of planes. He died in a plane crash in England before the war ended.

Ted Merryfull worked from his single fronted weatherboard cottage in Forest Road adjoining what used to be the Ampol Service Station near the Hill Street subway. He was a supporter of Boy's Town and organised a pet show to provide a new stove for Father Dunlea and the boys when a good samaritan gave them a dilapidated old house to move into on the sight that is now Boy's Town.

When we Macinantes left Narrandera we left behind the lamplight. My mother always worried that we children might knock over the lamp and set ourselves or the house on fire as the lamp was filled with kerosene and had a hairpin hanging on the glass to prevent it from cracking. However, in our new home at Hurstville we moved up to gaslight but at the very first opportunity my father had an electrician, a Mr. Curtis, and a new breed of workman, install the electricity. My sons would regard as hilarious the great lengths of black conduit that carried wiring across the ceiling and down the walls to connect with an outsized crockery switch and for the power point a separate red light to indicate when the power point was in use. Then came the day when father brought home an electric iron which was sometimes loaned to any neighbours were not too terrified to use it.

As far back as I can remember Hurstville was proud of its independent newspaper, '*The Propeller*' a weekly publication printed in a small building near the now Roundabout Hotel (once Wallington's White Horse Hotel). *The Propeller* cost two pence, and consisted of four pages of local interesting happenings and useful advertising. Notable was the Young Writer's Page introduced and edited by Will Carter, himself a bush poet, who provided encouragement to many of us in our teens.

Reverend Albert Morris we remember with affection. He used to allow us to meet in a room at the Methodist Church in The Avenue. Unfortunately rising costs forced Norm Wennholm, third generation of the family, to sell out to the *Leader* publications.

Woolworth's Arcade was originally Jolley's Arcade because Bert Jolly of the large cigar and Lucky Black Cat Sales, first had it built under his department store. Diments and Barthers were the David Jones images remembered for quality and service. One of the Diment brothers lived in Croydon Road and rode a push bike to work. It is pleasant to see the Barthers name still in Hurstville although Diments are no more.

At fifteen I left school with a dux prize, a copy of Shakespeare's Works in one hand and a wet handkerchief in the other, sad at having to say goodbye to so many friends, among them Phyllis Burnett who was always only a few marks behind in second place. The Burnetts had the butcher shop at Allawah station which is still operating although the Burnetts no longer run it.

I would have liked to become a teacher but my Italian father, traditionally biased, decreed that daughters stay at home and work – for me, the tuck shop. After obtaining a scholarship my older brother Tory entered teacher's college at a time when two different relatives had to each sign a hundred dollar guarantee that he would complete the course and spend a specified time in a country school. His first school was Moree High and he retired from Wollongong High School. Brother Joe, now deceased, after being dux of Hurstville Technical School, now Hurstville High, went on to win an Honours Diploma in Mechanical Engineering and the College Medal at Sydney Technical College and subsequently an Honours Degree in Engineering at Sydney University with the University Medal and a scholarship to Cambridge University for two years where he studied the investigation and correction of machinery vibration. He built his career around this subject and became head of the vibration section of National Standard Laboratory. After retiring he published a book on his experience. My young sister Millison did not strive for academic excellence but used her talents in other directions and is most loved.

I am not convinced that higher education always brings happiness as a typical housewife and mother the family is more than enough to fill my life. I must be the type that Women's Libber's are trying to exterminate.

When the Divine Hand turns out the light and closes the door for me I hope there will be a Celestial Tuck Shop where I can find my folk working busily inside and join them.

A TREE STORY

Now more than seventy years on I am still remembering fondly the gnarled old pear tree that grew outside our backyard 'dunny', when I was nine years old and my bother Tory was ten. It was probably grown originally to hide the necessary edifice tucked behind the aged weatherboard house which sheltered six of us.

Pappa had made us a swing, a hardwood seat hung with ropes from a stout bough of the tree and we took it in turns to swing higher and higher. Tory was timekeeper and always allowed himself to complete the verses as he sang:

‘The bush was grey, a week today,
olive, green and brown and grey,
but now the spring has come to stay
with graceful swaying wattle’.

Big deformed roots, protesting against years of neglect, (except for the occasional bucket of manure from the fowl yard) formed a maze of bumps and depressions for our marble games and, as the agates and bottle-oh's were bounced about, our friend would appear! Friend – our pet trapdoor spider – would carefully raise his dried mud trapdoor and peep out. The first one to notice would snap a twig from the pear tree and shut down his door – he was persistent and so were we.

The pears were never much good, a hard William variety which struggled into fruit after the mantle of white blossoms had covered our playground. Mother painstakingly salvaged what she could of the fruit, after the Coddling Moth had finished with it, and we had stewed pears ad infinitum.

More than fifty years on mother and the tree were still together, Pappa had gone ahead and only a week after Mother's funeral in 1965 the Council slapped a demolition order on the front door.

It was torment to watch the bulldozer ruthlessly strike into the aged weatherboards and reduce memories to dust – the driver was making his last turnabout to where the brick chimney stack stood naked and alone, but he allowed me time to step over the rubble and embrace our pear tree for the last time before it too had to go.

And the spider? I don't know.

Source:

This story was extracted from a book titled '*The Stories I could Tell – Hurstville Remembered*' and copied with approval given by Mrs. Anastasia Cuddy (nee Annie Macinante).

The editors are also very proud to call this lady a dear friend and neighbour.

Mrs. Anastasia Cuddy was also a member of the 'Propellor Young Writers Group' which was mentioned in the writing.

From a Church Bulletin

DO UP YOUR ZIPPER

The original slide fastener was patented in 1893, and consisted of a series of hooks and eyes which were fastened together with a slider.

The modern version, with meshed teeth was patented by Gideon Sundback in 1913. Men adopted the new device very quickly but it was about ten years before women decided that the zipper was a good idea. It was not until 1926 that someone coined the name we use – "Zipper"

PEARS BY THE TONNE

There are big trees, and bigger trees. A pear tree which grew on the banks of a river in England must surely hold the record for size and yield according to the accounts from the late 18th century.

The tree had been allowed to grow without restriction and branches drooped to the ground, re-rooted and the tree spread until it covered about a 60 meter circle. Some 5 – 7 tonnes of fruit were produced each year.

Source: Submitted by Mrs. Betty Williams