

# *St. George Historical Society Inc. Bulletin*

PROUDLY SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2005 EDITION

**VALE**



**ELIZABETH HAZEL (BET) OTTON**

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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.*



### SKERRICKS



We are sorry to hear that Mrs. Dora Lenane (Society Member) has not been feeling very well over the Christmas Holiday period but we are now able to let you know that she is feeling a lot better and our best wishes go out to her for her full recovery.



### VALE



It is with much sadness that we have learnt that Pam Herrick's mother passed away just before Christmas. Our condolences go to her and her family.



### VALE



It is with much regret that we inform you of the passing of Miss Elizabeth Hazel (Bet) Otton, former Curator and Caretaker of Lydham Hall. She passed away on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2005 at a Nursing Home in Hurstville.

She worked endlessly for the St. George Historical Society and Lydham Hall. She will be well remembered and we extend our sympathy to her niece Mrs. Margaret Wood and Family.

## **PRESIDENTS REPORT**

I hope everyone had a restful and enjoyable Christmas and New Year. I would like to extend thanks to the committee and Lydham Hall volunteers who have contributed so much over the past year. Everyone who plays a part, no matter how small, is a valued member of Society. That may mean just being a regular attendee at meetings. In the latter part of last year due to illness I was unable to perform the role of president, so I am particularly indebted to those who supported so wholeheartedly at that time. Thank you most sincerely.

Rather than review the past year (which is more appropriate at the end of my term as president) I want to mention a few items of importance to the Society.

### **BANKSIA HISTORY WALK**

Firstly, our activity for Heritage Week is a Banksia History Walk on Sunday 17 April. To my knowledge Banksia has never had a history walk, so this is probably a first, at least for the Society. The tour starts at 1pm at Banksia railway station (western side) and will conclude with afternoon tea at Lydham Hall. Cost is \$14 (\$12 concession) and includes entrance to Lydham Hall and afternoon tea.

### **LYDHAM HALL VOLUNTEER TEAM**

We urgently need to increase the pool of volunteers manning the Lydham Hall Museum. At present we have a team of 10 volunteers, 3 of which are paired for reasons of transport and security. This is barely adequate, not allowing for circumstance such as illness and other reasons for unavailability. The duty is far from onerous. The museum is open for 2 hours each Sunday. Increasing the volunteer team will probably mean volunteering perhaps once a quarter. Anyone willing to volunteer will be given training. Please contact me on 9567 8989. Your help will be very much appreciated and will take the load off fellow members.

### **BET OTTON**

In closing I would like to acknowledge the passing of Bet Otton. Bert's contribution has been enormous. She was caretaker and curator of Lydham Hall since inception and continued to perform this function until age and infirmity forced her retirement. I will not comment at length about Bet, because Ron Rathbone has very kindly written a fitting tribute, which has been included in this bulletin. Suffice to say it is impossible to replace people like Bet Otton and that she will be remembered by her friends at the St George Historical Society.

Best wishes,  
Bernard Sharah

## **ELIZABETH HAZEL (BET) OTTON**

The recent death of Miss Elizabeth Hazel (Bet) Otton marks the end of an era in the life of the St. George Historical Society's Regional Museum, Lydham Hall.

Bet Otton came to Sydney from Bega where her family have lived for generations and resided with her sister in Godwin Street Bexley. She was a well-known identity in the Kogarah Shopping Centre and worked in the Newsagency on the corner of Railway Parade and Montgomery Street.

Bet Otton was one of those people who liked to be involved. She was a respected member of the Rockdale Presbyterian Church, an enthusiastic supporter of the Fourth Ward Progress Association and a member of the Rockdale Branch of the Liberal Party, the Rockdale Red Cross and the St. George Historical Society. She was also a long time member of the Rockdale Mayoress's Fund. She is, however, best remembered as the Curator of Lydham Hall, a position she occupied for more than twenty years.

When Rockdale Council purchased Lydham Hall as part of its Centenary Celebrations in 1971, the former owners stayed on as caretakers and a Ladies Committee consisting of members of the Historical Society was formed to administer it. That arrangement resulted in constant conflict between the Ladies Committee and the previous owners and finally, the Ladies Committee with one exception, resigned in a body. The sole exception was Miss Bet Otton. Ultimately the Council compensated out the previous owners and offered the position of Caretaker/Curator to Miss Otton. A Lydham Hall Committee was then formed to manage the building with Bet Otton as Treasurer.

In the years that followed an enormous amount of voluntary work went into the furnishing and restoration of the home, the creation of the museum in the upstairs gallery and the landscaping of the grounds. No one was more involved in that than Bet Otton. It would be no exaggeration to say that she regarded Lydham Hall as her own home.

She kept the interior immaculately and there were always fresh flowers throughout the house when visitors came. As well, she was always on the lookout for appropriate pieces to add to its historic collection. She even made available items from her own personal treasures. Time and again, visitors would comment on the fact that Lydham Hall was the only historic house they had visited that looked as if someone lived in it.

Nothing was too much trouble to Bet where the house was concerned. She mixed paint and paste, helped shift furniture, washed the curtains, re-arranged exhibits, held the ladder and made countless cups of tea for volunteers. She liked nothing more than to accompany a committee member when new carpets, pieces of furniture or other furnishings had to be purchased.

During her years at Lydham Hall, Bet Otton would have conducted thousands of people through the home. She was on duty every Saturday and Sunday as well as showing groups through during the week. She promoted Lydham Hall at every opportunity speaking to church groups, Red Cross Branches, other Historical Societies and Charitable Auxiliaries, one of her great strengths was the way she conducted school groups through the house. She could hold the attention of Primary School children like a trained professional and any Secondary School pupil who overstepped the mark was smartly brought into line.

By the late 1980's Bet Otton's name and Lydham Hall had become synonymous and when the time came, through advancing years and she was forced to relinquish her role as Curator of Lydham Hall, it was possibly the hardest decision she had ever made in her life.

It was my privilege to work with Bet Otton during the whole of the time she was associated with Lydham Hall and I know of no-one who gave more of themselves to a cause she so thoroughly believed in. Her loyalty, her commitment, her high standards in everything she did and her willingness to always go the extra mile earned her the respect, the admiration and the affection of everyone who knew her.

RON RATHBONE O.A.M.

## **GROWING UP IN AUSTRALIA - Simply Brilliant**

I'm talking about hide and seek in the park, the corner milk bar, hopscotch, billy carts; cricket in front of the garbage bin and inviting everyone on your street to join in; skipping, handball, handstands, elastics, bull rush, catch & kiss; footy on the best lawn in the street, slip 'n' slide; the trampoline with water on it; hula hoops, stepping in puddles, mud pies and building dams in the gutter, the smell of the sun and fresh cut grass.

'Big bubbles no troubles' with Hubba Bubba bubble gum; a choc-top Mr. Whippy cone on a warm summer night after you've chased him round the block; 20 cents worth of mixed lollies that lasted a week; and pretending to smoke "fags" (the lollies) was really cool.

A dollars' worth of chips from the corner take-away fed two people (AND the sauce was free!).

Being upset when you messed up putting on the temporary tattoo from the bubblegum packet, but still wearing it proudly.

Watching Saturday morning cartoons: 'The Smurfs', 'AstroBoy', 'He-Man', 'Captain Caveman', 'Archie', 'Jem' (truly outrageous!), 'The Wizard of Oz', 'Banana Man' and 'Heeeey heeeey heeeeeey it's faaaaaat Albert'.

Or staying up late and sneaking a look at the "AO" movie on the second TV.

When 'Monkey Magic' with fish face & piggy had a cult following. Miraculous Mellors, & who could ever forget Degrossi Jnr High?

When around the corner seemed a long way, and going into town seemed like going somewhere. Where running away meant you did laps of the block because you weren't allowed to cross the road.

A million mozzie bites, wasp and bee stings. Sticky fingers, cops and robbers; cowboys and Indians; riding bikes and catching tadpoles.

Marco polo in the neighbours' pool ("fish outta water?"), drawing all over the road and driveway with chalk. Climbing trees and building cubbies out of every sheet your mum had in the cupboard.

Walking to school, no matter what the weather. When writing 'I love....?..' on your pencil case, really did mean it was true love. "he loves me? he loves me not?"

Running till you were out of breath; Laughing so hard that your stomach hurt; Pitching the tent in the back/front yard; Jumping on the bed; Ghosts stories with the next door neighbours; Pillow fights, spinning round, getting dizzy and falling down was cause for the giggles.

The worst embarrassment was being picked last for a team; Water balloons were the ultimate weapon; Cricket cards in the spokes transformed any bike into a motorcycle; Eating raw jelly, making homemade lemonade and sucking on a Funny Face, Paddle Pop or Red Icy Pole.

Remember when there were only two types of sneakers - girls and boys. Dunlop volleys with the green 'n' gold or blue and the only time you wore them at school was for "sports day."; Bloomers in primary school & Scungies under netball skirts.

You knew everyone in your street - and so did your parents!

It wasn't odd to have two or three "best friends" & you would ask them by sending a note asking them to be your best friend. You didn't sleep a wink on Christmas Eve and pretended to sleep for the tooth fairy.

When nobody owned a pure-bred dog; When 50c was decent pocket money; When you'd reach into a muddy gutter for 10c; When nearly everyone's mum was there when the kids got home from school; It was magic when dad would "remove" his thumb.

When it was considered a great privilege to be taken out to dinner at the local Chinese restaurant with your family; When any parent could discipline any kid, or feed her or use him to carry groceries and nobody, not even the kid, thought a thing of it.

When being sent to the principal's office was nothing compared to the fate that awaited a misbehaving student at home.

Basically, we were in fear for our lives, but it wasn't because of drive-by shootings, drugs, gangs, etc. Our parents and grandparents were a much bigger threat!

Some of us are still afraid of them!!!

Remember when decisions were made by going "eeny-meeny-miney-mo" or dib dib's; scissors, paper, rock.

Money issues were handled by whoever was the banker in Monopoly".

Terrorism was when the older kids were at the end of your street with pea-shooters waiting to ambush you.

The worst thing you could catch from the opposite sex was boy/girl germs, and the worst thing in your day was having to sit next to one.

Where blue light disco's were the equivalent to a Rave; and asking a boy out meant writing a 'polite' note getting them to tick 'yes' or 'no'.

When there was always that one 'HOT' guy/girl.

Having a weapon in school meant being caught with a slingshot. Your biggest danger at school was accidentally walking through the middle of a heated game of "brandies".

Nobody was prettier than your Mum. Scrapes and bruises were kissed and made better.

Taking drugs meant scoffing orange-flavoured chewable vitamin C's, or swallowing half a Panadol. Ice cream was considered a basic food group.

Going to the beach and catching a wave was a dream come true. If you actually lived there boogie boarding in the white wash made you the next Kelly Slater. Abilities were discovered because of a "double-dare".

Older siblings were the worst tormentors, but also the fiercest protectors.

Now, didn't that bring back some fond memories?? If you can remember most of these, you're an Aussie legend!!! Pass this on to another Aussie legend who may need a break from their "grown up" life...

I DOUBLE-DARE YA!!!!!!

## **Some Talented Members of the St George Historical Society**

By Jean W. Christison-Faulkner

Foundation member of the St George Historical Society

Herewith are the accounts of four of the many talented and outstanding members of our Society which started in 1961. There have been many more.

### **Phillip Geeves**

Phillip Geeves was the president of the Royal Australian Historical Society for a number of years and at the same time a member of our Society. For the best part of his working life he was a compere at Radio Station 2BL. Phillip Geeves had the most remarkable, beautiful and cultured voice I have ever heard. Its resonance and quality was beyond belief.

Phillip Geeves' grandmother was the first Postmaster (in this case, Postmistress) at Rockdale and it is claimed it was she who selected the name 'Rockdale' for the suburb.

In the late 1960's Rockdale Municipal Council commissioned Phillip Geeves to write a history of Rockdale combined with a history of the Council itself. He made a first rate job of it and the result was a high quality hardback edition. A copy was presented to me in 1970 by Rockdale Council and I prize it very much

### **Ronald Rathbone, Order of Australia Medal.**

Ronald Rathbone was the mayor of Rockdale Council for many years and he was the Headmaster of Bexley Public School.

About 1960 Mr Swan, whose family were deeply interested in Australian history and the saving of historical buildings (Mr Swan's father had saved about 6 historical houses at Parramatta) suggested to Ron establishing a Rockdale Historical Society. The suburb had been in existence since 1874. Ron was all enthusiasm and put it before Council. The aldermen were all in agreement and a notice was put in the local paper inviting all interested folk to a meeting to be held in the auditorium of the St George County Council at Kogarah. My mother and I had always been enthusiastic about the history of our wonderful country and had both lived in the St George District from the day we were born.

The result was 16 foundation members including, Mr Swan and Mr Bill Foster - who was headmaster of James Cook High School, together with my mother, Elsie Pearl Christison and myself. Then there were the aldermen, Ron Rathbone, Ron Gosling, dear old Bill Napper, Charlie Nairn and 8 other aldermen whose name I do not remember. The first year or so it was the Rockdale Historical Society and then it was changed to St George Historical Society.

The Society numbers went up and down mainly due to the fact that there were older fact and had to give up because of failing health or being unable to climb the stairs to the Society's meetings at the Town Hall. Due to Ron Rathbone's hard work and unfailing enthusiasm the Society kept going.

Mrs Rathbone, Ron's mother, brightened things up a bit by introducing a cup of tea and biscuits and the end of the meeting. It was not long before it became a 'banquet' due to members bringing cakes and pastries. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves and were able to socialise and know fellow members better. When the Bicentenary came along everyone wanted to jump on the bandwagon. Our membership grew enormously.

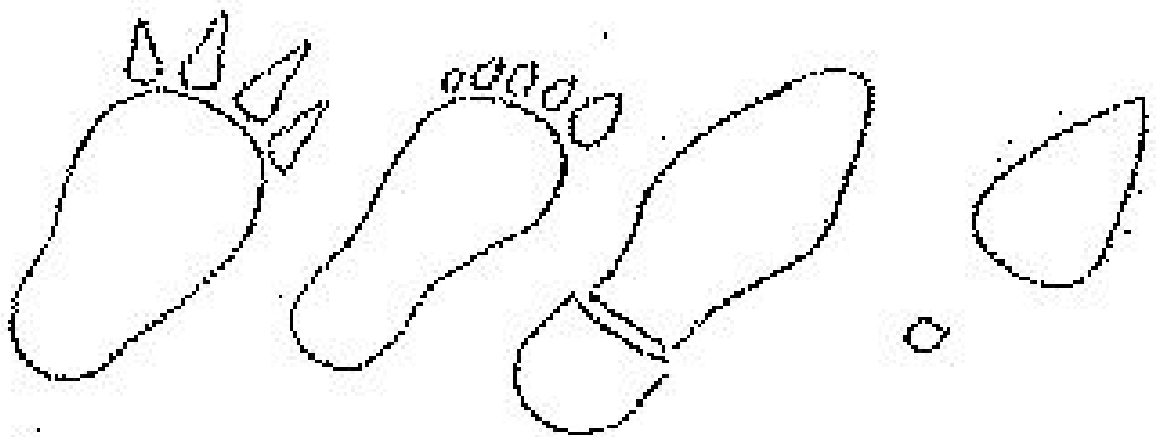
We have to thank Ron for all the work he did. Ron we salute you.

## Mr & Mrs Gifford Eardley

Mr and Mrs Gifford Eardley introduced the Bulletin some time after the Society began. They both contributed many articles to it. Mr Eardley was very good at sketching and if the Society went on an outing he would sketch the historical building, cottage or scene and in due course it would be included in the Bulletin. The Bulletin is a great asset as it keeps us informed of all that is going on.

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We are indebted to Mrs. Jean W. Christison – Faulkner for the above article.



The evolution of authority