

# *St. George Historical Society Inc. Bulletin*

PROUDLY SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL  
JULY - SEPTEMBER 2006 EDITION



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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 - SEPTEMBER EVENTS AGENDA

### July 9 **Christina Stead Day**

1:00 pm – 4:00 pm at Lydham Hall. 18 Lydham Avenue, Bexley, NSW 2207

\$ 6.00 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.

There will be a display entitled 'Writers of St George'. Light refreshments provided

For further enquiries (02) 9587 - 8307

### July 15 **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. This is also the time to renew your membership to the Society.

### July 30 **St. George Historical Society Inc. 45th Anniversary Luncheon**

Members and friends of St. George Historical Society Inc. will join Bexley Uniting Church, Gladstone St., Bexley, at 9.15 am Sunday 30th July, as part of the Society's 45th Anniversary Celebrations of being formed June, 1961, with their first Meeting held July of that year. We will join with the folk of that Church for Morning Tea afterwards in their Hall adjoining the Church and then will meet for Lunch at St. George Rowing Club, Wolli Creek at 12.30 pm where either a Menu or Bistro Service can be had at moderate prices. Booking not necessary but any enquiries should be directed to myself. Hoping to see many of you at either the Service or for Lunch or hopefully for both. Best wishes, Bettye Ross (02) 9545 - 0445.

### Aug 19 **Bexley Spring Fair.**

Will be held in the main street of Bexley, Forest Road. St. George and Lydham Hall will have a Book Stall at this event. For further enquiries (02) 9587 – 8307

# Vale

Margaret Anne Persen



Condolences are extended to the Sharah family on the loss of Cathyn Sharah's mother Margaret Persen.

She passed away on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2006 after a long battle with illness.



Margaret joined the St. George Historical Society early in 1990 and when a vacancy arose for a Treasurer in February 1991, she filled that position very ably and conscientiously until retirement from same through ill health July 1998.

This gentle and willing lady will be remembered by all who knew her through her time with the St. George Historical Society and our thoughts and prayers are with her husband and with Catherine and Bernard Sharah and family and other family members at this time.

A Service was held at St. Christopher's Church, Tower St, and Panania Tuesday 30th May, 2006.



## 171<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of Parish of St. George Day

### Launch of Mr. Ron Rathbone's "Cameos of Bexley" book

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of April, 2006 two important events were celebrated together at Lydham Hall.

The St. George Parish, County of Cumberland was proclaimed by Governor Major General Sir. Richard Bourke on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1835. We had Maps and Photos of the Parish on display to acknowledge the importance of this day, along with the books on the St. George area, donated by Mr. Rupert Gough. A great deal of interest was shown.

This day was also a memorable one because Mr. R. W. Rathbone's most recent book "Cameos of Bexley" was launched. This was done by our Societies Vice President, Mr. Bernard Sharah.

The day brought much happiness to Mr. Rathbone because he had seen the faces of many people whom, he had not seen for years. They attended because of their long association with him in different walks of life and their keen interest in all his publications on local history and his extensive knowledge on everything that had eventuated in the area over many years.

An enjoyable day was had by all that attended in the relaxed atmosphere of Lydham Hall, afternoon tea was served.

A sheath of flowers was presented to Jennifer Lee, long time friend and associate of Mr. Ron Rathbone, for her tireless assistance given to him in making this book "Cameos of Bexley" possible. As Mr. Rathbone himself stated "Without her assistance this book would not have eventuated".

## **Arncliffe Cultural Festival**

The festival was held on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006 at Firth Street, Arncliffe, and despite the weather, it had a really good attendance.

There was an interesting selection of stalls to cater to everyone's tastes, and a varied selection of performances held on stage, including our Mayor Shaoquett Moselmane giving us a demonstration of his long hidden unique drum playing skills.

St. George Historical Society / Lydham Hall had a book stall at which we did quite well, selling \$618.50 worth of books.

## **The Ron Rathbone Local History Prize**

The Rockdale City Council held the inaugural Ron Rathbone Local History Prize presentation at Lydham Hall on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2006

Interested people were invited to submit research on any aspect of our city: buildings, institutions, organizations or natural features; people or families; or events which have had a major impact on shaping the growth of the area.

There were nine entries and as stated by Mr. Rathbone, he was very surprised at the high quality of the entries.

The first prize, of \$5000, was shared by 2 entries, which were. Louise Binda's work entitled "*Farr Street, Rockdale: 120 years of houses, families and history.*" and Phillip Gregory's work entitled "*Recreation and Community*" Rockdale and St. George 1914 is a history of sport and recreation in the St. George district up till WW1.

All other entrants were presented with a gift and the day was enjoyed by all.

## **Rockdale History Walk**

Mr. Bernard Sarah, our Vice President held a history walk in Rockdale on June 25th, 2006, attended by the "After Hours" group, of "The National Trust".

They returned to the Rockdale Uniting Church for afternoon tea, served by St. George Historical Society, after having viewed the stained glass windows within the church.

Despite the weather, as it was a very bleak day in Rockdale, all enjoyed the walk immensely. Thank you again Bernard.



Elysian

## THE GHOSTS OF ELYSIAN.

"Elysian" was a grand old two story Victorian mansion next to Arncliffe Public School on Princes Highway, there was a side entrance from Wickham Street for access to sheds used for the carrying business run by the Hinton brothers, who were the last occupants, before the Education Department bought the property, and the house was demolished.

However the Hinton brothers and many others were convinced that the house was haunted.

The Hinton's were regular drinkers at the Arncliffe Hotel, and were often telling fellow drinkers of the ghosts. After drinking sessions at the Hotel and closing time arrived, their anxiety and fear increased, as they had to cross the overhead bridge on Princes Highway, and then through the overgrown garden, the house being set well-back from the footpath, a rather foreboding atmosphere for the ghost stories.

Sometimes others were invited home for more drinks, and to verify the claims about ghosts. More drinks...more convinced!

The faint sounds of whispering, murmuring, oaths and clinking were heard by enough witnesses to give the story credence.

Soon the ghost stories were becoming a local legend.

The noises were in the general Kitchen area, at the back of the house, which in its run-down condition, added to the perfect atmosphere for ghost stories.

It was in the early hours of the morning that the noises would start, then there were pauses...silence, and then the chilling moaning and clinking noises would occur again, eventually ceasing, allowing the Hinton's to get some sleep hours later.

Searchers in and around the house, armed with torches and weapons seem to dismiss the possibility of a hoax, but strengthened the growing legend.

One can only imagine, this reasonably well-intoxicated very tense group of ghost-hunters creeping around the over-grown house on a dark night, each as scared as the other.

When the Hinton's sold up, I bought antiques etc. from the old mansion, and after settling up, was given free reign, to take anything left of value, before the demolishers moved in. This meant a search into every nook and cranny of the old building was possible.

On the south side at the rear of the mansion was a small door for access under the house. I could not get in too far because of the rubbish and old bottles...Rubbish!!!!...Old Bottled!!!!!!...

Could this be the solution to "The Ghosts of Elysian"...

Now over these same years, there was a small group of Hobos and alcoholics, constantly around Arncliffe, surviving by devious means and sleeping it off behind any shelter, billboards, St. David's Church, Mrs. Pretty's Chicken shed, and as it turned out, under the Kitchen at "Elysian"... Probably Known as the "Hobo Hilton".

With these people in mind, the legend of "The Ghosts of Elysian" was less interesting.

I was at the site as the demolishing progressed, and when the Kitchen floor was removed, there was the answer.... A layer of old bottles about a half meter deep....old clothes...blankets and rubbish.



Here was the answer!

The cursing..... Someone lost the half-empty bottle among the empties...  
The clinking..... Looking for the half-empty bottle...  
The oaths..... "You lost the bottle, you idiot" ...Etc...Etc.  
The whispering..." Sh...Sh...The Hiltons are home...Sh".

Were there ghosts???... Well not really, but there were... Spirits ...  
But only the type that came in a bottle.

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Footnote. The Hinton brothers played in The Rockdale Brass Band many years ago.

Written and supplied by Kevin Little

Kevin is one of three generations who have resided in Arncliffe. All have worked as Stained Glass Artists.



*A Merriment. "Elysian" Arncliffe.  
10<sup>th</sup> February, 1900.*

Should anybody recognise the people in this photograph,  
would they kindly contact us on (02) 9587-8307  
with their information, so it may be recorded.

Written on Back of Photo from previous page

"I do not ask that flowers should always spring  
Beneath my feet;  
I know, too well, the poison and the sting  
Of things too sweet:  
For one thing only, Lord, dear Lord I plead—  
Lead me aright,  
(Though strength should falter, and though heart should bleed)  
Through Peace to Light."

Mrs Annie Hecht.  
From Henry N. McStern  
with best wishes

"I do not ask that flowers should spring  
Beneath my feet;  
I know, too well, the poison and the sting  
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## ORIGINS OF THE PROGRESS ASSOCIATION MOVEMENT IN THE CITY OF ROCKDALE

Many years ago someone declared that they should rename all Progress Associations - Protest Associations - as most of them had been established to protest or complain about some thing or another. Often the source of complaint involved official indifference to a problem that members felt strongly about. They were large in membership, non-political and provided a platform for people with a grievance to give air to their concerns.

At their peak, Progress Associations in the Municipalities of Rockdale and Bexley were numerous and their membership was measured by the hundred. There were Progress Associations at Arncliffe, Bexley, Bexley North, Kingsgrove, Kyeemagh, Rockdale, Brighton-le-Sands, Carlton, West Kogarah, Bexley West, Ramsgate, Sans Souci and Monterey. Only the Arncliffe Progress Association, the Fourth Ward (Bexley, Bexley West and Carlton West, Kogarah) Combined Progress Association and the Peninsula (Ramsgate, Sans Souci and Monterey) Progress Associations continue to exist.

There has always been controversy over which is the oldest Progress Association in the City of Rockdale. The Arncliffe Association was formed in the early 1890's primarily to seek improvements to the road system in the area but many of its letters to Rockdale Council concern the unhygienic conditions under which the large Chinese market garden population resident in the suburb lived and what the Council intended to do to improve the situation. Periodic flooding after heavy rain and tidal inundation from Cooks River and its tributaries were other areas of worry. It was not, however, without critics of its own.

Although established in the 1890's, by 1903 it had foundered for want of public support. That led the local paper, "The St. George Call", in January 1904, to severely reprimand the citizens of Arncliffe for their apathy. It declared -

*"There are few suburbs where the residents take such little interest in promoting the district's welfare. Arncliffe is in every way likely to become one of the star suburbs of Sydney. There are many ways in which to help; planting of trees along streets; the better paving of streets; the removal of unsightly fences and hoardings; park improvements and a drinking fountain here and there."*

*And when that failed to produce a response, it jibed - "The Arncliffe Progress Association is still on vacation owing to the apathy displayed by members."*

Finally, the Association was disbanded and not reformed until 1907.

While all this was going on, the Bexley Progress Association was agitating for the separation of the Bexley Ward from the Municipality of Hurstville to be a local government entity in its own right. Also formed in the early 1890's with Bexley shopkeeper Joseph Godwin as its motivating force, it took nearly ten years to secure the required number of signatures necessary before the area could be incorporated. The 1893 Bank Crash and the Depression which followed it meant many landowners were in financial difficulty and it was not until June 1900 that the Borough of Bexley was finally proclaimed.

Apart from its efforts to obtain independent status for the Bexley Ward. The Bexley Progress Association's other concerns were to get a bicycle for the Municipality's one resident policeman and the hordes of goats which were so adept at denuding garden-proud Bexley of its most outstanding feature. But perhaps its greatest worry was the practice of some Bexley residents removing bricks from the newly constructed footpaths for other purposes.

The two main aims of the Carlton, West Kogarah Association were to alleviate the flooding which occurred along Muddy Creek whenever it rained and the use of the creek for



the disposal of discarded domestic animals. But these were not its only sources of discontent. The poor rail facilities provided on the Illawarra Railway Line, a pedestrian over bridge at Carlton Railway Station and a park for Carlton after Bexley Park was gazetted on land acquired by the Government from the Preddey Estate were just some of the issues raised at Progress Association meetings in the period before the First World War. Filling in of Dominey's brick pit in Rawson Avenue after three children were drowned in it was yet another matter aired at Association meetings.

The issue that caused the greatest concern, however, was the practice of local children using the newly constructed brick footpaths as a race track for their scooters and Billy-carts creating a potential danger to the less agile residents for whom the footpaths had been originally constructed.

The Brighton le Sands Ratepayers and Residents Association was unceasing in its demands that the sand hills between Brighton and Kyeemagh be levelled to prevent sand accumulating in the ceilings of houses causing them to buckle and to fall while the Ramsgate and Sans Souci Associations threatened legal action against the Council over a rat plague generated by the Council's Chuter Avenue Garbage Tip. They were also persistent in their requests for better road conditions in the area when a cab proprietor's vehicle fell through the bridge in Russell Avenue and the ambulance and fire brigade both became bogged in Fontainebleau Street.

By the time of the amalgamation of the Bexley and Rockdale Councils in 1948, the Rockdale, Monterey and Ramsgate Progress Associations had ceased to exist and the Bexley and West Bexley Associations were in a parlous state. When Ward Boundaries were drawn for the newly amalgamated local government area there was also a re-alignment of the Progress Associations' areas of interest.

In 1962, the Bexley, West Bexley and Carlton-West Kogarah Associations decided to join together as the Fourth Ward (Combined) Progress Association. The three Associations had less than 40 financial members and averaged barely half a dozen residents at their meetings. Minutes of the Meetings were recorded in a school size exercise book and the Treasurer kept the Association's finances in an old tobacco tin. To my knowledge the records of what survives of the Progress Associations that once operated so actively in the City of Rockdale are held by the Local History Section of the Rockdale Central Library but what is lacking in documentary detail of their existence is more than made up in the Minutes of the Rockdale and Bexley Councils particularly during the 1920's when the Movement was at its peak.

**Source: Article written by Mr. R W Rathbone.**

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**NOTE:      Photographs on Front Cover (Left – Right, Top – Bottom)**

Jennifer Lee	Ron Rathbone Mayor Shaoquett Moselmane Mrs. Binder (Mother of Louise) Phillip Gregory	Ron Rathbone
Ron Rathbone	Ron Rathbone	Jennifer Lee
Ron Rathbone		

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Carlton School of Arts, Short Street, Carlton  
Where the meetings for the  
Combined 4<sup>th</sup> Ward Progress Association  
have been held for many years.