

# *St. George Historical Society Inc. Bulletin*

PROUDLY SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL

**APRIL - JUNE 2007 EDITION**

## *Vale*



Ron Rathbone O.A.M.

1931 – 2007

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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.*

## EVENTS AGENDA

### Jul 21st 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.

### Sep Visit to Neil Keast's Home Museum (Date to be advised)

A visit to the Home Museum of Neil Keast, a former History Teacher and avid Collector.

Neil Keast acquired a vast collection of varied and interesting artefacts from the past, which has been presented in a pleasing and professional manner including ephemera from various eras.

For further Information contact, Bernard Sharah 9567 8989.

### Sep 15th Meeting "What is happening to Tempe House?"

Members will be updated on this important topical issue.

### Oct 14th Brighton-Le-Sands History Walk

Brighton le Sands the suburb created by 19th century entrepreneur, Thomas Saywell, as a seaside resort is marked for dramatic change. In this 90 minute walk and talk we will revisit the Brighton of old - the Grand Parade terraces, the Federation streetscape of Princess St and the Norfolk Pine-lined sea frontage - all under threat.

Meet 2pm at corner of Princess St. and Grand Parade, Brighton.

Cost of \$10 (includes complimentary afternoon tea)

Bookings and enquiries, Bernard Sharah 9567 8989.



## COVER



We are extremely sorry about the error made on the cover of our previous issue of this Bulletin when stating the term of Mr Ron Rathbone's life.

We could just imagine him sitting on his cloud, shaking his head at our mistake, and saying, "During the thirty years they took off my life, some of my best work was done"

The Editors



## A FOND FAREWELL



It is surprising as to how many times in life, sentiments run side by side, such as sorrow and joy. We now bid farewell to one of our long time members Mrs. Norrene Burns.

Norrene is moving to a lovely home she has purchased at Avoca and we are very happy for her.

This dedicated, outgoing lady as been of great help to us at Lydham Hall and is always considerate and thoughtful to others, and she will be greatly missed.



## SKERRICKS



We are happy to report that Mr Geoff Rankin's health has greatly improved and he is now walking, sometimes aided, and the movement in his arms and hands is now much better.

Our many thoughts are with you Geoff and we hope to see you at Lydham Hall making the Tea for us again shortly.



## VALE



It is with great sadness that we inform you of the death of two of our members.

Miss Elizabeth Baker, of Oatley passed away on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006.

Mrs. M. Rawlinson, long term society member passed away on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

May they rest in peace.

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## WHAT CONSTITUTES A PIONEER BUILDING?

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When an area is assessed for its heritage potential, it usually involves the expertise of two people. The first traces the phases through which the area has passed and the second lists what remains of each phase. The most important of these are the ones we refer to as the pioneer buildings. But what do we mean by a pioneer building?

The concept of a pioneer building varies from place to place but is generally considered to be a building erected before an area was incorporated as a Local Government Authority and Councils imposed conditions on buildings to ensure that they were structurally sound and provided a healthy living environment.

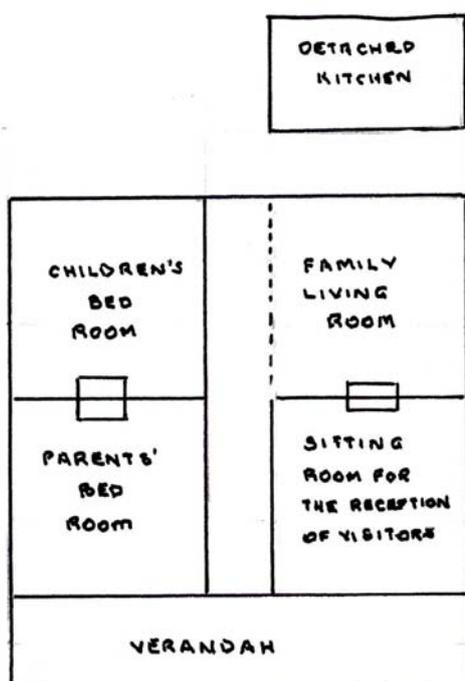
In the case of Rockdale, which was incorporated as the Municipal District of West Botany in February 1871, that would mean any building built before that date can be considered a pioneer building.

By far the best known of our pioneer buildings is Tempe House which was built in 1836 and is currently undergoing restoration of the most extensive and sensitive kind. How many other pioneer buildings do we still have standing in Rockdale and where are they located?

To date we have been able to identify twelve domestic buildings and one church that were built before 1871. Apart from Tempe House they are - Lydham Hall in Lydham Avenue Rockdale, Forsyth in Hannam Street Bardwell Valley, Mill Cottage in John Street Bardwell Valley, Pembroke Cottage in Bennett Street Kingsgrove, Hilisdon's Farm House in Slade Road Bardwell Park, Banbury Cottage in Chandler Street Kogarah, Wilson's Farm House in West Botany Street Rockdale, John Downey's Cottage in Downey Street West Bexley, John Fry's Cottage in Robertson Street West Kogarah, George Perrys home No. 666 Forest Road South Bexley and Charles Amey Howard's residence in Stoney Creek Road Kingsgrove. The church is the Rockdale Uniting Church, formerly the West Botany Wesleyan Methodist Church which has just celebrated its 150th Anniversary.

There must, of course, be other buildings or parts of buildings but these are the ones that have been positively identified as having been built before 1871.

Although each of the above buildings is different in appearance and size and is constructed from a variety of materials they all consist of the same basic characteristics. All were originally single storey; all contain four rooms and all were built with a detached kitchen.



The kitchen invariably had a stone or pressed earth floor and was detached in case it caught fire. In such situation, only the kitchen was destroyed and not the whole house.

Whether it was an architect designed palladian villa such as Tempe House, an imposing sandstone mansion like Lydham Hall or a humble painted brick domestic cottage the floor plan remained the same.

The second oldest pioneer building standing in the City of Rockdale is Pembroke Cottage at 9 Bennett Street Kingsgrove. Only Tempe House has been more thoroughly researched than this building and no building has been more completely misunderstood.

In the early 1960's I was a teacher at Kingsgrove Public School and it was a compulsory exercise to take your class for a walk along Bennett Street when doing the history of the area to "view the home of Hannah Laycock, the first European resident of Kingsgrove and the lady

who gave Kingsgrove its name". The only trouble was, Hannah Laycock's cottage, which had been demolished many years before, had been erected in the present day suburb of Clemton Park more than two and a half kilometres away so not only was it not there anymore but had never at any time been located in Kingsgrove.

Another story was that Pembroke Cottage was used by Governor Philip Gidley King, the man who granted Hannah Laycock this land in the first place, as a hunting lodge despite the fact that there is no evidence written or verbal that Governor King ever visited the area.

All that notwithstanding, Governor King did grant Mrs. Hannah Laycock 500 acres of land on either side of Wollie Creek in August 1804 which today would encompass much of the suburb of Kingsgrove and she, in turn, called the area Kings Grove as an act of appreciation for the grant she had been given.

Pembroke Cottage, was built in 1844 by Thomas Spencer West a former storekeeper, dealer and publican of Kent Street Sydney who had purchased the land on which it stood two years earlier. West had come to Australia as a free settler in 1821.

West's occupation of Pembroke Cottage was somewhat spasmodic and he appears to have spent long periods during his ownership back in the City while the cottage was lived in by various members of his family. He died at Pembroke Cottage in 1856.

The house is constructed of solid handmade bricks which were kept painted to keep out the dampness and over the 160 plus years of its existence the roof has been raised to allow for extra rooms in the roof cavity and an unsympathetic addition has been added to the northern side of the building. Entry to the house was originally gained from Stoney Creek Road not from Bennett Street.

Over those 160 years Pembroke Cottage has had at least six identifiable owners of which the Bennett Family are, perhaps, the best remembered. Because of the large block of land on which the cottage stands it is a miracle that it survived the Villa Home boom of the 1970's and 1980's.

Some pioneer buildings justify preservation for reasons in addition to their age and the period in which they were built. Typical of these are John Downey's Cottage on the corner of Downey Street and Mimosa Street West Bexley. Built in 1855, by the Irish immigrant John Downey, its claim to fame is that it is the location of the first Catholic Church Services to be held in the St. George District.

Until a permanent church was built in Croydon Road in 1883, itinerant priests said Mass, baptised the children and married their parents, often in that order, at the home of one of the faithful. John Downey claimed to be the first whose home was used for purpose.

That fact alone makes this pioneer building worthy of preservation.

RON RATHBONE

Local Government Representative

Heritage Council of N.S.W.

1992-1999

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## BE GRATEFUL GOD DOESN'T HAVE VOICE MAIL

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Imagine praying and hearing the following:

Thank you for calling Heaven.

Please select one of the following options.

- Press 1 for Requests;
- Press 2 for Thanksgiving
- Press 3 for Complaints
- Press 4 for Confessions
- Press 5 for all other enquiries.

I am sorry, all our angels and saints are busy helping other sinners right now.

However, your prayer is important to us and we will answer it in the order it was received.

Please stay on the line.

- Press 1 to speak to God the Father
- Press 2 to speak to Jesus
- Press 3 to speak to The Holy Spirit
- Press 4 and sing a psalm if would like to hear King David
- Press 5 to find a loved one that has been assigned to Heaven,  
then enter their social security number followed by the hash key.

(If you get a negative response, please hang up and try area code 666)

For reservations to Heaven, enter John 3:16.

For answers about:

- Dinosaurs?
- The age of the Earth?
- Life on other planets and TV?
- Where Noah's Ark is?

Please wait until you arrive.

The office is closed for the weekend to observe a religious holiday.

Have a nice day.

Source: *St. Michaels Church Newsletter*  
*January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007*

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## A TOUCH OF CLASS

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During the Second World War I was a pupil at Kogarah Intermediate Boys High School where, because most of the able bodied members of the teaching staff had enlisted in the Armed Forces, almost the entire staff consisted of men long since retired who had come back into the teaching service or women. Among them was a tall, balding severe looking mathematics master named Cyril Schrader.

Cyril Schrader was one of two bachelor brothers, the sons of a German coffee plantation owner who had originally taken up land in German New Guinea before the First World War.

Germany, unlike Britain, France, Spain, Portugal and The Netherlands was not one of the great colonial powers and the northern portion of New Guinea was one of its few overseas territories. After the War when it was annexed by Australia to form the colony of Papua New Guinea the Schraders moved to the Australian mainland motivated, it is suspected by wanting to ensure a good education for the two sons both of whom attended Sydney University, Cyril to be trained as a High School teacher and his brother Harold Ludvig Christian as a surgeon dentist.

They settled in Willison Road Carlton in a large Federation house located on four blocks of land on the corner of Wallace Street. The house was set well back from the street with landscaped gardens a fountain, a tennis court and a lych gateway. The main front room of the house was used as the dental surgery.

This house had an unusually wide central hallway both sides of which were lined with glass showcases containing the most incredible collection of exotic butterflies which Harold had assembled in New Guinea and brought with him when the family moved to Australia.

Despite the fact that during the Second World War all people of German background were regarded by teenage boys of my age group as potential spies for the enemy, I don't remember any particular discrimination against them or any incidents which involved their German ancestry.

In 1959, Harold Schrader the survivor of the two brothers died and those of us who were aware of the value of the butterfly collection held within the house wondered what was going to happen to it when the property was ultimately sold. There was some relief locally when it was learnt that the entire collection was to be acquired by the Macleay Museum of Entymology and Natural History of the University of Sydney to be preserved whilst ever it was possible to do so. The house was demolished and five free standing cottages erected on the site.

Carlton has always been looked down upon as one of the St. George District's less prepossessing working class suburbs yet residents who made their names in many fields and people who gave great character to the area lived there in surprising numbers.

There are not many suburbs along the Illawarra Railway Line that can boast as former residents authors and playwrights of international reputation, senior public servants, a dispossessed sea captain, several prominent members of the legal profession, a bevy of political and civic leaders, musicians of national standing, representative sportsmen and women, actors, businessmen and industrialists whilst the telegram boy at the Carlton Post Office before the First World War rose to become a cardinal archbishop and the National Leader of Australia's largest Christian Church.

The brothers Cyril and Harold Schrader were typical of the people who gave this suburb so much character.

RON RATHBONE

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## OUR YEAR 2006 - 2007

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- July 9<sup>th</sup> Lydham Hall celebrated "Christina Stead's Birthday" with a display of local Writers with a listing of their works.
- July 20<sup>th</sup> Penrith Women's Auxiliary visited Lydham Hall 17 people.
- July 22<sup>nd</sup> St. Andrew's Uniting Church attended Lydham Hall after a History walk of Bexley and had afternoon tea with us.
- July 24<sup>th</sup> The "Out and About" group consisting of 35 persons were served morning tea upon arrival at Lydham Hall after being taken on a tour of the Hall we then went on a History drive around Carlton, Bexley, Banksia & Arncliffe.
- August 4<sup>th</sup> South Haven Nursing Home toured Lydham Hall. Ten people were in attendance.
- August 11<sup>th</sup> Another group from South Haven Nursing Home toured Lydham Hall and had morning tea. Another Ten people were in attendance.
- August 19<sup>th</sup> "Bexley Spring Fair." A book stall was set up at this event.
- September 10<sup>th</sup> A most interesting display of coins at Lydham Hall.
- November 15<sup>th</sup> St. Declan's Catholic School visited Lydham Hall. 61 children and teachers.
- February 27<sup>th</sup> Group of 20 people visited Lydham Hall.
- March 22<sup>nd</sup> 46 People Visited Lydham Hall from Topp Tours (Paramatta)
- June 29<sup>th</sup> Engadine Northcote Group had 15 visitors to Lydham Hall.