

# St George Historical Society Bulletin

April - June 2016

---



Pemberton's Ramsgate Baths - opened in October 1924 - Coles supermarket now occupies this site on the corner of Ramsgate Road and The Grand Parade. Many thousands of children learned to swim and competed in races here.

photo courtesy of Elaine Lamond

Proudly Sponsored by the Rockdale City Council

<b>Office Bearers 2015-2016</b>		
Patron	Councillor Shane O'Brien	
Acting President	Mr Wesley Fairhall	9546-5555
Vice President	Vacant	
Secretary	Miss Laurice Bondfield	9599-4274
Treasurer	Mr Wesley Fairhall	9546-5555
Bulletin Editor	Dr Garry Darby	9583-9916
Lydham Hall Committee	Mrs Gloria Henke, Mrs Joan Rankin, Mr Bernard Sharah	9587-8307 9567-8641 9567-8989
Public Officer	Mr Robert McGarn	<a href="mailto:mcgarnr@bigpond.net.au">mcgarnr@bigpond.net.au</a>
Publicity Officer	Dr Garry Darby	9583 9916
Research Officer	Dr Garry Darby	9583-9916
Refreshments Officer	Mr Allan Stahl	9556- 2805
Lydham Hall Roster	Mr Bernard Sharah	9567-8989
Hon. Auditor	Mrs Joan Rankin	9567-8641

**Meetings are held on the third Saturday, of each month, commencing at 2pm.**

**Meetings are held at Sans Souci Library, cnr of Russell Av and Clareville Av Sans Souci  
(no meetings December and January)**

\*\*\*\*\*

**Next Meeting: 16th April, 2016  
at Sans Souci Library**

## **Guest Speakers Coming Up**

**Saturday April 16th  
John Stanbridge from 'Nutcote'  
for more information see page 9**

-----

**Guest Speakers for May and June will be announced at our April meeting - or contact Laurice Bondfield, 9599 4274**


**The St George Historical Society web site may be  
accessed at**

**<http://stgeorgehistsoc.org.au>**


**The St George Historical Society Facebook page may  
be seen at**


**St George Historical Society Inc**

## **News & Notes**

 **About Trove Again:** It has been reported that the proposed Federal Government cutback to funding of the National Library of Australia will impact seriously on TROVE. As of February 25 2016, TROVE includes information on over 374,419,217 books, articles, images, historic newspapers, maps, music, archives, datasets and more, expressing the extraordinarily rich history of Australian culture. Content is available within seconds. The benefits to researchers, local and family historians, and the Australian community as a whole, is immense, resulting in over 70,000 unique, on-line, visitors a day. The funding cuts are set fly in the face of the recently much publicised "Ideas Boom".

 **Barry Johnson** has again contributed a great article for this Bulletin. One of our younger members, Barry is showing the way with his articles. Members are encouraged to follow their particular historical interests by contributing short articles for publication. Local St George area topics are particularly welcome.

 **A new and important book** has been published on the history of "Primrose House" The book, by StGHS member, Dr Garry Darby, will be launched on Saturday 9th April at 2pm in Peter Depena Park, opposite "Primrose House". The hope is that a large attendance at the launch will demonstrate the strong local support for this grand old house which is so important to the history of our district. Signed copies of the book will be available on the day. Please come along and show your support for the heritage of the area. Sausage Sizzle - Free entry.

 **New Members** are always needed for the St George Historical Society. It has been suggested that ALL members make a special effort and turn up for the APRIL meeting and **BRING A FRIEND WITH THEM !** We should then have about 60 people at the meeting. Will you help your Society ?

## OUR WAR, OUR WORDS – JAMES HODGEN

### BARRY JOHNSON



*In 1908, James (right) with his brothers, William and Alva. His grandmother is carefully repairing Alva's shorts. [2]*

James Hodgen, born in 1897 and residing in Herbert St, Rockdale, joined the Australian Imperial Force during World War One after reaching the minimum age limit of 18 years. In 1916, 18 months after his brother enlisted, James embarked on the 3-month journey to England. He fought for 2 years on the Western Front in Europe before suffering facial injuries from artillery shelling during the Second Battle of Villers-Bretonneux. Whilst recovering in hospital, he wrote a letter to his mother, using a postcard image of the village to detail his experiences. He begins the letter with domestic concerns in London.



*(left) A postcard aerial image of Villers-Bretonneux in 1914. Hodgen was stationed in the fields in the upper right portion surrounding the commune. Upon his arrival, many of these buildings had already been destroyed. [3]*

"When we come on leave, we're issued with a sugar card entitling us to 40 grams\* per day and meat coupons. The fruit is terribly dear here. How would you like to pay 20 cents each for peaches that you would think twice about

paying 5 cents a dozen for at Mrs. Cohen's – to wit – bananas 70 cents each barely worth eating



and yet they say we're winning. I suppose we are too, very slowly though, by slow exhaustion – so to speak.” [1]

In April, 1918, during World War One, Hodgen fought in the world's first battle between two tank forces. Over 4 days, British, Australian and French forces liberated the commune of Villers-Bretonneux in Northern France from the German Empire. Hodgen hints at the nervousness amongst the soldiers, waiting for the impending battle while sheltering from sporadic rifle fire and mortar explosions.

“One dark rainy night we were brought to that place and consequently had to dig positions facing the village. Morning broke, finding a handful of men weary, worn and worried. Wet to the skin by the rain, and sweating muchly owing to the exertion. The Germans were nowhere near the village. After 9 days, we moved position, having up till present received very little fire from the Germans. Things were very quiet except for a few mortars which paid a visit now and again.” [1]

After 15 days of tense waiting at various reserve positions surrounding the commune, “the story begins” on the night of 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 1918 with the fierce initial capture of Villers-Bretonneux by the German Empire.

“Three large field guns within one kilometre of our position began blazing away at a terrific rate, we hardly knew what was happening. The firing ceased after an hour. We then heard an occasional crack, which grew and grew until the row was deafening. Our planes had evidently spotted one of the gun nests and soon settled it. However, that must have angered the Germans. At 11pm, the enemy started by sending over 'heavies', 42kg howitzer shells. Further back still he sent over mustard gas. At 3am, the noise increased as he used smaller guns. Simply a hailstorm of shells resulted in the British being forced back to a new front only to be driven out soon after. At 9am, a runner who has since been killed told us we had to come back to camp. Everything was a mix-up that day, no one knew which way to turn.” [1]

The following night, Allied forces were ordered to reclaim the village despite the lack of artillery preparation, a tactic where the opposing force was 'softened up' before infantry forces advanced.

“At midnight, we got near his line and the yelling and shrieking began, our chaps to frighten him, and he in his fright calling for artillery support which was promptly delivered onto us in no small measure. I never expected to get out alive. Within trenches, we mounted guns and by 5am the Australians has surrounded the village and began souveniring. By 10am we had the grand total of 1,000 prisoners, not a bad pull for a silent raid!” [1]

Whilst the previous battles began in darkness, the German forces launched a risky daylight counter-offensive, desperate to prevent the Allies from 'digging in'.

“You may be sure he wasn't going to rest contented after being so rudely pushed out of the town. At 3.30pm on the 25th, he began his counter-attack with artillery. Imagine a tornado, a typhoon to pass over a place. At the same time all the crockery in a hardware shop crashing to the ground and you have a very rough idea of what a decent bombardment is. He was repulsed, leaving behind numberless dead and dying, and again at 6pm with the same result. During this, I got a piece in my face.” [1]

After transport to a hospital in London, he was in high spirits during his recovery.

“I'm as fit now as I ever was, enjoying life to its utmost – as far as I can. The wound has left a scar just under my eye. Perhaps it will grow out more in time.” [1]

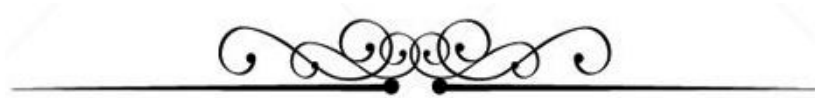
James Hodgen was discharged from hospital at the end of May in 1918. He applied his clerical experience at the Administration Headquarters in London before returning to the family home in

May, 1919. Discharged from the AIF, he continued his civilian employment as a clerk, passing away at 86 years of age.

\* Mass and length values have been converted to metric equivalents. Currency values are recorded in the decimal, inflation-adjusted equivalents.

#### SOURCES:

1. Australian War Memorial 2015, *Letters and postcard relating to James Hodgen, 1918-1978* <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/RCDIG0001149/> accessed 1.3.2016
2. Ancestry 2015, *James Hodgen II* <http://person.ancestrylibrary.com/tree/58465822/person/34297011997> accessed 4.1.2016
3. Culture Victoria 2015, *Aerial postcard produced post 1918 depicting Villers-Bretonneux 'avant sa destruction'* <http://www.cv.vic.gov.au/stories/a-diverse-state/villers-bretonneux/aerial-postcard-produced-post-1918-depicting-villers-bretonneux-avant-sa-destruction/> accessed 1.3.2016

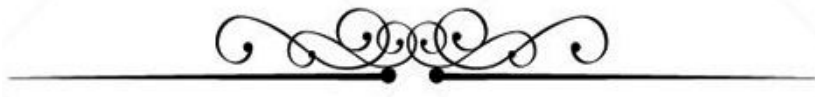


## Wolli Creek Railway Station

Wolli Creek station was built as part of the Airport Line opening on 21 May 2000. The name derives from the local creek branching from the Cook's River and Wolli Junction is the name of the original junction point for the East Hills Line from the Illawarra Line at this site. In the initial concept for the Airport Line, no station was to be provided at this site, however the State Rail Authority decided to construct a station here as an interchange point with the new Airport line and the Illawarra line.

The station, unlike the others built on the line, was constructed with government finance and hence is owned by RailCorp. In the initial concept and design phase, the station was named North Arncliffe, however this was changed to Wolli Creek in 1998. During construction, a set of points allowing the cross-over of trains from the Illawarra local lines to the Illawarra main lines was moved further south.

A secondary motivation was to promote urban renewal around the station site. The station is located on a former industrial site and siding, and the area around the station was occupied by light industrial businesses when the station opened. Since the station's opening, the suburb has been significantly redeveloped with high density housing which as of 2015 is ongoing. As part of this development, the Airport line platforms have been partially covered over.



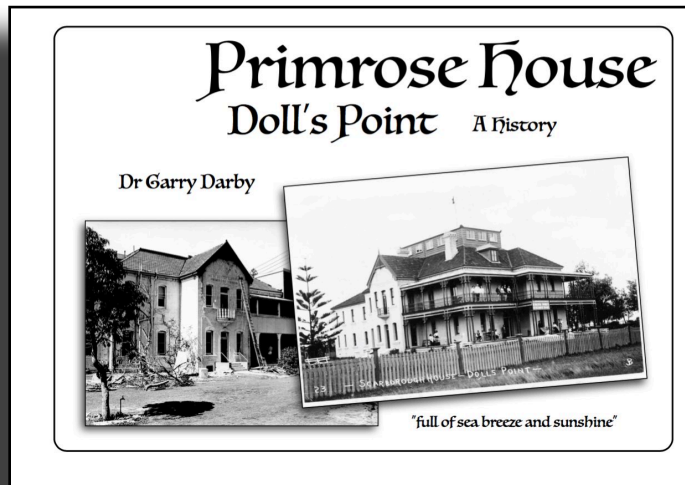
Lydham Hall will be open for extended hours on two  
Sundays in May. Sunday 22nd May, Sunday 29th May.

10 am - 4pm

If you can help out on either day even for an hour,  
you'd be very welcome!

## IMPORTANT BOOK LAUNCH

### “Primrose House, Doll’s Point - a History”

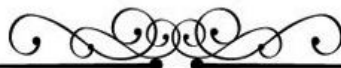


Local historian  
Dr Garry Darby has  
produced a definitive  
history of “Primrose  
House” - hear Garry  
speak about his new  
book and the need to  
support the future of  
“Primrose House” in  
public hands.

You are Invited  
**SATURDAY 9TH APRIL - AT 2PM**  
Venue: Peter Depena Park - opposite Primrose House

**This new release book will be available on the day - \$25**

more details ? - Garry Darby - 9583 9916



**CASTLE**  
Opposite Station



**PICTURES**  
... ROCKDALE ...

**Open Every Evening**  
**All-Star Programme**

First-class Music.      Comfortable Seating.      Come and see for yourself  
Everything Up-to-date

**Admission 6d. and 8d.    Reserved Chairs, 1/-**

From the “St George Call” - January, 1914 - found on TROVE

## Can you be a History Detective ?

Since setting up our website, St George has had some requests for help in solving historical mysteries in the district. Do you remember the strange military building in Bexley North? Now we have two more that locals might be able to help with!

1. Mr Tod Mclauchlan is looking for information about his great grandfather, Alexander Tod Mclauchlan who was licensee of the Brighton Hotel ( formerly Saywell's, now the Novotel) with Tooth and Co from 1932 until he died in 1951. He would particularly like to find photos of the hotel during that period. His son John Mclauchlan seems also to have been involved in running the hotel, during this time.

Mr Mclauchlan has two presentation certificates and books given to his great grandfather and grandfather by the Rockdale sub - branch of the R.S.S. & I.L.A. One, stamped " To Alex . Mc Lauchlan As a mark of esteem and appreciation from the members of Rockdale Sub Branch etc 1944"

The other "Certificate of Appreciation presented to Mr A.J. McLauchlan by the members as a mark of esteem and goodwill - 1943"

*Does anyone have some photos of the hotel in the years from 1932 - 1951? Would anyone know why the R.S.S. & A I.L.A. Rockdale esteemed the Mclauchlans so highly?*

2. Vito Milana is looking for information about a poster stamp he owns. It is a Red Cross label with the text "Lady Gowrie Red Cross Appeal - To Aid the Sick and Wounded" 1d. These stamps were issued in 1940 by the thousands. His, however has an overprint added after its release "Bexley Prisoners of War Fund 6d"

*He would like to know how many of these were printed, what advertising occurred for their selling etc.*

So far we have found that after the fall of Singapore in 1942, the Australian Red Cross began to concentrate on providing parcels for POWs and local societies were urged to undertake fundraising efforts to support this.

Kirsten Broderick, Local Studies Coordinator, was able to provide copies of Bexley Council Minutes which showed that in August 1942, it was reported that following discussion with Bexley War Fund and Red Cross, so as to avoid duplication of effort any street collections, the Bexley collectors had agreed to accept contributions to the Red Cross POW Appeal. The contributions to the POW Fund would be acknowledged" by the issue of proper stamps". In June, 1945 the Red Cross notified Bexley Council that it had discontinued the collection of funds for POWs and the Mayor stated that a letter to that effect had been forwarded to the Area Collector of the Patriotic Fund.

*Does anyone know anything about the Bexley War Fund? Was there a Bexley Red Cross Branch too? Is this the "proper stamp" issued?*

*Contact the Research Officer, the Secretary or email the website [www.stgeorgehistsoc.org.au](http://www.stgeorgehistsoc.org.au) or Facebook.*

-----

*Why not look for clues on TROVE ? - it's free & easy*



## Our Guest Speaker Topic for 16th April



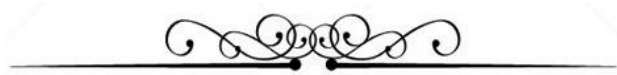
**“Nutcote” is the beautiful harbourside home of May Gibbs (1877-1969), Australia’s foremost children’s author and illustrator and best known today for her iconic story *The Complete Adventures of Snugglepot & Cuddlepie*. Located in Sydney’s Neutral Bay and now a house museum surrounded by delightful gardens, May Gibbs’ Nutcote is an**

**enchancing venue to be enjoyed by everyone, all year round.**

Cecilia May Gibbs was one of Australia’s foremost children’s authors and illustrators and is best known today for the iconic Australian children’s story, *The Complete Adventures of Snugglepot and Cuddlepie*, featuring two gumnut babies and their escape from the big bad Banksia men.

May Gibbs was born on 17 January 1877 in Sydenham, Kent, in England to parents Herbert Gibbs and Cecelia Rogers. She migrated with her family to Australia when she was four years old, settling in Perth, Western Australia. After several journeys back to England to pursue her artistic interests, May finally settled in Sydney, Australia in 1913. Here she designed covers for magazines, provided illustrations, designed postcards and published the first of her gumnut books, *Gumnut Babies*. Following her marriage in 1919 to mining agent, James Ossoli Kelly, the couple moved into Nutcote, the house designed for them by architect B J Waterhouse in Neutral Bay, on the shores of Sydney Harbour, in 1925.

May continued her career as an author and illustrator, writing numerous other stories and publishing her popular weekly comic strips *Bib and Bub* and *Tiggy Touchwood* for many years. Her work remained extremely popular. After the death of her husband in 1939, she lived on at Nutcote with her dogs, (mainly Scots Terriers), publishing her last book *Prince Dandee Lion* in 1953. She died without having had children, in 1969, leaving her estate to UNICEF, the Spastic Centre of NSW and the NSW Society for Crippled Children )



**Member Olga Sedneva has won two prizes in the Sydney Royal Easter Show Art Competition - congratulations Olga !!**

-----

## SOLDIER CBABS AT DRILL.

I can supplement "J.W.S's." par regarding the soldier crab. These crabs are fairly common on the sand flats of parts of Botany Bay. I have sat for an hour at a time watching them at their drill at Doll's Point (Sandringham). They are well named "soldier crabs." for it is simply amazing to see them wheel about, right turn, left incline, left turn, etc.; in fact, they seem to do almost anything in the drilling business, and always the bigger ones keep in front (sergeant-majors I call them). If one happens to approach too near, or danger threatens, they instantly disappear into the soft sand, reappearing when the sergeant-major gives them the signal. - Sans Souci.

The World's News, Sydney, Sat 25 Sept 1920 p 3 from: TROVE

### A TRIBUTE TO BERNARD SHARAH

Bernard joined the Society in 1988 and has recently retired from the Society after 27 years as a member as mentioned to the March 2016 Bulletin.

Bernard has made a very active contribution in the Society during this time both as an office holder and in all the activities he has undertaken.

He has helped the society adapt to the changing times and continue to be relevant & well known to the local community.

Bernard was President and has been a guide at Lydham Hall both for many years. He has given talks about its history at special days e g Christina Stead's birthday and he has organised Collectable Fairs there which were a great success.

He has answered many queries about Lydham Hall from visitors.

His knowledge of Lydham Hall & other local history is vast.

He has been the face of history in the local media and raised the profile of the Society as a result.

He has worked tirelessly on promoting local history and the protecting & improving the local environment.

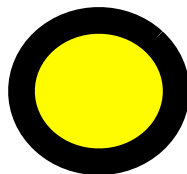
He has organised many walking tours of Arncliffe.

Bernard has also been involved with a local community group and helping to get improvements for Arncliffe Railway Station and preserving local historic houses when they have been under threat on many occasions.

He has helped with many campaigns with other local residents to work for community improvement.

On behalf of everyone I would like to thank him for all that he has done for the Society and the local area over the past 27 years and wish him well in the future.

Robert McGarn



Contributions to this bulletin, articles, photographs, news, notes, diary dates, reviews etc., are always welcome - please contact the editor, Garry Darby, 9583 9916 [garry@garrydarby.com](mailto:garry@garrydarby.com)

***Please come along to our meetings and enjoy the history presented by our expert speakers. All visitors welcome***