

# *St George Historical Society* Inc.

## *Bulletin*

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

MAY - JUNE 1995 Edition  
MEETING PROGRAM

### *LUNA PARK - just for fun* *9 May*

Remember the Luna Park of old - Coney Island, the Ghost Train, the Big Dipper - well, at our May meeting, Sydney architect, Sam Marshall, will give a talk and slide presentation on the history of this amusement park which has become one of Sydney's cultural icons. Mr Marshall, who was in the forefront of moves to save the site from redevelopment, will also tell us about the new-look Luna Park and its future. It's a topical subject at the moment because the future of Luna Park is under threat of closure.

### **Grave Moments in History** **13 June**

No, this is not about graveyards. Margaret Fleming will give a very interesting talk about some of the more famous monuments throughout the world.

Meetings are held 8pm every second Tuesday of the month (except January) in the Council Chambers, Rockdale Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale.

Members, please bring a plate.

### *A visit to the* **TRAMWAYS MUSEUM** **Sunday 18 June**

You thought the Tangara was the ultimate in public transport. Have you tried the "toast-rack". Get together with friends from the Society to relive the good old days of tram travel. Bring a picnic lunch. Meet 11am at front gate Tramways Museum, Pitt Street, Loftus.

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### *Mashman's Pottery Works*

One of the things that really surprised members on our tour of the Mashman's Pottery Works at Kingsgrove was the fact that everything is hand-made, from wonderful and intricate dragon-shaped roof finials to the plainest of air-vents. It's hard to believe these aren't manufactured. The highlight of the tour was to see the old beehive shaped kilns where the pottery was fired before the days of electric heated ovens. The rounded walls of these kilns are highly glazed and multicoloured having taken on the dyes of pottery being dried. The glaze is produced by salt build-up. We were given a demonstration of hand-thrown pots and a tour of the factory which has been operating in Kingsgrove since the beginning on this century. Our group emerged from Mashman's wiser but dustier.



### *The Hut*

For those familiar with the unusual crenellated house surrounded by date palms which stood behind a high vine covered wall in Dora Street, Hurstville, "The Hut" is no more. It was demolished on 27 March. Structurally it was unsound and there was really no way it could have been preserved without extensive rebuilding. However, due to a purely impromptu diversion from our planned visit to the Centennial Bakery some Society members did get the opportunity to view the house before demolition.

What a house! The building has been described as a "folly" and a more accurate description could not be found. The original owner, a Mr George Lewis, was a master plasterer and it is claimed by long time neighbours that he did much of the marvellous plaster decoration on the State Theatre. Out of what was originally a modest timber house Lewis created a Hollywood-style fantasy. From the 1920's through till 1949 Lewis altered, extended and decorated the house in an imaginative and eccentric concoction of various architectural styles. Gothic meets Spanish Mission might be one description but there could be any number of others.

The Lewis family apparently kept very much to themselves and few people saw the house's remarkable interior. Plaster wall lanterns, alcoves, rococo columns and stained glass rose windows are featured throughout. In the main hallway, over a doorway, plaster stalactites hung suspended from the ceiling giving the visitor the impression of entering an amusement park wonderland. The decoration was grand but the proportions used were actually quite small indicating an owner short in stature or modest in budget or possibly both. In the garden, grottos concealed prosaic garden sheds. A small passageway through pointed gothic arches led to the backyard where huge phoenix palms added to the exotic effect. The house originally stood on eight land lots some of which were gradually sold off.

It was wonderful to get the opportunity to see such a house and a pity because of the impromptu nature of the visit it was not possible for more members to see the house. The Society would like to thank former owners, Brenda and Rex Harold, for allowing access to the site. The National Trust has recorded the house on video so perhaps in the future our members could view "The Hut" once again.

MEMORIES OF THE MOVIES.

At the Centennial Bakery Museum bookstand, on our recent visit there following the fascinating tour of the Mashman Pottery, I purchased two booklets on the histories of the local cinemas. On reading the chapter on the "Victory" at Kogarah, I was reminded of a family anecdote.

Back in the depression days, my mother gave my brother, then aged about ten, one shilling to take himself and his two younger sisters to the Saturday afternoon matinee at the "Victory". The tickets were threepence each, which meant that the threepence change gave them each a penny to spend. (Twelve pennies to a shilling for those too young to remember)

However, my brother fronted up to the cashier, and asked for "two halves". (half-price, or child's tickets) When she looked questionly at the two girls in tow, he blithely told her that his younger sister, who wore thick glasses "was blind, and couldn't see anything". She let the three in for sixpence - so instead of a penny intended for a treat at interval they had a whole twopence each!

Mr John Wayland, the manager, I met in later years when as a student at St. George Girls' High we held our speech days there. On that important day in the school year, all the girls wore white dresses.

Mr Wayland's brother was a pastrycook who had his bakery and shop in Jolly's Arcade, Hurstville. I well remember the enormous slabs of soft buttery sponges, generously filled with jam and cream which he would cut into blocks as required whilst you waited - and your mouth watered. Jill, his daughter would help out after school. This Mr Wayland was a tall spare man and like his brother, also very kind and courteous.

By the time I was old enough to go to the pictures, the family had long since moved from Cameron Street in Bexley to High Street, Carlton, so my Saturday afternoon matinee visits were to the Carlton "De-Luxe". Prices had gone up to sixpence for the front stalls, and ninepence for the back stalls, and I was given a shilling all for myself. Scorning the front stalls where the picture looked all distorted and, and everyone seemed to stamp their feet in unison when the serial (always before the first film) became exciting, I spent ninepence to sit in the back stalls, saving my threepence until the end of the session when I would go around the corner into Station Street (now Jubilee Avenue) and indulge in a hot potato scallop from the fish and chip shop opposite the hotel. How I looked forward to that indulgence!

*Dorrie Shaw*

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EXTRACT FROM "The Propellor" - 11th October 1934.

THIRTY MILES TO SYDNEY.

In these days of concrete and bitumenous-surfaced roads a journey from Kogarah to Sydney is one devoid of difficulty and may be accomplished in quick time. Before the constitution of the Main Roads Board in 1925, or up to the time that the Board reconstructed Cook's River Road, the condition of that road was atrocious - it was little more than a right-of-way. Mud alternated with dust as the weather was wet or fine or the municipal watercart was in use, while potholes were as plentiful as holes in a collander. Motorists looked upon most of our roads as a "nut and bolt or spare part department" owing to the number of fragments of motor vehicles to be encountered along our thoroughfares. This state of affairs was thought to be a disgrace to those supposedly in charge of the upkeep of our roads, but even this rough condition of the highways was far superior to that which was encountered by the pioneers of the district. There was a time when the only means of reaching Sydney from Kogarah or Hurstville and the surrounding districts was by way of Punch Bowl (now spelt Punchbowl) Road, through Enfield to Liverpool Road, making the journey about 30 miles from Hurstville Station. The cause of this was evidently the absence of roads or bridges over Cook's River. Early records contain the information that "the first bridge across Cook's River 'lower down' was Thompson's Bridge, built by Mr. Thompson, a solicitor, some 60 years ago (about 1830), which was afterwards replaced by the Undercliffe Bridge."

Commenting on the transport difficulties between Kogarah and Sydney some 44 years ago, the writer stated that "like most of the suburbs of Sydney, Kogarah and Rockdale have suffered severely from want of good roads and consequent means of communication with the city. In early times residents were compelled to head Wolli Creek and Cook's River, and to get to Sydney by way of Canterbury or Enfield, and thence on to the Parramatta or Liverpool Roads. Even by taking this roundabout way it was very difficult to get through the bush with vehicles, and most of the carriage was done by means of pack-horses. An occupant of Sans Souci, at Rocky Point House, who established a still, carried the liquor he manufactured in kegs slung one on each side of a pack-horse, and covered the kegs with bags, rushes, etc. The Rocky Point Road is said to have been first cleared by order of Governor Gipps who was in office from 1838 to 1846. Sir George seems to have taken a deep interest in the morals of the settlers. He frequently attended service at St. Peter's Church, and one day, when he met Mr. Robert Cooper, of Rocky Point House, he said, "How is it I've not seen you at church recently?" Mr Cooper explained that it was almost impossible to get through the scrub. "Pooh", returned his Excellency, "that is no excuse. Here, take this order and get some men from the stockade to clear a track; and don't let me have to complain of your absence again." As a result a

track was cleared from the Cook'e River dam to Rocky Point (Sans Souci) to enable Mr. Cooper and his family to go to church. For many years there was merely a bush track, in some places almost impassable for vehicles. At a ridge known as Cobbler's Pinch (the steep pinch on Prince's Highway between Rockdale and Cook's River, generally known as Arncliffe Hill), carts, gigs, etc., had to skirt the ridge, and wind in and out among the rocks and scrub for a mile or more until the obstruction was passed, and then make their way back to the cleared track.

The first to cross Cobbler's Pinch with a vehicle is said to have been Mr Berghofer, who went out from Sydney to take possession of his farm with a German waggon and four horses about the year 1862. Mr. Berghofer found it impossible to follow the winding of the track round the ridge with such a team, and therefore he decided to attempt to make his way over the pinch. In this he was successful, but he met with misfortune further along the road when his waggon capsized owing to a wheel of the vehicle going into a hole. From Mr. Berghofer's experience it would appear that the dreaded Cobbler's Pinch was not much worse to negotiate than the road itself.

First Road Trust.

It was about this time that the first road trust was formed under the Parish Roads Act ( 4 Victoria, No.12), passed by Governor-in-Council in 1840. It provided that trustees might be elected for three years, and that these trustees should have power to erect toll bars and levy tolls. It also provided that a rate not exceeding 6d. per acre might be struck on all lands within a distance of three miles of a road. The permissive principle in vogue to a large extent in early years of the colony appears to have been the base of legislation in New South Wales from the first establishment of local government in the colony. The Parish Roads Act might have formed a good basis for a more complete local government measure, but for the fact that all its provisions depended on the word "may" instead of "shall". The legislators do not appear to have realised that laws should be made to be enforced, there being otherwise a danger of them proving useless, and too many of the laws of New South Wales have been found useless when tried. The Parish Roads Act was almost a dead-letter. The Rocky Point Road Trust, which was almost the only one in the colony which attempted to carry out the provisions of the Act, found that the rate of 6d. per acre could not be enforced, as the Act provided no means of compelling defaulters to pay. The want of roads in the district, however, was so great that the majority of the residents in Kogarah and Rockdale did not raise any dispute against the rate, which they might have done had they taken legal opinion as to the wording of the Act; and, therefore, this Act remained in force in the district long after the levying of rates by similar trusts elsewhere had been abandoned.

The first road trust for this district consisted of Messrs. J.B. Carroll (Chairman), Patrick Moore, J.Moore, William Beehag and James Beehag.

The first Government vote for our roads was dated May 20, 1864 and was for pounds 60.0.0.

#### A Toll Bar.

Before this grant for roads was given, however, a toll had been established by the road trust near the Cook's River dam, and the money collected had been expended principally in cutting down and levelling the huge rocks on top of Cobbler's Pinch, and in building a bridge over Muddy Creek (on Prince's Highway between Kogarah and Rockdale). This bridge was opened on February 20, 1862. It was composed of large logs with smaller logs or saplings laid across and covered with earth and stones. The building of this bridge marked the abolition of one of the difficult places to negotiate on the road from Sydney to Kogarah, and to-day is an up-to-date structure, it having been rebuilt in 1933 by the Main Roads Department after having been practically swept away by an unusual rainstorm during that year. A road committee was formed in the early days of the district in connection with Kogarah Road, which branches off Rocky Point Road near Prendergast's Inn, and ran to the punt at Tom Ugly's Point. Kogarah Road and Rocky Point Road are now known as Prince's Highway, the only portion of Rocky Point Road now bearing that name leaves Prince's Highway at Moorefield Racecourse and extends to Rocky Point, Sans Souci. The site of Prendergast's Inn was in the vicinity of Moorefield Racecourse. The Kogarah Road Committee consisted of Matthew Carroll, Patrick Moore and Joseph Clarke, and the first Government vote of pounds 35.0.0 for making and repairing the road was granted on October 3, 1860.

#### Dispute among Residents.

However, a dispute arose in 1869 between residents along Forest Road and the Rocky Point Road Trust, the residents claiming pounds 100.0.0 from the toll receipts for making their road. The residents on the Muddy Creek Road, not to be outdone, claimed pounds 50.0.0 for their road, and as the trustees could not see their way to divert these large sums of money (a large amount in those days) from the use for which they had been collected, the dispute waxed warm, and resulted in the toll being abolished at Cook's River Dam by Mr. William Forster (Minister for Lands in the Fifth Cowper Ministry). Determined not to be deprived of such an easy means of revenue, a toll was shortly afterwards opened on Rocky Point Road south of Cobbler's Pinch, or near where Spring Street, Rockdale, now joins Prince's Highway. This new position for a toll bar thus allowed traffic using Forest Road to go free as the toll was situated a little beyond Forest Road towards Rockdale, and thus residents of the latter road were not in any way entitled to any of the revenue collected.

The road trust was abolished in 1876, the last trustees having been Messrs. J.B. Carroll, Joseph Twiss, Thomas Mascord, James Hickey and William Bush. Mr. Samuel Schofield served three years on the Trust, and other gentlemen were elected and served for longer or shorter terms. Mr J.B. Carroll was also one of the trustees of the road from the southern side of George's River to Bottle Forest.

## ROCKDALE'S HERITAGE AT RISK

The built heritage of Rockdale Municipality has been put at serious risk and only letters from you can help save the historic architectural character of the area.

A rash, ill-judged decision by Rockdale City Council could well mean that only a handful of buildings will be preserved for future generations. At a special meeting, on 12 April, to consider the Heritage Local Environment Plan, Council voted to delete from the list of heritage items all those properties where an objection has been lodged. Bad enough, but the resolution went much further. Council resolved to write to all property owners that had not actually supported the listing and ask if they wanted their property listed or not. This is a direct reversal of Council's long-held practice of regarding "silence as assent". That is, if a property owner does not object to a development proposal it is taken as agreement. This common practice applies to many Council implemented actions such as re-zonings, development approvals and so on. And whilst it may appear superficially "democratic" it takes no account of community concerns. Mayor Peter Bryant stated in a recent letter to the *Leader* "...we [Council] should not impose the Government's will on the people." Of course this is nonsense, Council imposes the will of the Government on the people all the time. If Rockdale City Council adopted the same approach to other issues that it has done in regard to heritage the result would be anarchy.

Clearly, on the matter of heritage, as in other issues that Council must deal with, there has to be a balance between the genuine rights of the individual and the interests of the community. The rights of property owners do not include an entitlement to do whatever they wish with their houses. This right does not exist now or in the foreseeable future. The approach taken by Council supports this misrepresentation and in so doing panders exclusively to the interests of one section of the community.

In appealing a particularly loud group of property owners Council has not considered the implications of its actions. For instance, what is to be done in regard to areas of natural heritage and the Conservation Zones? Most importantly, Council has agreed to the removal of a heritage planning controls without:-

1. considering the significance of the heritage item involved;

2. evaluating the validity of the objection.

Conceivably, some very important items of heritage could be lost on the basis of objections which have no basis in fact whatsoever.

Only intervention by the Heritage Council of NSW can save Rockdale's Heritage Conservation Plan from being discarded entirely. This will only happen if there is evidence of public dissatisfaction with the actions of Rockdale Council. I urge you to write to the Heritage Council of NSW requesting it to intervene to allow a reconsideration of the Plan.



The address to write to is:-

**Heritage Council of NSW  
Dept of Planning  
Remington Centre  
175 Liverpool St  
Sydney NSW 2000**

In closing I might point out that not all councillors supported this action of Rockdale Council, in fact it was strenuously opposed by Councillors Rathbone, Field and Holroyd.

Bernard Sharah,  
St George Hist.Soc. representative on Heritage Advisory Committee.

### ***SOCIETY NEWS***

It's good to see our President, Bettye Ross back after a very nasty bout of ill health. Noel and Val Beehag have returned from their visit to Western Australia by train. Noel has been quite busy lately meeting up with old wartime friends as part of " 1945- 1995 Australia Remembers". Betty Robinson wanted me to mention a thanks for the little gift to members at the Christmas party which she thought a lovely gesture by our President. Finally, welcome to new member, Alma Lane.