



O UR HISTORY

Issue 1, 2022



Contents

Welcome.....	4
President's Report 2020-2021	5
Financial Year Report 2020-2021	7
Lydham Hall Historic House and Museum History	8
Stage 1 Restoration of Lydham Hall	10
The colours of Lydham Hall	12
Cleaning and cataloguing the collection at Lydham Hall	14
Publications list and ordering.....	16
Join the Society membership form.....	17

Front Cover – Stage 1 refurbishment of Lydham Hall. Image shows contractors working on the slate roof of the house in January 2021. Photo courtesy of Heritage Slate Roofing, Sydney.

Back Cover – Detail of child's dress in the collection of the St George Historical Society. Detail shows cotton pleats, machine stitched with hand crochet trims. Circa 1920s.

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Welcome

Somehow, I am here, writing this welcome to *Our History*, the magazine for the St George Historical Society. Barry Johnson, our amazing Editor, has retired from the role, and the job has been thrust my way. I am still not sure how that happened, but here I am, as the new editor and I will endeavour to give it my best shot.

My first task is to thank Barry for his hard work and dedication. As many of you may know, Barry has been editor since July 2016 and has managed to elevate *Our History* from a simple photocopied newsletter, into a professional magazine packed full of information and photographs. Working almost entirely on his own, I have always marvelled and wondered how he did it with such little fuss. Well, I will now find out.

We have started the new year with a new logo. Keeping the traditional design, but with a more contemporary feel, members voted unanimously to adopt the new logo going forward at our last meeting. The previous logo was drawn in the 1970s and was looking its age. The new logo is more user friendly and can be more easily applied to platforms such as our website and social media pages. Image below shows the old logo and the new logo side by side. We'd love to hear feedback.

It has been a very bumpy few years for the Society. Thanks to Covid, there has been little outward activity, although we have

continued to work behind the scenes on various projects.

Our monthly Society meetings and talks were reduced to whenever we could manage to slip a meeting in between lockdowns, and we were fortunate to be able to have a meeting in June 2021. At that time, we thought we could see light at the end of the Covid tunnel and so we outlined big plans for the coming year for the restoration, cleaning and cataloguing of Lydham Hall Historic House and Museum. Thank you to all those members who enthusiastically volunteered to help. The only other meeting we were able to have after June was in November – our last for the year.

Because of Covid, we have also missed some important celebrations that we had planned for the Society. The first was to be the 50th Anniversary of the opening of Lydham Hall to the public and also the 60th Anniversary for the St George Historical Society. Both anniversaries fell during a time that made celebrations impossible. We are still hoping to celebrate with our members and the local community, once the house re-opens in 2022.

In the meantime, this issue is devoted to Lydham Hall – its history and the restoration works it is currently undergoing.

Happy New Year to all of our members. Stay safe.

Tina Workman
Editor



Presidents Report 2020-2021

Well, who would have thought 2021 was destined to continue in the same vein as 2020 due to COVID-19 related sickness, death and Lockdown restrictions impacting family, friends, the business and health sectors plus leisure pursuits to name but a few? May Australia and hopefully the rest of the world turn a corner into a more positive 2022... The COVID-19 lightning bolt which struck once, then twice but we hope will not strike thrice?! Let us all hope and pray for a much gentler and kinder 2022.

The St. George Historical Society Inc has joined a great throng of like societies which have been embroiled in learning how to adjust to a new paradigm. Our meetings have necessarily been curtailed by Government and Bayside Council restrictions. This has been challenging, but at least with modern technology, communication updates have still been possible on a timely basis. Nonetheless, in person, face-to-face gatherings are without doubt the most rewarding and popular forms of communication and interaction for social gatherings such as our monthly meetings.

A review of the Society's activities makes for sobering reading. Of the possible 10 monthly meetings between February 2021 and November 2021, Lockdown restrictions, a clash with ANZAC Day and a freak storm event resulted in the cancellation of 7 and due to being unable to access the Senior Citizen's Centre due to a Bayside Council error, potentially the aborting of yet another meeting. We must thank the quick-thinking Hortons for use of St. Peter's Anglican church Cooks River for saving the day. The Lord on this occasion did indeed provide! Sadly, we will not be able to access Lydham Hall for this year's Christmas party due to ongoing renovations. We shall canvas members' thoughts for an alternative venue.

2021 coincided with the Golden Anniversary of the opening of the Lydham Hall museum and the Diamond Anniversary of the St. George Historical Society Inc. Alas, due to

the pandemic and long-awaited works being undertaken at Lydham Hall, possible celebrations have necessarily been deferred; but significantly not cancelled!

Although monthly meetings have largely been in recess, I can assure members, much indeed is happening 'behind the scenes' as it were. Laurice and Tina will each provide updates as to what has been negotiated with Bayside Council and Lydham Hall respectively.

I take this opportunity to thank members of the Society's Executive and Committee for so freely and unselfishly giving their time and talents. Specifically, I would like to thank Barry Johnson in his capacity as the Society's Editor in recent years and wish him well in his well-deserved retirement from this role. The reformatting and colourisation of the '*Our History*' newsletter was revolutionary and has been well-received. Well done good and faithful servant!

Laurice Bondfield has worked tirelessly during especially challenging times and on occasion, had to manage exasperating circumstances. Many telephone calls and e-mails have been had between Laurice and Bayside Council as regards COVID-19 Safety plans and securing meeting rooms. She has in addition spent hours reviewing Government COVID-19 information websites and liaising with members, the Society's committee, the Leader newspaper and guest speakers, collated meeting agenda, taken monthly and committee meeting minutes, helped with the logistics of the meeting room set-up and brought COVID-19 supplies for all our use. I am sure this list is not exhaustive...but I think this should give some idea of what Laurice has accomplished this year. May she continue to keep on keeping on!

Tina Workman indeed lives up to the first syllable of her surname. Work she has and how! Whilst managing the Society's finances would ordinarily be her principal duty as Treasurer and presumably has the odd challenging moment; NOTHING could

compare with her undertakings at Lydham Hall! Fortunately, because of her profession, Tina has the trained eye for detail and design so critical at this watershed period in the Museum's history. She has had to negotiate with many stakeholders such as Bayside Councillors, Council tradesmen, specialist heritage architects and consultants plus of course the Lydham Hall Management Committee, as much needed external restoration and some internal renovations to this historic house have been actioned with still more to be undertaken before the overall project is finalised.

Tina has necessarily adopted a 'roll up the sleeves and get cracking approach'. Over perhaps hundreds of hours including many weekends, Tina has cleaned and catalogued upwards of 500 individual pieces and upgraded the associated displays. There is still at least another 1,500 objects to be given the same treatment. Tina has fortunately been assisted by Councillor Liz Barlow, Laurice, the Rankins and others on occasion. The work has been long-overdue and herculean in scope but ultimately will make the Lydham Hall Museum a viable concern in the years to

come. Suffice to say, "Tina, thank you very much and do please take time to breathe, eat and sleep"!

I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Robert McGarn to the Committee. Although Robert is very much a quiet achiever, he regularly provides insightful feedback to ideas and proposals. In addition, he has the handy talent of keeping abreast of local news and happenings, much of which would probably otherwise escape the Committee's attention.

Finally, I wish all members a happy, healthy and holy Christmas. May 2022 prove to have significant respite from COVID-19 and provide the opportunity for our society to joyously celebrate milestone occasions deferred from this year plus a return to some semblance of normality for all Australians.

Best wishes,

Wesley Fairhall
President



February 2021 Talk given at the Rockdale Senior Citizens Centre with appropriate Covid social distance seating.

Financial Year Report 2020 - 2021

The Financial Report for the year 2020-2021 is shown below. Given that the disruption of covid lockdowns has meant that there has been little activity this year, the Society is thankful that members have continued to support us with membership. This has allowed us to continue to pay those necessary expenses to keep the

Society active. This year we were also lucky enough to receive a grant from Bayside Council for \$2,000 which will go towards the purchase of visitor chairs at Lydham Hall Historic House and Museum. If any members would like a copy of a month by month account for the previous year, please contact the Treasurer.

ST GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.		
<i>Financial Report as at 30 June 2021</i>		
OPENING BALANCE	Commonwealth Bank Society Cheque Account	\$ 3,647.47
	Commonwealth Bank Long Term Deposit	\$ 8,000.00
	Sub Total	\$ 11,647.47
INCOME recurring	Membership	\$ 765.00
	Meeting Refreshment Takings	\$ -
	Book Sales	\$ -
	Events	\$ -
INCOME miscellaneous	Donations and Grants	\$ 2,105.00
	Interest from Long Term Account	\$ 108.00
	Sub Total	\$ 2,978.00
EXPENDITURE recurring	Afternoon Tea Expenses	\$ 57.40
	Christmas Party Expenses	\$ -
	Postbox Charges	\$ 205.00
	RAHS Insurance	\$ 455.70
	RAHS Membership	\$ 108.00
	Speaker Reimbursements	\$ -
	Website Domain Renewal (1 YEAR)	\$ -
	Website Domain Name	\$ -
EXPENDITURE miscellaneous	Postage for AGM notification and new constitution	\$ -
	Condolence flowers for Betty Ross	\$ 88.99
	Members Christmas Mail Out	\$ 66.00
	Hall Hire for 2 months	\$ 84.00
	Miscellaneous expense	\$ 19.48
	Sub Total	\$ 1,084.57
CLOSING BALANCE	Commonwealth Bank Society Cheque Account	\$ 5,541.20
	Commonwealth Bank Long Term Deposit	\$ 8,000.00
	Total	\$ 13,541.20

Lydham Hall Historic House and Museum

The St George area was very fortunate that Rockdale Council had the foresight to purchase a stone cottage called Lydham Hall many decades ago with the sole purpose of conserving this beautiful old house which, in turn, would provide the area with a local history museum and a home for the St George Historical Society. It was purchased for \$26,000 and opened as part of the Rockdale Council's Centenary Celebrations in 1970.

Lydham Hall is a sandstone villa built in 1860 for businessman Joseph Davis, his wife Ellen and their family. The house was part of a 67 acres estate that Davis called 'Lydham Hill', built on the highest ridge in the area and with commanding views of Botany Bay. Davis had a butchering business in Newtown and used the property to fatten up his cattle before slaughter.

The original house consisted of 4 large rooms coming off a central hallway, surrounded on all sides by a generous verandah. When Davis died in 1889, the property was subdivided and a smaller parcel of land was sold to local oyster farmer, Frederick Gibbons, who leased the property to a succession of wealthy tenants.

In 1890, the house stood on three and a half acres surrounded by outbuildings, paddocks,

orchards and with rugged vegetation beyond. In 1907, Gibbons daughter, Ada, married renown naturalist, David Stead. Stead was a widower with a young daughter, Christina, and the family occupied the house with their growing brood of children, Steads sister and her daughter.

Christina Stead would go on to become an important, internationally acclaimed author who included references to 'Lydham Hill' and the surrounding area in a number of her books and short stories. The Stead family lived in the house until the death of Frederick Gibbons in 1917.

After Gibbons died, the house, as well as sections of the property, were further subdivided and a succession of owners and tenants lived at Lydham Hall until 1958. Up until that stage, the property still had substantial outbuildings to the southern side including stables and a large kitchen.

In 1917, part of the verandah on the southern end was demolished to create additional rooms which were used as a bedroom and a bathroom. There is also evidence of 'lean-to's' built under the verandah on both the eastern and the northern sides.



An aerial photograph of the house in the 1940s shows the house with stables, kitchen and other outbuildings on the property.

By the late 1950s, all remnants of outbuildings were gone and the property was subdivided again, until only 1300m² of land was left. This was to be the last subdivision.

In 1958, the house was purchased by George and Valmai Long who lived there, as caretakers, long after it was sold to Rockdale Council in 1971.



The house in the early 1960s

On acquisition, the Society began the mammoth task of restoring the house, furnishing it and gathering enough objects to create a folk museum in the upstairs attic rooms. When the house officially opened in March 1971, only 2 rooms and the hall were open to the public. The other 2 rooms, the attic and the 1917 rooms were still occupied by Mr and Mrs Long and their family. Regardless, in the first year of opening, approximately 1,700 visited the house with the house charging 20cents on entry.



Opening invitation

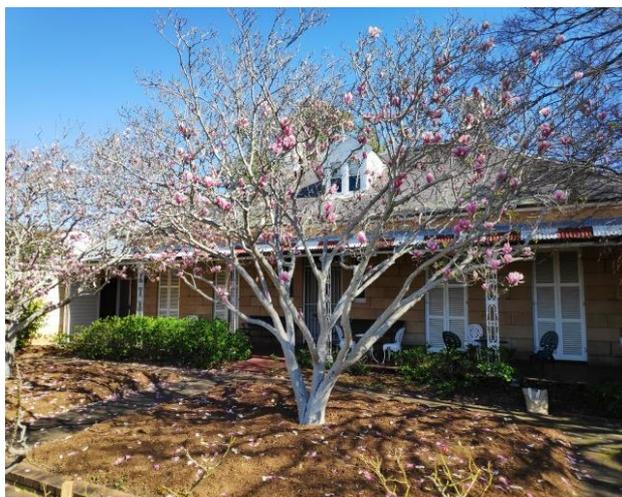
The house soon found itself in a position of having too many objects and not enough space to display them. The lack of space saw the Society knock back several objects of importance including a desk owned by David Stead, one of the original occupants of the house.



Mayor Ron Rathbone officially opening the museum in 1971

In 1972, the house was offered a large loan of furniture from the National Trust which required substantial space. The attic was vacated by the caretakers the following year and the additional space meant that the Society was able to renovate the upstairs rooms for the display of objects donated. These rooms currently display over 1500 objects of local and historical interest.

In 1978, a new wing was built to accommodate a new caretaker. This wing included a bathroom and kitchen as well as toilets for visitors.



Magnolias in bloom in the back garden

Today the house still sits proudly on 1300m² surrounded by manicured, modern gardens and is open to public regularly. Throughout 2020 and 2021, the house has undergone extensive renovations which has included refurbishment of the existing slate roof, replacement of the verandah roof and repairing the verandah decking and repainting of the exterior in colours that reflect the period of the house. The house will re-open in 2022. 

Stage 1 Restoration of Lydham Hall

Anyone who owns an old house, will appreciate that restoration and maintenance is an ongoing process.

The last major restoration for Lydham Hall occurred in the 1970's when Rockdale Council first purchased the house. Minor works were done as required and then, in 2015, a storm caused extensive damage to the roof of the house and interior spaces. Whilst this was repaired at the time, major restoration was required to stop further damage.



Image showing some roof damage prior to the refurbishment (photo courtesy of Heritage Slate Roofing, Sydney)

In 2019, Bayside Council successfully applied for funding from the State Government for restoration works for Lydham Hall. A new Conservation Management Plan was written and, after delays due to Covid, work commenced in October 2020.

Stage 1 works included:

- refurbishing the existing slate roof with new battens, sarking, flashings, gutters and downpipes on the original stone residence building;
- reconstruction of the timber framing, flashings, cladding, sarking, internal lining and roofing to the two dormers;
- removal of the dilapidated shed in the backyard;
- replacement of the verandah sheeting and painting of the dormers, chimneys and verandah posts.

Before work could commence, the Society, together with the members of the Lydham Hall Management Committee, had the task of removing all of the objects in the upstairs museum and securing furniture in the rooms impacted by the works. Over 1500 objects were



Work commences in October 2020

washed, wrapped, transported downstairs and boxed for storage. The important task of cataloguing the collection, which had started some months earlier, was put on hold as the house would be inaccessible until work was completed in 2021. **SGHS**



New ridge capping being installed on the dormers (photo courtesy of Heritage Slate Roofing, Sydney)



BEFORE: the images above show missing, broken and loose tiles. The windows, fascias and timber sides of the dormers were rotted and allowing water into the house.

The house in the 70's had been painted all white and new decorative fascia and finial added. The tree overhang had caused blockages in the gutters and downpipes.



AFTER: All the slates tiles were lifted, checked, cleaned and replaced. New tiles brought in where required. New ridge capping installed and the corrugated iron verandah sheeting replaced with new

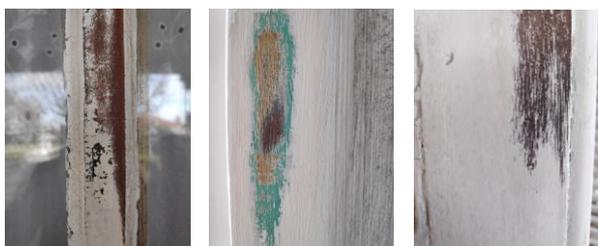
New timberwork on the dormers and chimney painted to colours more appropriate to the period (taken from paint scrapings).

All photography on this page courtesy of Heritage Slate Roofing, Sydney

The colours at Lydham Hall

In the 1970's, the council and the St George Historical Society undertook the major restoration of Lydham Hall. As part of that restoration, external elements of the house were given a new coat of paint and all the walls inside were painted or wallpapered. Existing carpets were removed and replaced with new, and the black and white check linoleum flooring was laid in the hallway. Unfortunately these finishes were selected without any research into what colours may have been originally used in the house nor any research into what colours would have been correct for the period.

As part of the 2020 restoration, a heritage architect was contracted to review the finishes and to undertake the task of carrying out paint scrapes. The scrapes done on



Paint scrapes taken on the exterior show a variety of different colours dating from the 1860s through to the 1960's.

the exterior windows and shutters showed a variety of potential colours. The next stage would be to decide on a final colour scheme – no easy task when the various stakeholders had

strong and differing opinions! It was decided to paint sample colours of all the possibilities, on the house itself, in order to see how the colours looked in situ. Below is a selection of images showing the various permutations:

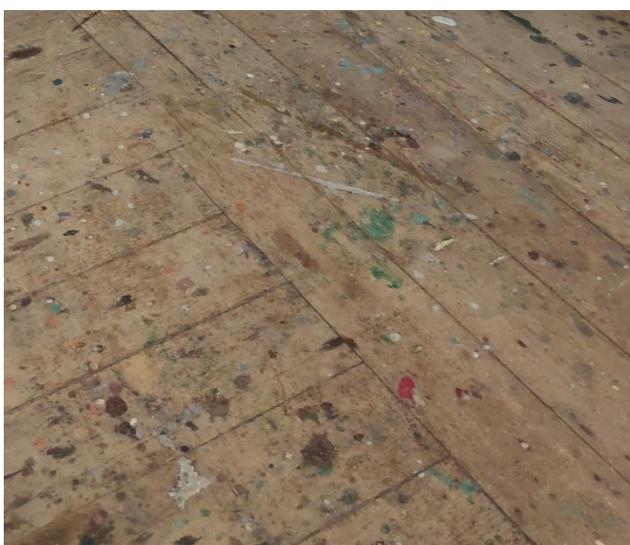


In September 2021, a final scheme was agreed on and approved by the architect. This scheme is fitting to a house of the 1860's and matches the colour scheme already painted on the top of the house as part of the Stage 1 works. The rendered image below shows colours for the final scheme selected.



However, the selection for colours for the *interior* have proven to be more elusive. Initial research revealed only a single layer of paint in all rooms with original plaster underneath. This implied that the house had only ever been painted once since the 1860's.

The floor boards in the attic proved this theory incorrect. When the carpet was lifted in one of the rooms, an abundance of colours were revealed. These paint splashes had been deposited over many decades of painting. Fortunately, the floorboards in the attic rooms were not sanded and polished like the ground floor rooms so they revealed paint colours in different whites, pastels pinks and green to vibrant reds and greens and dark browns.



Floor boards in one of the upstairs attic rooms reveals a myriad of different colours that would have once been painted on the walls.

This suggests that this room, at least, had been painted multiple times despite none of these colours appearing on the walls of the house.

The mystery was solved when old meeting records were reviewed. In the November 5th 1974 meeting records for the Lydham Hall Committee, "*Alderman Ron Rathbone expressed concern that no work had yet been undertaken in the bedroom. Two painters he had rung had refused to quote because of the amount of stripping that was involved.*". Some months later, a company of painters were found who were willing to undertake the task and,

sadly, over 100 years of historical fabric was stripped from the walls.

Further research and investigation will involve removing skirting boards and architraves around doors and windows to see if there are any remnants of historic wall paint colours or wallpapers. This research will have to come later, when future funding becomes available. In the meantime, the house interior will be repainted, with the approval of the heritage architect, in neutral colours suitable for a temporary scheme for a house of this period.

The wallpaper in the upstairs rooms and in the dining room will also be removed as part of Stage 2 renovations. These wallpapers were applied in the 1970's and are now in poor condition. The walls will be temporarily repainted in preparation for the house re-opening in 2022. The wallpapers in the other rooms will remain in place until further funding becomes available.



Wallpaper in the attic rooms being removed from the walls in preparation for new paint.

Cleaning the collection at Lydham Hall

In early 2020, the task of cleaning and cataloguing the collection at Lydham hall was being planned, and had just started, when Covid arrived.

Since then, the museum has only been intermittently accessible to volunteers between state lockdowns and renovation works so the project has been extremely slow. However, some progress has been made.

The objects in the upstairs museum needed to be relocated to allow access to builders to the roof and attic. Volunteers took this opportunity to wash and box up the crockery, silver and glass in the display cabinets for temporary storage downstairs. Many of these objects hadn't been cleaned for many years and the high humidity and leaking roof had left the items dirty, dusty and mouldy. Once work on the roof had been completed, these objects were unpacked and stored upstairs ready for the task of cataloguing them.

The silver and metal objects in the collection are also in the process of being cleaned and catalogued. Because of the damp conditions, some of these items were so badly corroded and tarnished that they were unrecognisable. The long arduous process of cleaning these may take some time.



Before & After: The difference a good clean can make.

The Society also has a large collection of textiles ranging from bedspreads, supper cloths, doyleys, dresses and a large collection of nightwear, underwear and childrens wear. Many of these were in poor condition when they were donated, and the environmental conditions inside the house have made them more susceptible to mould and insects.



The large dining room table laid out with doyleys, all ironed and sorted. Shown here is only a selection of the total collection.

The volunteers started with the easy textiles – doyleys. There were hundreds of them! Some old, some in fragile condition, but most were in good condition. They were all inspected for condition, age, tears and stains and washed or treated accordingly. The same routine was applied to the white linens (underwear, nightshirts and childrens dresses) and bedcloths. Items too fragile to wash have been stored until they can be conserved professionally and will be reviewed for future care.



All the whites hanging to dry after washing. Next step, ironing!

One large fabric object was deemed too important, too large and too fragile to keep at Lydham Hall. This object was the Bexley Public School Patriotic Appeal Flag - a rare and significant object from the first World War.

A funding-raising project in support of the war effort, the flag is embroidered with 59 names of local residents who donated to the appeal.

The flag was donated to Bayside Council who have cleaned, repaired and conserved this valuable object and it is now on display in the Rockdale Town Hall foyer.



Books cleaned, sorted and ready to be catalogued.

Books are another object in abundance at Lydham Hall, including a huge collection of Bibles and religious books. Like the textiles, many of these were donated in poor condition and are also affected further by humidity and



Cataloguing in progress

It is anticipated that the task of cataloguing the collection fully may take a number of years. Once the house re-opens properly and the Society can gain full access again, volunteers will be called on to help. If you would like to be involved, please contact us via our email address located on page 2.



Council staff installing the Bexley Patriotic Flag. Photo: Bayside Council

St George Historical Society Publications

The St George Historical Society Inc. has many books and pamphlets for sale, documenting the history of suburbs, people and events in the St George district, including well-researched books by Ron Rathbone.

The books can be posted or collected from Lydham Hall. Postage for books 1 through to 10 is \$9.55 for up to 5 books. All other books incur a \$9.55 rate per book. Payment details on following page.

<i>No.</i>	<i>TITLE</i>	<i>AUTHOR</i>	<i>PRICE</i>
1	The Kogarah to Sans Souci Tramway		\$2.50
2	Saywells Tramway 1887-1914 – Rockdale to Lady Robinson’s Beach		\$2.50
3	The Arncliffe to Bexley Steam tramway		\$4.00
4	Our Heritage in Stone		\$4.00
5	All Stations to Como		\$4.00
6	Tempe and the Black Creek Valley		\$4.00
7	Early Churches of the St George District		\$4.00
8	Early Settlers of the St George District – Volume 1		\$4.00
9	Early Settlers of the St George District – Volume 2		\$4.00
10	The Illawarra Railway – Hurstville		\$4.00
11	Christina Stead	Jennifer Gribble	\$10.00
12	History of the Rockdale Uniting Church – 150 Years Anniversary (1855-2005)		\$15.00
13	Kingsgrove The First 200 Years	Brian Madden	\$20.00
14	A Village Called Arncliffe	R.W.Rathbone	\$25.00
15	Brighton Le Sands	R.W.Rathbone	\$25.00
16	Cameos of Bexley	R.W.Rathbone	\$25.00
17	The Bexley Book	R.W.Rathbone	\$15.00
18	The Glen Village – its first 25 years	R.W.Rathbone	\$7.00
19	The Sans Souci Peninsula	R.W.Rathbone	\$26.00
20	The Lydham Hall Booklet		\$6.00
21	On the Streets Where You Live		\$8.00

St George Historical Society Membership

Membership fees help us:

- lobby for historic preservation of our local area
- maintain our museum – Lydham Hall Historic House and Museum
- publish an informative magazine for members
- undertake research for members and the local community
- publish histories of the St. George area
- fund talks and walks for members and locals
- facilitate society meetings and gatherings
- support the volunteers who assist with all of the above

Membership is due in June for the following financial year. Please post or email a copy of the membership form with payment. If you are unsure if you are a financial member, please send an email to the Treasurer (contact details at front of magazine).

new application

renewal

DATE

NAME

ADDRESS

POSTCODE

TELEPHONE

EMAIL

SINGLE **\$15.00** INC GST

FAMILY **\$20.00** INC GST

PRINTED AND POSTED

EMAILED ELECTRONICALLY

MEMBERSHIP TYPE (please tick one)

MAGAZINE DELIVERY (please tick one)

Payment for membership or book orders can be made by cheque or money order:

Payable to

St George Historical Society Inc.

Forwarded to

Treasurer

PO Box A89 Arncliffe 2205

Or via direct deposit:(reference your name and telephone number to identify the payment)

Account name

Bank Commonwealth Bank

BSB

St George Historical Society Inc.

062 119

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