



OUR HISTORY

ISSUE 2, 2022



Welcome

Welcome to the latest edition of *Our History* magazine. We have been without an editor this year so this current issue is a hybrid version of newsletter and magazine that we are testing.

We had hoped that we would have a volunteer, at the AGM in July, to take on the role of editor for our fantastic magazine. Alas, this was not the case and we have made the decision to scale down the magazine. This will allow us to produce a magazine much more quickly but at the same time we will be emailing members information on a more regular basis. At this stage, both Laurice Bondfield and Tina Workman will share the task of co-ordinating the information for both the magazine and the email supplements.

Our new look website, designed and managed by Barry Johnson, has been updated and will also have lots of updated news and information. And we also have regular updates on our Facebook page which is full of interesting local history posts.

We would love some feedback on this issue and the website. Feel free to drop us a line.

Laurice and Tina

What's on

Saturday 15 October 2-4pm Level 3, Rockdale Library Gold coin donation	Society Meeting and Talk THE CRAFT OF FAITH <i>John Radecki (1865-1955) created some of the finest stained glass windows in Sydney and country NSW. Guest speaker, Zofia Laba, will share the story of Radecki's life and works.</i>
Thursday 20 October 2-3.30 National Maritime Museum Free Ph: 9298 3777 Book: https://bit.ly/3S1RzCx	History Talk BEATING FRANCE TO BOTANY BAY <i>The contest between Arthur Phillip and Laperouse to get to Botany Bay first and to claim rights to sovereignty of either Britain or France. Margaret Cameron-Ash will talk on how the French had a jump start in the race for a Pacific empire, but English officials then launched their own pursuit around the globe. The contestants finally met in Botany Bay, with the French just five days too late.</i>
Saturday 19 November 2-4pm	Society Meeting and Talk SPEAKER TO BE CONFIRMED
Sunday 20 November 2-4.30pm Rockdale Town Hall \$60 Contact: http://www.rockdaleopera.com.au/	Rockdale Opera Company DIE FLEDERMAUS GALA CONCERT Highlighting the acclaimed music of Johann Strauss II and other popular composers! This production will feature young, emerging operatic artists, and for one performance only on the Sunday, Rockdale Opera Patron and acclaimed international bass-baritone, Daniel Sumegi.

Lydham Hall Update

Lydham Hall will be closed for a little while longer yet. But progress has been made.

At the September 2022 Bayside Council Meeting, Councillors agreed (in principle) to award a License for the management of the house to the St George Historical Society. The License will be for an initial period of 5 years and will require the Society to pay an annual fee. This fee, as well as the other items to be included as part of the License, are currently being negotiated with Bayside Council.

The 5 year Licence allows the St George Historical Society full access to the house and also allows us to program a range of events and activities for members and the general public.

Once the License Agreement has been finalised, a business plan will be developed which will include financial strategies as well as strategies for marketing and the collection.

Bayside Council will still retain ownership of the house with primary care for the site, including the structural integrity of the house and the maintenance of the gardens. The Society will be responsible for the cleaning and the maintenance of the interior of the house as well as the day to day operations.

The Lydham Hall Management Committee has been renamed the Lydham Hall Advisory Committee and they will be responsible for assisting the Society in the care of the property.



Image: Lydham Hall, circa 1960s. (Georges River Local Studies collection)

“Thirty Miles to Sydney”

An interesting article in *The Propeller*, which was a local area newspaper which started early last century. This article dates to 11th October 1934.

“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 Wollie 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"

(continued next page)

“Thirty Miles to Sydney”

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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's 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 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."

Still standing

'Ithiel', a large and imposing Victorian Italianate villa on Inverness Avenue Penshurst, is the only surviving house from the 1884 large-lot subdivision release of the Penshurst Park Estate. Built by John Sproule, a prominent local Master Builder and Hurstville Council Alderman and Mayor.



Another house built by Sproule in 1893 was 'Gladwyn' on Queens Road at Hurstville. Hurstville Council purchased 'Gladwyn' in 1986 to house Hurstville Local Studies and Archival collections from 1995 to 2004. It is still owned by Georges River Council.



Images: Georges River Local Studies Collection
Information: NSW Department of Planning and the Environment

Blast from the past

We take a look at some interesting articles and reports from past newsletters and bulletins from the Society. The one below is an entry from April 1962:

ROCKDALE TO ENTER HOMES IN
S.M. HERALD COMPETITION.

At the last meeting of the Rockdale Historical Society, it was decided to approach the owners of a number of fine old homes in the Municipality to see if they would allow them to be entered in the above contest which closes in October.

High on our list are James Brodie Sparks, "The Retreat" (Good Samaritan Convent, Arncliffe) which is 135 years old and Hannah Laycock's cottage at Kingsgrove (at least 150 years old).

A special committee set up by the Society has listed possible entries and the Secretary has been busily photographing them ready for cataloguing.

Ald. Rathbone reports that whilst roaming around the back streets of Arncliffe one recent Saturday afternoon looking for likely entries, he discovered an illegal S.P. set-up in full swing.

This is certainly an OLD Australian habit with many HISTORIC associations but it was more than his life was worth to try to photograph it.

And a year later (April 1963), this extract from Alexander Brodie Spark (below), owner of Tempe House, recorded snow in the St George area in 1836. Can this be possible?

EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF ALEXANDER BRODIE SPARK.

June 28th, 1836 "Mary Stephens pointed out snow on the ground, a thing I have never seen in the colony before".

(the first recorded fall of snow in the St. George Area)

Membership to the Society in 1962:

"THE ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION SHALL BE 10/- (TEN SHILLINGS.) DUE AND PAYABLE ON THE FIRST DAY OF JULY EACH YEAR. THE MEMBERSHIP FOR ALL OTHER MEMBERS OF THE SAME HOUSEHOLD SHALL BE 5/- (FIVE SHILLINGS). ANY MEMBER FAILING TO PAY WITHIN THREE MONTHS OF THE DUE DATE SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE UNFINANCIAL"

And our first committee:

THE ROCKDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

PRESIDENT:- Mr. J. I. Swann,
38 Ethel St., CARLTON.
LW 3398.

VICE-PRESIDENTS:-
Mr. C. W. Napper,
156 Frederick St.,
ROCKDALE, LX 4916
Mr. W. Foster,
13 Hillpine Avenue,
KOGARAH.

HON. SECRETARY:-
Ald. R. W. Rathbone.
53 Bruce St., BEXLEY.
LW 4813

HON. TREASURER:-
Ald. C.C.W. Nairn,
104 Staples St.,
KINGSGROVE. LY 6431

Membership

The St George Historical Society Inc relies on membership subscriptions to function. Memberships are our principal form of income and we value the contribution our members make. It costs only \$15 for a single membership or \$20 for a family.

Membership helps us:

- Lobby to preserve historic sites and buildings in our local area
- Maintain our museum – Lydham Hall Historic House
- Undertake research for members and the local community
- Publish histories of the St. George area
- Host talks and walks for members and locals
- Facilitate society meetings and gatherings
- Support our volunteers

To become a member, please download the membership form on our website <http://stgeorgehistsoc.org.au/>

Publications

The St George Historical Society publishes a range of books and pamphlets that document the history of suburbs, people and events in the St George District. The books can be posted or collected directly from Lydham Hall. To see a full list of our publications or to order a book, please visit our website <http://stgeorgehistsoc.org.au>

Our History is published by the St George Historical Society Inc.

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