



ST GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER | **NOVEMBER 2023**



WELCOME

It is only a handful of weeks before Christmas and the start of a new year. A time to relax for many people but the Society executive is still working to bring you more talks, activities and events next year.

We hope you have enjoyed the new format newsletter and all the updates on Lydham Hall. Next year will be an exciting one for the Society so stay tuned!

This will be the last newsletter of the year and we would like to wish all of our members and their families peace, health and happiness and a happy new year. Merry Christmas!

The Editorial Team.



WHAT'S ON

Christmas Afternoon Tea at

Lydham Hall

Saturday 25 November 2023

2pm to 4pm | 18 Lydham Ave Rockdale

Please join us at Lydham Hall for an exclusive members event to celebrate Christmas - and the end of a hectic year for the Society. This will be our first afternoon tea at Lydham Hall since 2018 and the museum will be open for members to have a sneak peak at all the wonderful work that has been done towards opening the house to the public again.

If you haven't already, please click on link below to RSVP.

A SHORT HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS GIFT GIVING



Christmas gifts for the Allen children in 1899. Image from the Collection State Library of NSW.

The tradition of Christmas gift giving starts in Ancient Rome, when gifts were exchanged for the winter solstice in December. It was only later, with the rise of Christianity, that it became a Christmas tradition. Originally gifts were shared on New Years Day and many cultures still exchange gifts on the New Year.

Christmas presents as we know them today became popular in the mid 19th century and by the end of the century, Christmas Eve had been designated the day to share gifts in most Western cultures. Christmas Eve was the day landowners shared Christmas Boxes with their tenants and servants.

Two things contributed to the more modern tradition of gift giving. Firstly, Christmas became a much more serious affair during the reign of Queen Victoria. In her household, gift giving became a more private, family affair and a slew of other traditions became fashionable such as sending Christmas cards and the erection of Christmas trees. The second, and possibly the most significant contribution, was the changes made possible by the industrial revolution. Gift selection went from small, handmade articles to factory made mass produced gifts.

By the end of the 19th century, clever manufacturers and retailers realised that marketing Christmas to children would net a healthy profit. By the mid 20th century, and with the economic prosperity after WW2, Christmas shopping boomed and by

the 1970's nearly 80% of all gift buying was for children.

Below image: Two children with Christmas stockings outside a Paddington toy store in 1934. Image from the Collection State Library of NSW.



Below image: Children with Christmas gifts in 1955. From the Collection State Library of NSW.





Image top left: Christmas shopping in the city. Christmas crowds at a trains station in 1947 .
Images on right: Christmas gift shopping David Jones 1963 (right). All images from the Collection State Library of NSW.

MICHAEL GANNON: HIS FAMILY AND SKELETONS

Lydham Hall is fortunate enough to have had donated a wonderful portrait of William Gannon, after whom (Gannon's) Forest Road was named. This portrait (image on the right) is currently hanging in the entrance hallway of the museum.

An interesting article was written on William Gannon for the St George Historical Society in June 2013 by the late Anne Carolan, donor of the portrait and other objects relating to the family.

Read below this fascinating history:



The Gannon family understandably hid their convict origins for two generations, so that descendants must 'depend almost entirely on 'government records and printed sources to gather information. However, episodes to give life to the facts do emerge and, in the case of my great, great-grandfather, Michael Gannon, these range from comic to tragic, from religious to criminal. In the Municipality of Marrickville the only

reminder that he once lived in Tempe is the home of his son, Fred Gannon in Union Street.

Michael Gannon established a respected Cook's River family, educating his children to become solid, sometimes prominent citizens in the local and wider community. He was (though an emancipist and an Irish Catholic) active in conservative politics. He was a man of charity, who donated land for the future building of St Michael's Catholic Church, Hurstville. For this he has been remembered affectionately during its recent centenary celebrations. He was involved in the foundation of Sts Peter and Paul's Catholic Church, Station Street, Tempe.

He shared business interests with his wife's brother-in-law, John Jenkins Peacock, and following his insolvency Michael, too, was declared insolvent in 1846. He was also charged with fraud, trying to keep a 14 acre block of Cook's River land by placing it in the name of his wife's brother, Edward Parsonage ('a poor man with a large family'). He was sentenced to nine months in Sydney Gaol, but research to date has not shown whether he served this sentence.

In 1850 for the sum of £732, he purchased from John Holden and James Holt an immense forest of 1906 acres which had been granted to Captain John Townson of the New South Wales Corps. Previously it had belonged to Simeon Lord who named it Lord's Bush. Stretching between the present suburbs of Hurstville and Bexley, it became Gannon's Forest, and the track through it became Gannon's Forest Road, now Forest Road. Michael watched the trees gradually disappear as the wood was carted back to the city. He made further profit as he had control of the Cook's River Toll Bar. In contrast, he was, with his friend' Walter Bradley, a prime mover in the formation of the original Zoological Gardens in the 1870s.

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