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PUBLICATIONS

LYDHAM HALL



ST GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER | **MAY-JUN 2025**

WELCOME



Saturday 14th June 2025
THE SCOTS CLUB, 6.30pm
29 BURROWS STREET ARNCLIFFE

INVITATION

WITH GUEST SPEAKER: EMMA WATTS, 2021 WESTFIELD CITIZEN OF THE YEAR
and
SPECIAL GUEST, COUNCILLOR EDWARD MCDUGALL, MAYOR BAYSIDE COUNCIL

We would like to invite you to our Annual Dinner to celebrate our outstanding achievements over the last 12 months. Join us for an evening of delightful cuisine, presentations, raffle prizes, & pleasant company.

COST: \$50 PER PERSON

To secure your place, simply scan the QR code to book and pay for your tickets or contact us at stgeorgehistorical@gmail.com

We look forward to sharing this special evening with you.



The most important thing to mention in this issue is that our Annual Dinner is coming up on June 14th. It is a major fundraising event for the Society and we would love to see as many members as possible. Feel free to bring family and friends. We have two special guests - Emma Watts, 2021 Citizen of the Year, who will give a fascinating talk about Memory Books, and Cllr Edward McDougall, Mayor of Bayside Council who will present our volunteers with a Certificate of Appreciation for their hard work for the St George Historical Society and Lydham Hall. To book, scan the QR code above or follow the links below. We hope you will join us, particularly if you have volunteered with us.



One of the most rewarding benefits of opening Lydham Hall has been the amazing groups we get for our **'Tea and Tour Thursdays'**. We have welcomed groups from all over Sydney for a tour of the museum and delicious Devonshire tea. Some groups have come back twice! If you belong to a social group and would like to book a special opening for your group, please let us know. The the very happy group above are the Pagewood Seniors Group.

We would like to warmly welcome our new members - Rhonda Crisanti (Bardwell Park), Ursula Dubosarsky (Marrickville), Robert Gascoigne (Bardwell Valley), Monique Lica (Bardwell Valley), Rosa Miranda (Banksia), and Amanda & David Nugent (Cronulla). We are so pleased to see our membership growing. A reminder to all members that entry to the museum is free.

Your Editorial Team

[BOOK YOUR GROUP HERE](#)

[BOOK FOR ANNUAL DINNER](#)

WHAT'S ON

[LINK TO WEBSITE](#)



May 2025 | 11am to 3pm | 18 Lydham Avenue Rockdale

LYDHAM HALL HERITAGE MONTH OPENINGS

May is Heritage Month & Lydham Hall will open its doors extra days during the week to celebrate Australian Heritage Festival with the National Trust of Australia. To find out what extra days we are open, [click here](#). Note that our famous Devonshire Teas are only available on the 1st Sunday of the month.



Sunday, 11 May 2025 11am - 3pm at Lydham Hall, 18 Lydham Avenue

SOLD OUT!

MOTHERS DAY HIGH TEA

Bring your mum along for a wonderful High Tea Celebration at Lydham Hall. A delectable array of sweet and savoury treats served on the verandah overlooking the gardens. This is a booked event - keep an eye on our website for [details](#).



Saturday 17 May 2025 | 2pm until 4pm | 3rd Floor Rockdale Library | 444 Princes Highway Rockdale

LOCAL HISTORY TALK: MYSTERY OF THE FIRST FLEET PIANO

SGHS Member, Elaine Phillips will examine the mystery of the First Fleet piano which arrived in 1788 and then disappeared in 1793. Today there are two people claiming they have it! Entry is **FREE** but donations gratefully accepted. Refreshments provided. Bring a friend!



Thursday 22 May 2025 | 5.30-7.30Pm |
Rockdale Library, 444/446 Princes Hwy,
Rockdale

NO WORRIES WRITING WORKSHOP

In this short workshop with acclaimed writer Dr Kathryn Heyman, you'll learn how to pace your writing and manage the passage of time. You'll also discover when (and how) to pull back off the throttle and give your readers time to reflect. Workshop cost is \$30. [Register Here](#)



Friday 23 May 2025 | 7pm | Botany
Town Hall, 1423 Botany Road

DEBRA OSWALD: 100 YEARS OF BETTY

Hear bestselling author Debra Oswald discuss her latest release, *One Hundred Years of Betty*, its century-spanning saga and the life at its centre, in conversation with Kathryn Heyman. A talk presented in partnership with Sydney Writers' Festival. Free but registration is required. [Register Here](#)



Sunday 1 June 2025 | 10am-4pm | 18
Lydham Avenue Rockdale

LYDHAM HALL OPEN DAY

Immerse yourself in history in the magnificent Victorian interior of Lydham Hall. Our knowledgeable volunteers can share the history of the house and the area. After a tour, relax on the verandah for some delicious home baked scones. Entry is free for members. Bring family and friends for a morning or afternoon.



Saturday 14th June 2025 | 6.30pm | Arncliffe Scots Sports and Social Club

ST GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL DINNER

Join us for a night to remember - the St. George Historical Society invites you to our Annual Dinner, an enchanting evening of community, history, and celebration!

Whilst indulging in a delicious two-course dinner, listen to an inspiring talk by Emma Watts. Emma was Westfield 2021 Citizen of the Year and for good reason. She runs a successful business in Kirrawee and she is interested in memory books, which encourage people to leave their life story in such a publication .

We would also like to take the opportunity to thank our volunteers on the night with a special presentation by Councillor Edward McDougall, Mayor of Bayside Council. We wouldn't exist without our volunteers and this presentation is our way of saying how much we appreciate all that you do.

As well as some terrific food, we will have many, many raffle prizes to give away on the night. Don't miss this opportunity to connect with fellow history enthusiasts and celebrate the vibrant past of our community. Let's come together to honour our history and create new memories. We can't wait to see you there!

Book now via the link below.

[BOOK FOR THE ANNUAL DINNER](#)

[VOLUNTEER WITH US](#)



Saturday 21 June 2025 | 2pm until 4pm
|3rd Floor Rockdale Library | 444 Princes
Highway Rockdale

**LOCAL HISTORY TALK: BEA MILES:
BOHEMIAN REBEL**

Bea Miles was Australia's most famous Bohemian Rebel. She constantly defied conventional expectations of female behaviour. Until now, no-one has uncovered the real story behind the colourful legend. Speaker, Rose Ellis will share a fascinating glimpse into a dark side of Australia's history.

Entry is **FREE** but donations gratefully accepted. Refreshments provided. Bring a friend!

GOOD BETTY LEGACY: Elizabeth (Bet) Otton - Caretaker Extraordinaire



Miss Elizabeth (Bet) Otton, a St George resident from the 1950s and a member of the St George Historical Society Inc from 1968, was and is now *"best remembered as a Curator at Lydham Hall, a position she occupied from December 1974 for more than twenty years."*

Born as Elizabeth to a pastoralist family in the Bega Valley Region of NSW, she was a descendant of an English convict on her father side and had Scottish ancestry on her mother's side. The pioneering Ottons set up a large dairy farm that became well known beyond their own Ottonville estate. The eight-bedroom house which still stands on the top of the hill and formerly overlooked thousands of acres, was to become home to the large Otton family, which eventually numbered some fifteen children. Bet's father, *"Frank A., the fifth son of Mr Henry Otton of Ottonville, married Miss Esther Mary Jardine of Nitlom, Cooma," in 1911*. They had two girls, Bet and Janet. Janet had two children. One of them, Margaret Wood (nee Gould), is a member of the St George Historical Society, and she generously shared the story of her beloved Aunty Bet.

Frank Otton, the father of Janet and Bet, died in 1942. The girls' mother, Esther, sold the farm *"as there were only women left on the farm,"* and moved to Cooma finding employment as a nurse in Leura Hospital. A few years later, Esther and the girls reunited with the rest of her family in Sydney, where Bet took up a job as a nanny with the Mashmans of Bexley, the owners of brickworks in Kingsgrove. She also enjoyed working occasionally, initially in a Rockdale and then a Kogarah news agency. The author must mention that even the current employees of the Kogarah news agency still recall Bet's name.

(Below: Bet Otton at 5; Bet with her niece Margaret Wood; Ottonville.)





A country school education sparked a passion for history and, when she moved to Sydney, Bet became interested in local history, which led her to join the St George Historical Society in 1968. As soon as the purchase of Lydham Hall was concluded, Otton, as one of those people *"who liked to be involved"* joined the Ladies' Auxiliary Committee to raise the funds for the restoration and set up of the museum. Miss Otton worked along with Ron Rathbone and Arthur Ellis in restoring the house between 1970-1971 and showed herself as a lady for whom *"nothing was too much trouble."*

In 1974, Miss Otton was offered the position of live-in Caretaker. The position included onsite accommodation in one part of the historic premises which had been augmented with a modest extension for her comfort, together with a small wage. Bet resigned from her news agency role, moved into Lydham Hall and from then on was managing the museum full time.

She considered Lydham as her own home, where her days were filled with dusting, scrubbing, polishing, and gardening. As Lydham Hall was becoming known far and wide, Miss Otton *"made herself available to conduct people through the building almost every Saturday, Sunday and Public Holidays,"* and delivered lectures on Lydham Hall to historical societies and numerous charitable organisations. Ron Rathbone, the Hon Secretary of the Lydham Hall Committee, reported on March 15th, 1976: *"Council's appointed Curator Miss Bet Otton's work is a source of unending praise and appreciation."* Lydham Hall continued to flourish under the care of Miss Otton as did Lydham Hall garden.

The mammoth amount of work in the museum was eventually shared by Miss Otton with the then President of the Society, Mrs. Betty Ross. Their deep personal respect for and trust in one another, led to the "Good Bettys" team initiating the cataloguing

of the museum content, and subsequently to further research of the objects. Betty Ross published articles in the Society's Bulletins based on their findings.

Below: Miss Otton; Bet Otton C.1990s (In the hallway at Lydham Hall)



Miss Otton set a high standard for the displays' presentations, which were not only dust free and spotless, but tastefully decorated with flowers. This standard was expected of the Society's volunteers as they came to assist her in presenting the property. An unwritten 'code of conduct' was in place for everybody from child to senior citizen without any exemption. Under Miss Otton's watch, good manners meant not to touch anything without permission or an invitation to do so. Miss Otton on occasion rightfully reprimanded a wayward individual, whether it was a member of the public, a member of the Society or even a family member who may have come to help.

All people were expected to follow instructions and mind their manners. Mrs. Margaret Wood recollected relatives were allowed to come in after school and to spend a night or two in Lydham with their beloved Aunty Bet during the holidays, and specifically for the family's Tuesday tea. The most regular guests were Margaret and her two children, Nathan, and Carly. Margaret vividly recalls these times as joyful and happy. Always smiling,

Aunty Bet regaled them with stories of the house and showed them around. Margaret's favourite parts were the Blue Willow china collection and the Christina Stead stories. Sadly, Margaret along with many of visitors miss the times when the view from the first-floor rear dormer window was more enjoyable than now.

Miss Otton kept the Lydham Hall doors open for over twenty years. One may say that the attendance of the museum was dependant on her presence. The only other reasons for opening cancellations occurred through occasional prolonged petrol

shortages during the 1970s: *"Notwithstanding all efforts, an inevitable decrease in visitor numbers was recorded in the aftermath of petrol strikes which resulted in the cancellations of four group bookings"* and on occasion when the museum was closed through Miss Otton's illness.

In the mid-1990s Bet Otton was hospitalised following a debilitating stroke which required her to sadly vacate Lydham Hall due to a move to a full-time care facility. After Ms Otton's decline in health and in the aftermath of her departure from the Museum in 1994, another Caretaker was briefly appointed but this role was then made redundant.

Along with her husband David and children Nathan and Carly, Mrs. Margaret Wood was pleased to attend the unveiling of a veranda bench seat dedicated to the memory of her aunt. The commemorative plaque states: *"For Her Diligence, Care and Love of Lydham Hall."* The bench was unveiled on February 18, 2001, during the 30th Anniversary of the opening of Lydham Hall to the public."

Nowadays, her niece Margaret has joined the team of dedicated volunteers in helping out during working bees and Open Days.

Miss Otton enjoying the rose beds in the Lydham Hall back garden.



Article by Olga Sedneva, 2024.

(Edited by T. Workman. The original piece titled "Good Betty Legacy" is a chapter of "The history of SGHS Inc and its Museum," which was entered to 2024 Ron Rathbone local history competition. The original can be viewed and read in full in Rockdale Library).

RAFFLE PRIZE WINNERS

Our latest raffle prize winners are Skye from Penshurst who won a bottle of sparkling in March and Brandan from Banksia who won the delicious Easter Simnel Cake. Congratulations to you both and thank you so much for supporting our fundraising efforts.



ST GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY COMMITTEE

The St George Historical Society is led by a Committee, which is chaired by the President. The role of the Committee is to manage the Society's business as per the Constitution.

Nominations for all Committee positions were called prior to the Annual General Meeting and elected at the meeting in July 2024. The Executive and General Committee meets on the 2nd Tuesday night of every month.

The Executive Committee:

President - Wesley Fairhall
Vice President - Laurel Horton
Secretary - Laurice Bondfield
Treasurer - Barry Johnson
Public Officer - Robert McGarn
Curator/Librarian - Tina Workman
Research Officer - Barry Johnson
Publicity Officer - Anne Field
Newsletter Editor - Tina Workman

The General Committee:

Michael Drew, Brendan Giles, Diana Smith, Garry Stokes

The Lydham Hall Advisory Committee:

Laurice Bondfield, Wesley Fairhall, Tina Workman with Anne Field as supplementary. This Committee meets with Council staff and Councillors every 3 months.

2025 RON RATHBONE LOCAL HISTORY COMPETITION

Submissions are open again for this worthwhile history prize. You do not have to be a published author to enter - all entries, large and small are considered. The prize is \$5,000 for adults and \$2,000 for school students.

ENTRIES CLOSE **THURSDAY 17th JULY 2025**. For more information, [click here](#)

2025 Ron Rathbone Local History Competition

Bayside Council invites high school students and adults to participate in the Ron Rathbone Local History Competition.

A competition for works of original research on any aspect of the history of the Bayside Local Government Area.

Optional theme:

Role of women in war during WWI and/or WWII within the Bayside Council LGA.

Open Category

Prize Pool \$7,000
\$5,000 for the Winner

High School Category

Prize Pool \$2,000



COULD YOU BE OUR NEXT GUEST SPEAKER?

Have you researched your family history or entered the Ron Rathbone Local History Competition? If you enjoy sharing stories from our past and raising awareness about the local history of the St George District, you can present to a local community group. You'll choose the topic. It could be genealogy, railways, churches, or Victorian-era homes in your suburb.

Reply to this newsletter to join our [Guest Speaker program](#). We'll help prepare your talk and support you with all the details.

DONATIONS TO MUSEUMS - A WORTHWHILE GIFT

Do you have anything at home (or in the garage!) that belongs in a museum?

We are currently searching for every day objects for our kitchen. These are the things that might be hiding in back of cupboards, sheds and garages because they are worth so little to you but tell great stories when placed in a museum. Jars, tins, potions, medicines, soaps, flour sacks etc.

If you have something with a history that you would like to donate, please get in touch.



RESTORATION FUND DONATIONS

CORPORATE MEMBERSHIP

St George Historical Society Incorporated

PO Box A89 Arncliffe NSW 2205

www.stgeorgehistsoc.org.au

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