

"SOME EARLY HISTORY OF THE ST. GEORGE AREA"

by Phillip Geeves,

Councillor R.A.H.S.

Note: following the above address last June, a number of members asked that a precis of the talk be printed. owing to the unavoidable absence of the Editor in New Zealand in June/July, and again in Aug./Sept., this has unfortunately. been delayed..

This talk was very much enjoyed by all members; and, as the St. George district is not only adjacent to this shire, but also had early connections with it, it is all the more interesting.

The original St. George district was bounded by Botany Bay to the east, by Cook's River to the west, and by George's River to the south. St. George district shares with Sutherland Shire in having the honour of the first contact by Capt. James Cook, when he sailed into Botany Bay and then landed at Kurnell.

Cook's River was named after Capt. Cook; George's River was named after George III, who had been responsible for inaugurating the trip of the "Endeavour" to Tahiti to observe the transit of Venus: and the Admiralty had given Cook secret orders to look afterwards for the "southern lands" -- these secret orders of Cook's were not published by the Admiralty, London, until 1928.

The western coast of Australia was already known to the Dutch, but nothing was Down of the eastern coastline.' After sailing from Tahiti and discovering this eastern coastline, Cook tried to get ashore at several places, including Wollongong, but the strong surf prevented this; and he sailed north until he reached a narrow-entranced bay; this. he first named Stingray Harbour, then Botanist Bay, but as the latter name was not euphonious, he changed it to Botany Bay.

The landing at Botany Bay was principally for watering and wed; but his two botanists, Banks and Solander, were delighted with the variation of unknown plants; and on their return to England, it was the writings of Banks and Solander which made Botany Bay so famous. When a new location for transportation was required, Banks' descriptions of Botany Bay solved the problem. Banks, who was Squire of Revesby, was thereafter regarded as a general authority on all information concerning Botany Bay; and he was even consulted when it came to recommending a suitable man for the Governorship of the convict settlement. Capt. Arthur Phillip was recommended for this, through a Mr. George Rose, who was a near neighbour of Phillip -- hence Rose Hill and Rose Bay both commemorate Phillip's neighbour.

In passing, it is of interest to note that Capt. Arthur Phillip's father was a German; and based on this, the Nazis, during the past war, stated that Australia should rightfully be a German colony as it had been discovered by a German!

A few land grants were made in the St. George area from 1804, members of the NSW Corps being heavily involved. Hannah Laycock, wife of Capt. Thos. Laycock son. received 500 acres -- he became mental from sunstroke; and his son, William, received land nearby. The Laycock land was across the Wollie Creek --the stream is still there today, but most of it is encased in concrete. The Laycock farm was named King's Grove, and is one of the few original names retained in this locality.

Capt. John Townsen, another NSW Corps member, was given three separate grants totalling about 1668 acres, one being known as Townsen's Bay, now Kogarah Bay. Here Capt. Townsen built a small cottage called "The Retreat", the only ingress being through the district of Canterbury, the aptly-named farm of the Rev. Richard Johnson of the First Fleet. A branch road was made from Liverpool, to pass through Banks Town -- this town site was not built upon for nearly 100 years later, although there was a settlement formed by Irish convicts, known as Irish Town, where the Hume Highway now is.

Capt. Townson resigned from the NSW Corps and settled on his grant, and was later joined by his brother Robert, from England. Robert was a brilliant scholar -- probably the most brilliant mind in the young colony. Dr. Rbt. Townsen received a large grant in the present-day area of Oatley/Mortdale, but he did not succeed as a farmer; nor did he get on with Governor Bligh; and during the Interregnum (when the NSW Corps governed the colony) various difficulties developed over the land. and they ultimately sold after much trouble regarding title.

There were immense quantities of age-old timber – first class hardwood --in the locality; and for the next 50 years it provided the best wood available for Sydney, the industry being concentrated on the George's River at Shipwright's Bay, because of water transport to Sydney.

Another early settler was John Chandler, who arrived in the early 1820s when NSW was beginning to prosper after Macquarie's administration. He brought with him £3000, and was given 1200 acres of land, plus convict servants. The estate was named Bexley, and covered most of Bexley North, taking in the railway station areas of Rockdale. and Kogarah, almost to Banksia; for which he paid 6d per 100 acres quit rent. His address was given as Cook's River.

An ex-convict named Moss who had a farm at the Punch Bowl (so called for the peculiar shape of the land), was constable. at Botany Bay -- although an extremely disreputable character. As Moss' farm was some 3 miles from Chandler's residence (and access to Moss of course difficult, owing to lack of a road), Chandler applied to have one of his ticket-of-leave servants made a special constable; for the district was infested by bushrangers, who stole and killed his cattle; and convict servants robbed his house when he was absent.

Alexander Brodie Spark, attracted by the sylvan beauty of the area around Cook's River, bought land, built a home and named it Tempo House -- for the beauty of the area reminded him of the Vale of Tempe in Greece.. During the 1840 depression, he lost much of his investments, and was compelled to subdivide, but he retained Tempo House and its surrounding land. Cook's River formed a natural moat to the property, preventing "Sunday trippers" from invading his privacy. "Old Willy", his boatman, would row Spark's friends across to the house -- the only means of access. In 1843, when the colony had just come through a severe drought, it was realised that something must be done about a permanent water-supply for the Town of Sydney. It was decided to dam Cook's River and to pipe the fresh water into Sydney: and so a wide dam was built across the river opposite Tempo House, thus ruining Sparks' privacy, for "all Sydney", so it seemed, would. drive out to Cook's River and across the dam, to stare at Tempo House and its lovely gardens and setting. However, as a freshwater supply for Sydney, the idea was a failure, as seawater penetrated through the stone-packed dam, making it brackish and unusable. About 25 years later, Thos. Holt decided to dam the George's River in a similar way, and he actually commenced work on the project, but it never progressed, beyond the driving of a number of piles.

The old southern road out of Sydney to serve this area, led past Devine's farm at New Town (= Newtown) to Tempe, and over the Tempe Dam -- to the wilderness beyond. Here, lime-gatherers, timberworkers and charcoal-burners in the area created the demand for the building of a licensed inn, and their wild and drunken parties. created so great a commotion that Sparks started to subdivide the land prior to. selling out, but he died before this was finalised.

Another early settler was one Reuben Hannan, an ex-convict who, after taking up land in the district, proved himself so good a settler that Macquarie recommended to the Colonial Secretary that Hannan's family be allowed to join him at Government expense. Hannan was later made Superintendent of Government Brickmakers, and in this connection his workers supplied most of the bricks for Macquarie's Sydney building schemes. There are still members of the Hannan family living in the area today. Reuben Hannan came from Yorkshire, and he named his farm Arncliffe after his birthplace: he is also said to have named another locality Wincanton -- now called Bardwell Park, this being named after an early settler in that district. (Sir Thos. Mitchell, Surveyor-General, strongly disapproved of Thos. Bardwell, and would not allow the name).

To summarise St. George District names:

The Townsen brothers are remembered only by the name Townsen Av., near George's River Bridge (after leaving the St. George district, Dr. Robert Townsen settled at Campbelltown, where he built Varroville, and is buried at St. John's, Parramatta; John Townsen was buried in the old burial ground at Sydney).

Mrs. Hannah Laycock: her grant of "King's Grove" is now Kingsgrove.

Alex. Brodie Spark: the suburb of Tempe

Sir Jos. Banks: Banksia, Bankstown, Banksmeadow, Revesby.

(continued over)

(St. George District names -- contd.):

Reuben Hannan: the suburb of Arncliffe  
Capt. Jas. Cook: Cock's River: George's River: Botany Bay: Point Solander  
Mrs. Yeoman Geeves: (nee Mary Ann Jordan, grandmother of Mr. P. Geeves) Rockdale.

"Great Australia." :a series of interesting booklets: Oxford University Press, Melbourne: published 1964: 55 cents each: approx. 30 pages: illustrated. There are 32 titles in all, ranging from Capt. Arthur Phillip to Mr. Essington Lewis. Early historical figures covered.-- Governors Phillip, King, Macquarie, Bourke: Francis Greenway, Caroline Chisholm, Mary Gilmore. Each is written by an acknowledged authority, giving a brief but interesting "thumbnail" description. These copies were from Graham's Bookshop, Martin Place.

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Information Wanted re Old Shire Buildings etc.: an appeal in the June Bulletin has resulted in the discovery, of one and possibly two) unknown pioneer homes.

As well, the Bulletin Editor has been told of a "convict grave" (such is the local name for the plot) in the Menai district -- the exact location has yet to be seen. Mr. Wm. S. Kalf, of Illawong (of Kalf & Van Etten Pty. Ltd., Builders), has written me about his home "Cranbrook" (bought 1959), which he states was built in 1888 by Mr. Rbt. Fowler, who at that time was managing director of R. Fowler Ltd., Pottery Works -- hence the nave Fowler Road. Mr. Kalf has restored the old home to maintain its original historic atmosphere. He has also advised me of the probable existence of an earlier-period stone cottage (new forming part of a newer and larger building); and I hope to discover further details at a later date. Mr. Kalf is also anxious to obtain further historical data concerning his home and also the surrounding area, and this will be supplied to him, as far as possible.

Mr. P. Geeves has kindly made available to me the history of "Heathcote Hall", a two-storey stone mansion built about 1886 at Heathcote I have been vaguely told of "an old stone blockhouse" in the vicinity of either Turriel Bay or southern Yowie Bay-- it could by now have been bulldozed by "developers". Can any member supply any information?

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Methodism in the Shire: As Castlereagh Methodists are to celebrate their 150th anniversary in Oct. (see. p. 4) it is of interest to note that -- as far as can be ascertained at present Methodism appears to have been the only practical religious movement in the sparsely settled areas between George's River and Wollongong from 1846 (the first Census) to about 1900. Settlement at the "Five Islands" (Wollongong) had commenced by about 1822. Methodism had been a strong minority force since the beginnings of settlement, especially so in the Hawkesbury area. It is known that Methodism had a following in the Wollongong and Helensburgh districts about the 1880s, if not earlier; it is also known that there were small groups in isolated settlements -- "Waterfall was once very strong", is an early Methodist record, unfortunately with no date: Heathcote was another early area --and this may have been the earliest organised, for there is a record that land was bought in the "Parish of Heathcote" in 1900, for a chapel, this indicating that there must have been a fairly strong following to enable this purchase. All information prior to 1900 is very sketchy; but various references (undated) refer to local or itinerant laymen "preachers".

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Society of Australian Genealogists: I have been asked by several members for information about this Society: its address is: History House, 8 Young St., Sydney: 'phone 27-8902. It is primarily a Research Society, concerned with tracing the descent of members and others who are interested in the history of their ancestors; and also the ancestral background of persons (convict or free). connected with the history of Australia -- and of course New South Wales in particular.

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BEYOND SYDNEY TOWN:

Lansdowne Bridge, over Prospect Creek near Liverpool, was designed by David Lennox, and was officially opened 26/1/1836 by Governor Bourke. It is the second oldest stone bridge on the Australian Mainland. Both through heavy usage by modern traffic and the effects of time, the old bridge is in urgent need of repair. This work is to be carried out by the Dept. of Main Roads, and they have called in Mr. Morton Herman; a Sydney architect and member of the Architectural Advisory Panel of the National Trust. The D.M.R. have thus taken care that the historic old bridge will be renovated as carefully and sympathetically as possible. When all repairs are completed, the whole of the stonework will be permanently treated with a silicone preservative.

-- National Trust Bulletin, Sept. 1967.

Castlereagh Methodist Church will celebrate its 150th anniversary on Saturday, October 14, with a service commencing at 2.0 p.m. Members of Historical Societies and National Trust are invited to attend. The first Methodist Church in Australia was erected at Castlereagh in 1817 -- a slab building. The present brick church was built in 1847, and is now being restored,

"Parramatta Foundation Week" 1967, will be held from Oct. 28 to Nov. 4, to celebrate the 179th birthday of this early settlement. Details of varied events may be obtained by contacting either the National Trust (phone 25-5344) or the P'matta City Council offices (phone 635-9122).

Shire Roads' Historical Associations:

Woollooware Road North & "Connell's Canal": the first "road" put down in the Shire was an "access road" in 1842; from the west shore of Botany Bay, across the low swampy land adjoining, to approximately the present site of Burraneer Bay Rd.; but of course was little more than a rough bullock track. John Connell (son of the first John Connell) was then working the big timber which covered most of the Shire 130 years ago. To provide access for his timber, he cut a canal from the-water's edge to the foot of the Woollooware track about ½mile long --- the .... canal was about 20 ft. wide and at ugh tide about 4 ft. deep, sufficient to allow the timber to be floated.-out into the George's River, where it was probably rafted across to Rocky Point Rd. and so transported by bullock dray to Sydney; or by coastal ships sailing through Botany Bay Heads. Connell also constructed here a sawpit and a rough wharf, the logs being crosscut in the pit before shipping. After the Holt takeover of most of Connell's land, Holt leased out these timber concessions until about 1880. After this, the canal site became a popular rendezvous for Botany Bay fishermen, who used the Woollooware Rd. as a kind of "portage" to enable them to cross over to Gunnamatta and Port Hacking River to fish, Connell's canal was for many years affectionately known as "The Drain". Until about the end of World War 2 the remains of the old canal could still be seen, as also the slide-down to the canal for the timber. About 15 years ago the Cronulla Golf Club took over much of this swampy area to reclaim for extensions; and with the construction of the Captain Cook Drive, most of this old site has gone. "Connell's Canal", "Holt's Fence" enclosing Weeney. Bay, "Holt's Bridge" and his Gwawley Bay oyster canals; have now passed into local history -- and the marine suburb of Sylvania Waters is covering Holt's unsuccessful oyster-farm.

Bottle Forest Road, Heathcote: this is the old name (i.e., Bottle Forest) for Heathcote. Sir Thomas Mitchell recorded that, when exploring the forest around the Heathcote area bout 1840, he was amazed to discover a bottle growing out of a tree; and the only conclusive he could come to was that Asst. Surveyor Rbt. Dixon and his party had thrown away the bottle when kangaroo-hunting sometime in 1827, when Dixon was surveying the coastal and Port Hacking areas.

Dolan's Bay Road & Dolan's Bay: named after Patrick Dolan; who purchased approximately 286 acres on January 17, 1856.

Connell's Road, Burraneer Bay/Caringbah area: part of the land bought by John Connell 2nd, at the first Crown Land sales in January 1856.

Kurnell Road, Cronulla: "Kurnell" is said to be an aboriginal corruption of "Connell" -- named after the Connell family.

Laycock Av., South Cronulla: named after the family of John Connell Laycock, who was the son of Thos. and Margaret Laycock. This was originally Laycock land.

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## NOTES ON CONVICT SETTLEMENT NORFOLK ISLAND.

By ... M. Hutton Neve

In 1785 a group of speculators approached the East India Company for permission to establish a settlement on Norfolk Island, where rope and other cordage could be manufactured from N.Z. flax; and at the same time it was proposed that the Island serve as a general trading centre for the South Pacific. However, as the East India Co. held monopoly rights generally in the whole South Pacific area, and particularly so in the China Seas, powerful interests in London (connected with Company) refused the application.

In the Instructions issued to Captain Phillip --following the decision to ship convicts to "Botany Bay" -- Norfolk Island was to be occupied and settled as soon as possible. A number of convicts, both male and female, were chosen for this settlement; and Phillip particularly recommended to the convict women that they choose husbands from amongst the accompanying transported males,

By the end of 1788 there were over seventy convict men and 'women on the Island, with several children. It was hoped to grow extra food there, to augment the mainland colony rations; but this did not work out. Trouble amongst the convicts, sickness and disease, all mitigated against the early maturity of this plan. Further troops were sent to the Island, together with more convicts: and a more strict discipline was imposed. by October 1792 there were 737 men, women and children on the Island, both convicts and troops.

By 1798 conditions on the Island generally were much better than on the mainland; the soil was fertile, and the convict population more easily controlled. Governor King was particularly interested in the welfare of the convict-born children (who were "born free"), and by 1796 there were three charity schools -- at one of which female orphans were supported by fines imposed for breaches of the peace, as well as by private subscriptions. Land grants were made to industrious and well-behaved convicts to encourage them to farm.

At this time, Norfolk... Island served a threefold purpose; as a place to which certain convicts were sent from Sydney to serve their original sentences; as a settlement for ex-convict farmers and labourers; and as a gaol for convicts who had committed further offences after landing at "Botany Bay" -- as the whole mainland settlement was called for some years,

After several years of settlement, the Irish convict element mutinied --- at about the same time as Irish convicts mutinied on the mainland. The authorities decided to abandon the Island as a general settlement in 1803: all population being transferred to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). It was not until 1825 that the Island was re-occupied, and then only as a penal settlement. Many of these convict settlers were decent, hard-working types, and they were granted land in the vicinity of the Dement River, where the new settlement was named "New Norfolk" in memory of their former homes,

In 1840 convict transportation ceased as far as the mainland was concerned, but transportation to Norfolk Island and Van Diemen's Land continued until 1855, Norfolk Island remained a dependency of N.S.W. from 1788 until taken over by the Commonwealth in 1914

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### ARRIVAL OF THE FIRST FLEET.

The first transportation Fleet of convicts left England on May 13 1787, under command of Captain Phillip, on the Sirius, with the small tender the Supply; the "advance party", as it were; arrived at Botany Bay on January 18, 1788, and by the 20th the whole Fleet was at anchor. The Fleet comprised the transports Alexander, Charlotte, Friendship, Lady Penrhyn, Prince of Wales, Scarborough.

The actual number of convicts in this First Fleet varies slightly according to various sources; between 700 and 800 is the general estimate --probably 770 to 780; and the number of convicts' children varies from 5 to 17. The total cost was estimated at approximately £18,000 -- this covered the hire of ships to serve as transports, together with crews; food, tools, clothing, etc.; and the establishment of buildings for the marines, soldiers and civilians after landing. Canvas, for tents for the convicts, was bought cheaply at second-hand prices -- and on landing much of it was found to be either rotten or not proof against heavy rain.

After the cessation of transportation to the "New World", following the American Revolution and Declaration of Independence, other sites had been considered for continued transportation. In 1778 Sir Joseph Banks suggested Botany Bay in New Holland -- then recently discovered by Captain Cook --stating the land was remote, fertile, and inhabited by few and inoffensive natives. Phillip had his doubts about Botany Bay from the first, and his initial sight of it quickly convinced him that it was impossible as a settlement, being low-lying and infertile and generally unsuitable. "There was a small run of water there, but it appeared to be only a drain from a marsh", Phillip reported, (Cook's River originally flowed through long and wide stretches of low-lying and swampy land to enter Botany Bay). Phillip thereupon took a whaleboat crew to explore Port Jackson (noted by Captain Cook but not entered by him); and the First Fleet dropped anchor in Camp Cove on January 26th 1788 -- and so began the historical settlement of this island continent.

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