

# on the street where you live



A HISTORY OF THE STREET NAMES IN THE ST GEORGE AREA

Submitted by

**TINA WORKMAN**

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# introduction

Street names provide a rich source of information into the area that we live in. The street names in the St George district afford us excellent clues about our geography, glimpses into our aspirations and reveal information about people and events in our local history.

In 1980, Ron Rathbone (former Councillor and Mayor for Rockdale Council) published an extensive history of street names in the St George area. His booklet listed every street known at the time and gave a brief description of where the names originated. His booklet was the inspiration for further research in this paper.

Some street names are clearly descriptive. A street with views toward Botany Bay is logically called **Bayview Street** (Arncliffe) and streets running parallel to a railway line might be called **Railway Street**. Some streets were wistfully named after places in England and Scotland such as after a castle called **Segenhoe** (Arncliffe) or a school in England (**Harrow Street** Bexley).

But most of the streets in the St George area are named after people.

Some of these people were Royalty. Bexley in particular has a fondness for royals with street names such as **Albert Street**, **Regent Street** and **Queen Victoria Street**. Others were named after Lords and Parliamentarians (**Gladstone Street** and **Carrington Street** in Bexley or **Lennox Street** and **Richmond Street** in Rockdale).

Many were named after local councillors and mayors. And a large number were named after people associated with the investment and real estate companies who were responsible for the subdivisions.

It was only in the early 1920's that street signs were installed in the district. A newspaper at the time reported that *"Every suburban policeman and shop keeper has been asked the question: "What is the number of this street, please?" The Interrogator usually goes on to explain that he or she has been walking around for some time looking for a certain street, but owing to the absence of name plates has*

*been unable to find it.”(1).* And so the council agreed to fix name plates to the electric light poles so they would also be visible at night.

Over the decades, some street names have changed for various reasons despite objections by locals and alderman. A large number of these changes were made in the 1920s and 1930s. Names were being used repetitively across suburbs within the council which caused much confusion and council sought to streamline the names.

German names were removed after the war and replaced with more patriotic names. And some street names caused controversy – for example, there were indignant calls to change the name of **Oakura Street** Rockdale because it was thought to be a Japanese name at time when the Japanese were our enemies. But common sense prevailed when it came to light that it was actually a Maori word for ‘a flashing red cloak’. Changes to street names caused many council debates and arguments, with the Mayor in 1924 exclaiming during a meeting *“These changes cause more confusion than they do good”*(2)

**West Botany Street** was originally the common sounding Muddy Creek Road. In 1937, this was changed *“...as it is not now in harmony with progress in the district.”* At the time, Alderman Mottershead cheekily suggested *“...perhaps it would be a good idea to get rid of some of the mud first.”* (3)

**Wollongong Road** was one of the first roads in the district. Originally surveyed by Thomas Mitchell, the Surveyor General for NSW, and called Mitchells Road to the Illawarra, then shortened to Illawarra Road and eventually changed to **Wollongong Road**. The road was the first to connect the city of Sydney to the district, via what is now Marrickville.

(1) *The Sun* (Sydney, NSW : 1910 - 1954) **Saturday 14 April 1923** p 6 Article  
(2) *The Propeller* (Hurstville, NSW : 1911 - 1954) **Friday 3 October 1924** p 2 Article  
(3) *The St George Call* (Kogarah, NSW : 1904 - 1957) **Friday 7 May 1937** p 6 Article

**The Princes Highway** was called **Rocky Point Road** until the name was changed with the visit in 1920 of the Prince of Wales, who later became King Edward VIII. Later, in 1936, it was suggested that **Rocky Point Road** be changed to Rockdale Road as the road had now been fixed and was no longer rocky. This suggestion was unsuccessful.

**Forest Road** was once a narrow, winding dirt track that was used to haul lumber from the great forests that covered the area. The track went through the land of early landowner and timber merchant, Michael Gannon, and it was known as **Gannons Forest Road**. The track followed a high ridge and **Forest Road** at Arncliffe is still the highest point in the district.

This history focuses on the 4 suburbs sitting atop the highest peaks along Forest Road – the suburbs of Arncliffe, Banksia, Bexley and Rockdale. It is by no means exhaustive research into the history of names in the district, but provides a glimpse into some of the more interesting street names in each of these suburbs.



*1882 sketch of Forest Road, Arncliffe. With views towards Botany Bay.  
Photo: Bayside Libraries.*

# arncliffe

Some of the earliest grants of lands in the St George District were given out in Arncliffe. One of those parcels was given to William Packer, a Sergeant who arrived on the Second Fleet in 1790 and married a convict named Sarah Baxter. In 1806 he was granted 100 acres south of the Cooks River. By 1815, his land comprised most of the suburb we now know as Arncliffe.

However, the first settler in Arncliffe was David Hannam. David was the son of convict Reuben Hannam who, by 1833, owned 320 acres of land bounded by the Cooks River, Wollie Creek and what is now Arncliffe Railway Station. Reuben gave 60 acres to his newly married son, David, who set up a house and a farm.

In 1840, another early settler, James Pike, sold his land to wool merchant and land speculator, William Hirst. Hirst subdivided the land & registered the subdivision as **'The Village of Arncliffe Estate'**. Hirst was born in Yorkshire close to a pretty town called Arncliffe and it is said that the name was born from this.

In 1856, the following advertisement appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald, for a subdivision sale:

*"Arncliffe has all the characteristics of an English village, being beautifully situated amidst quiet rural scenery, spotted here and there with neat cottages, which charm the eye with their pretty, well trimmed gardens, perfect pictures of competence and content. The soil is good and for the most part very suitable for cultivation while an abundance of water can be procured from Wollie Creek, a tributary of the Cooks River, which flows past the village."* (1)

By 1898, all of the area now known as Arncliffe was in private ownership.

(1) *The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842 - 1954) Saturday 29 November 1856 p 7 Advertising*  
Other information sourced from the following publications:  
Rathbone, R.W. 1997, **A Village Called Arncliffe**,

# athelstane street arncliffe



William George Judd and his family in the driveway of their home, Athelstane.  
Photo: Bayside Libraries.

**Athelstane Street** and Athelstane Public School were named after the grand house named 'Athelstane' that stood on **Wollongong Road** until it was demolished in 1954. 'Athelstane' was built around 1884 on the corner of **Wollongong Rd** and **Dowling St**.

The house had a windbreak of pine trees and orchards, several large gum trees plus a creek that flowed through the orchard (near **Fripp St**) and on to Kim Too's market garden, now Arncliffe Park.

The house was built by William George Judd, who was Mayor of Rockdale twice (1885-1889 & 1898-1900) and a Member of the Legislative Assembly for the seat of Canterbury 1885-1887. Judd also has the distinction of having **Judd Street** Banksia named after him. In his book on Arncliffe, Rathbone suggests "...of all the people

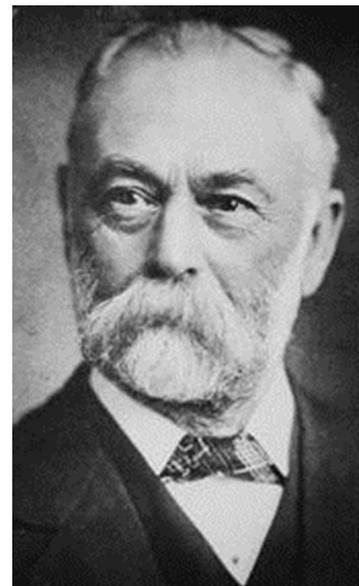
*that settled in Arncliffe at this time, it was Judd who was to have the greatest impact on the district." (1)*

Between 1885 and 1889, Judd was instrumental in the growth of the district. He lobbied for the swampy mud flats at the mouth of the Cooks River (before it was dammed and redirected) to be filled, in order for the area to be developed for industrial estates, shops and residences. This is the area along the **Princes Highway** at Rockdale. And he erected the new council chambers and town hall built on the corner of the **Princes Highway** and **Goodes Street**, now **Bestic Street**. He lobbied for the first telegraph and telephone facilities in the area (at Arncliffe Post Office). And in 1888, he was involved in creating a new ward on the south side of Bay Street to be called the Rockdale Municipality.

In 1920 he subdivided his property and created **Athelstane Ave** and **Horsell Street**.

Judd died in 1929. His wife, Eleanor, lived at Athelstane until her death in 1944. After she died, the Department of Education began negotiations with the family to buy the two & a half acres of land the house stood on.

At the time, William Percy Judd (son of William George) and his wife lived in the house and *they "...were adamant that they wished to remain there during their lifetimes. Failure to come to an agreement with the Judds led the Department to resume the property...in 1949."* (2) and the new school opened in 1952.



In 1950, the Rockdale Town Clerk wrote to the Department of Education requesting that the trees, flora and natural beauty of the site be preserved. But the house was demolished in 1954.

The foundations of the house were used as rubble to fill in an unused well.

(1) Rathbone R.W. **A Village Called Arncliffe 1997**, p. 49

(2) Rathbone R.W. **A Village Called Arncliffe 1997**, p. 150



Photograph of Wollongong Road showing Athelstane shielded by trees (centre, left hand side).  
Photo: Bayside Libraries.

Most of the houses in **Athelstane Street** were built after the WW1 and a handful were built specifically to accommodate war widows. The war widow houses were won by state ballot and built by volunteers. One of those war widows was a Mrs Compton who, in 1919, moved into her 4 room cottage built with her 4 children on a block of land given for the purpose by the late Mr W Monte.

The handover was done on a Saturday afternoon and the house was opened by the Lord Mayor Richard. *"There was an impressive silence as Mrs. Compton, a tall figure in black, with handsome features, her hair turning grey, stepped out of the crowd on the balcony, and faced the gathering, which stretched out before her. Two of her daintily-dressed girls crept up behind her, and cast nervous glances at their mother, who had been greeted with warm applause. Mrs. Compton was overwhelmed by the demonstration, and the task of acknowledging the gift devolved upon the chairman."* (1). Mrs Compton paid only 5 shillings per week which would eventually pay off (without interest) the principal amount owing - £275.

(1) *The Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW : 1842 - 1954) **Monday 28 July 1919** p 9 Article

# esdaile place, arncliffe



View of Esdaile Place looking south.  
Photo: Bayside Libraries.

**Esdaile Place** is a short, shady paved street running parallel to **Forest Road**. The street is named after the family of Edward William Esdaile, a well known and extremely successful instrument maker who migrated to Australia as a 25 year old in 1883 "...bringing with him a knowledge and experience of instrument making that had been handed on to him by his father. In that year he founded the business of E. Esdaile and Sons in Hunter Street, City." (1).

Soon after his arrival, he settled in a modest weatherboard cottage in Gordon Street Arncliffe (now **Farrar Street**). In 1897, he moved the family to the larger, newly built house also in Farrar Street called 'Berowra'. The original house (3 Farrar Street) is still standing, although it has been rendered and many of the original details, such as the distinct turret, have been removed.

(1) Rathbone R.W. *A Village Called Arncliffe* 1997, p. 91

In 1901, he again moved his family to an address (that is now 107 **Forest Road**) into a grander house called 'The Towers', which had been originally built by Thomas Lawless in 1890. Towers Street (Arncliffe) and Towers Place were both named after the house when the estate was subdivided.

In 1907, Esdaile had another house built on the estate for his eldest son, also called Edward. This house, 'Walsworth', was built on the rocky outcrop at the end of the street that is now **Towers Place** and still stands today.

As well as their own family houses, other houses in the area were built or bought by Esdaile for investment and speculative purposes. Some of these houses are still standing - including the 2 heritage listed sandstone cottages at 146 and 148 **Wollongong Road**, a large Federation House at 100 **Station Street** and a smaller, modest semi at 111 **Station Street**. Remarkable, *Berowra*, *Walsworth* and *The Towers* are still standing today although, by the 1920's, 'The Towers' had been broken up into flats. It can still be seen from **Forest Road** behind a newer block of units built in the 1970's which obscure the house from the street. Parts of the original sandstone fence, wrought iron balustrades and gates can still be seen.



*Berowra (left) and Walsworth (right).*  
Photos: Bayside Libraries.

The Towers sits on one of the most elevated sections of **Forest Road** and the position afforded the family magnificent views, particularly to the East and to the West.

Esdaile and his eldest son (also called Edward) were keen amateur photographers and many historical photographs of the district that survive today, were taken from the gardens, turreted walkways and roof rotundas of their houses, all of which had

spectacular views of the district. Some of these photos form part of 'The Esdaile Collection' held by Rockdale Library.



*View from the turreted walkway of The Towers looking south east. Forest Road can be seen in the centre. Photo: Bayside Libraries.*



*The Towers  
Photo: Bayside Libraries*

The family moved away from Arncliffe in 1916 and, when Esdaile died in 1947, 'The Towers' was passed to Edward Jnr. By 1932, the land had been subdivided & the house converted into residential flats. It was finally sold in the 1970's.

# banksia



*Rocky Point Road (now the Princes Highway) Banksia 1908  
Photo: Bayside Libraries.*

In comparison to other places in the district, the suburb of Banksia was a relatively late developer.

The suburb was part of a much larger parcel of land owned by the Pearce brothers (Simon b.1821, d.1886) and James. This large parcel of land extended from Rockdale right down to Brighton-le-Sands.

Whilst some small pockets of residences appeared in the 1880's, it wasn't until the railway station opened on the 21 October 1906 that the suburb started to become more attractive to people to live here, and development began in earnest.

The name was selected by an eminent resident - the naturalist David Stead. Stead was a marine biologist, conservationist, writer and the father of acclaimed author, Christina Stead. Christina Stead was born in Banksia and later moved with her family to Lydham Hall, Rockdale, now a local museum.

Stead named the suburb after Joseph Banks, the botanist who made the voyage to Australia with James Cook in 1770. In presenting the name to council in a letter, David Stead said : “ *“The name of 'Banksia' in itself is not ineuphonious, and it has*

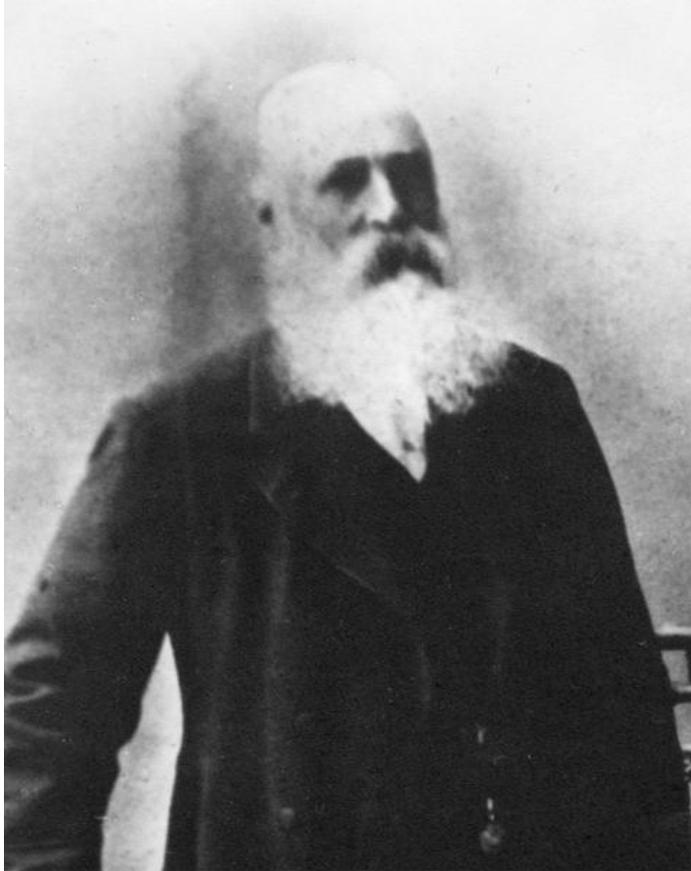
already been rendered pleasant to our cars by its application to the familiar and picturesque tree, often known as 'Native Honeysuckle,' which is so abundant in this district. The latter alone would be sufficient reason, but by honouring ourselves in the use of the name of this brilliant man— Sir Joseph Banks - we assist in keeping alive perpetually historical memories which should never be allowed to sleep." The council unanimously decided to submit this name, together with the following, so that the Commissioners could choose a suitable one:— Bowmer, Hopetoun, Cliffdale, Rosemead, Eddyville, and Rawson. These names have been considered by Commissioners, and they have chosen that of Banksia." (1)



David George Stead in the 1950s (left). Christina Stead in the 1940s (right).  
Photos: The Stead Foundation and The New York Times

(1) The Daily Telegraph (Sydney, NSW : 1883 - 1930) **Wednesday 28 March 1906** p 12 Article

# bowmer street, banksia



John Bowmer  
Photo: Bayside Libraries

This quiet little street in Banksia which runs between **Railway Street** and **Gardiner Avenue** was named after an early settler to the district, John Bowmer (b.1827, d. 1903).

Bowmer was a Rockdale alderman from 1876 to 1887 and he served as Mayor of West Botany (later renamed Rockdale) from 1878 to 1885. He was regarded as a pioneer to the district.

He was born in Lincolnshire, England, in 1827, and married Maria Elizabeth (from Gloucestershire) in 1848. 4 years after their marriage, they

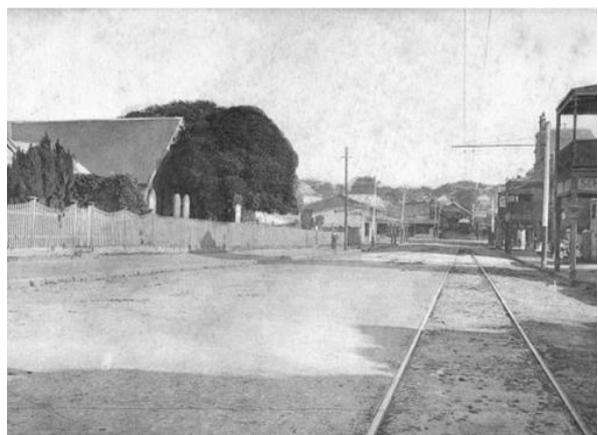
decided to seek their fortune in NSW and Bowmer "spent a few years at gold-mining with varying success" (1).

In 1862 he bought land at Muddy Creek, Cook's River, in what was then known as West Botany and later called Rockdale. At the time, there was little here other than market gardeners and farmers. As well as dabbling in some agricultural pursuits, Bowmer was a lay preacher for the Methodist Church "and but for his services the people of the district would during a great part of the time, owing to the scarcity of ministers, have been almost entirely without religious ministrations." (2).

(1) *The Methodist* (Sydney, NSW : 1892 - 1954) **Saturday 2 January 1904** p 4 Article

(2) *The Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW : 1842 - 1954) **Wednesday 16 December 1903** p 12 Article

In 1875 he was elected an alderman of the West Botany municipality. He was chosen Mayor in 1878, and was re-elected seven consecutive times. He resigned in 1888 only when his health began to decline. His retirement dinner was held at the Brighton Hotel (now demolished) with his colleagues praising him for works to the local community including the opening of Bay Street for Saywells tram line from Rockdale Station to Lady Robinson Beach. He was also chiefly responsible for the establishment of the St George Public Hospital, Rockdale Public School and Scarborough Park. His wife, Maria, planted the first tree at Rockdale Public School at it's opening.(1)



Rockdale Public School circa 1920's (left) and tram line from Rockdale to Brighton-le-Sands  
Photos: Bayside Libraries

In the last year of his life he was said to have *“suffered much from sleeplessness and a general breaking down with much physical and general depression, but his mind was kept in perfect peace...He said, ' All is well,' and so he passed away...”*(2)

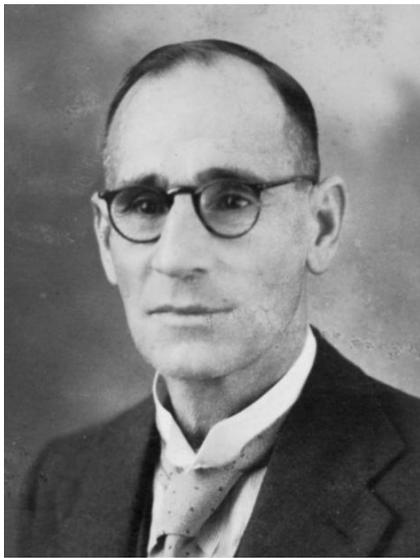
By the time he died, he had left 8 children 49 grandchildren and 6 great grandchildren. Mrs Bowmer went on to live for another 11 years.

(1) *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney, NSW : 1870 - 1907) **Saturday 3 March 1888** p 28 Article  
(2) *The Propeller* (Hurstville, NSW : 1911 - 1954) **Friday 13 May 1932** p 1 Article

# gardiner avenue, banksia

Many of the streets in the area were named after aldermen and mayors.

In Banksia, Gardiner Park and **Gardiner Avenue** were both named after Edward J. Gardiner, who was an Alderman from 1917 until 1950 as well as Mayor of Rockdale for 2 years in 1926 until 1928. He left the municipality a legacy that included tarred roads, new parks and amenities like toilet blocks.



Edward J Gardiner (left) and the entrance of Gardiner Park from Gardiner Avenue.  
Photos: Bayside Libraries

The park (originally called Hopetoun Park and home of the St George Baseball Club) was acquired by council in 1933 and, in 1935, was named in honour of Edward Gardiner to commemorate his 20 years of service to the council.

At the commemoration, a memorial plaque was also erected for William Crossling, *"...a ganger working in the park...(who) was killed by falling rock. He instructed other men to keep clear, making his own investigations of blasting operations, and was crushed to death with a twenty-ton stone."* (1). The date of the commemoration for Gardiner was exactly 2 years to the day of the accident. The memorial to Crossling is still in the park today. Gardiner went on to serve another 15 years after this commemoration.

(1) *The Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW : 1842 - 1954) **Monday 18 November 1935** p 5 Article



Gardiner Park in the 1930s (left) and in the 1950's (right)  
Photos: Bayside Libraries

Although he looks quite mild mannered, newspaper accounts reporting on council meetings show that Gardiner was very vocal about local issues and particularly about trees in the area. The local papers recorded some extremely heated and passionate arguments with fellow aldermen during council meetings.

In 1935, Miss Thistle Harris of the Junior Tree Lovers League, addressed the council about beautifying the area and protecting and planting trees. The address was well received. After this passionate plea from the Tree Lovers League, the next item on the agenda was a letter asking for trees to be heavily lopped in Dolls Point so that the double decker buses were not damaged. Gardiner was enraged and his response was "*...in America, when it became necessary to lop trees, every care was taken to save the beauty of the trees. They did not stand off and slaughter them like they did in St. George.*" (1). Interestingly, Thistle Harris married David Stead in 1951 (she was 49, he 74) who named Banksia and lived at Lydham Hall in Rockdale in the early 1900's.

An example of his colourful language at council meetings can be seen in 1925 when Rockdale Council sought funding to build a toilet block. The funding was rejected on the basis that the land was too valuable and the toilet block would detract from land values of nearby properties. Gardiner's response was "*Why, that piece of land is utterly worthless at the present time, and is no more than a rubbish tip. As to the building, if erected, deteriorating the value of property, there is no property whatever near the site.*" (2)

(1) *The St George Call* (Kogarah, NSW : 1904 - 1957) **Friday 30 August 1935** p 6 Article

(2) *The St George Call* (Kogarah, NSW : 1904 - 1957) **Friday 29 May 1925** p 6 Article

He strongly advocated for having the local roads tarred and for the inclusion of parks in the local area. Gardiner was instrumental in presenting a petition for a park on the corner of **Heathcote Street** Rockdale - now Yambawoora Reserve after the house that still stands today behind the park.

Gardiner lived in a house that he built in 18 **Oakura Street** Rockdale with his wife and children. In 1946 his wife, Mary Estelle, died at the home in Oakura Street and the house still stands in its original condition today.

His son, Douglas Edwards, also left a mark on Rockdale – as an architect who designed the Rockdale Town Hall in the 1940's.



*Rockdale Town Hall prior to the widening of the Princes Highway in the 1960's.  
Photo: Bayside Libraries*

# bexley



*Aerial view of Bexley 1934.  
Photo: Bayside Libraries*

In 1822, James Chandler, “...a wealthy and serious young man...who set up in business at 99 Pitt Street selling cloth and grain and soon became a person of some influence in the colony.” (1) was granted 1,200 acres of land in addition to the 100 acres that he had already bought in the area that we know today as Bexley, Bexley North, Kogarah and most of Rockdale. He called the area Bexley after his place of birth in Kent, England.

Subsequent owners of the land kept the name 'Bexley' but they, like Chandler, had difficulties selling the land. However, in 1839 work commenced on the Cooks River Dam and in 1844 Mitchell's New Line of Road to the Illawarra was completed.

*(1) Rathbone, Ron, A History of Bexley, Forest Press.*

Once the road was in place, the sawyers moved in to provide timber to Sydney. They cleared the forests of the "...magnificent stands of Iron Bark, Blue Gum, Spotted Gum, Red Gum, Bloodwood and Turpentine which grew in unbelievable profusion on both sides of Mitchell's Illawarra Road. While ever there was daylight, the sound of the axe and the saw and the crash of falling trees could be right along the ridge." (1)

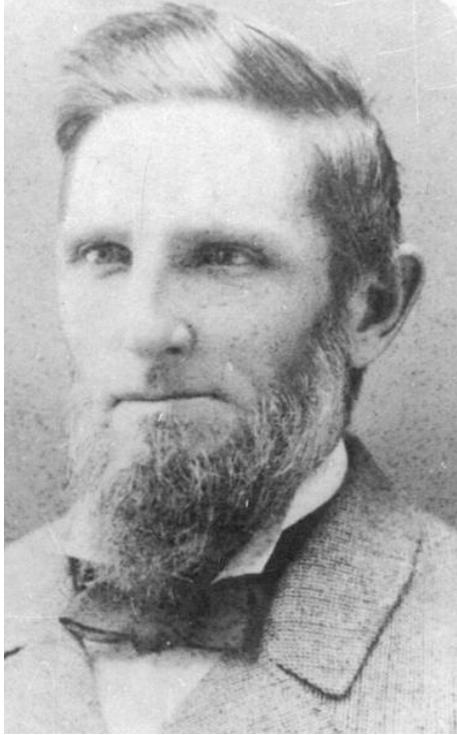
But it wasn't until the late 1850's that the first residents settled in Bexley - Joseph Davis (a butcher) and George Preddey (a convict). Both were successful businessmen who built magnificent houses on their properties. One of those properties, Lydham Hall, the home of Joseph Davis, still stands today and is a local museum.



Forest Road Bexley travelling south in 1907.  
Photo: Bayside Libraries

(1) Rathbone, Ron, *A History of Bexley*, Forest Press.

# preddeys road, bexley



George Preddey.  
Photo: Bayside Libraries

**Preddeys Road** is named after the family of George Preddey – the name had been misspelled and the 'e' had been forgotten at the time of the road construction.

George Preddey was born in 1807 in Bath but arrived in Sydney as a 20 year old convict in 1827. He had been sentenced to 7 years in the penal colony for house breaking. Whilst his start in life wasn't the most promising, he went on to become a successful entrepreneur and business man and a pious law abiding citizen.

In 1836, he married 18 year old Margaret Carey, who had arrived as a free migrant 18 months earlier. They went on to have 13 children.

Once free of his sentence, he tried his hand at numerous occupations and ran a successful hauling company through the 1840's & 1850's. He used his cart to haul furniture, remove night soils, ashes and other "obnoxious" rubbish before moving onto selling and delivering bran, hay and lucerne from his stores on the wharf. His company was successful enough to employ staff and in 1850 he advertised for a "*...a single man, to cut chaff and work about the stores. No drunkard need apply.*" (1)

In 1856 he had a clearing out sale of his stores on the wharf "*...in consequence of his retiring from business.*" (2) and turned his hand to being a timber merchant. The availability of timber from Gannon's Forest influenced him to buy land at Bexley and he set up a saw mill at Summer Hill.

(1) *The Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW : 1842 - 1954) **Tuesday 16 April 1850** p 4 Advertising  
(2) *Empire* (Sydney, NSW : 1850 - 1875) **Friday 3 October 1856** p 8 Advertising

In 1860 he built 'Besborough' for his family in Bexley. The house stood on **Forest Road** between what is now **Besborough Avenue** and **Preddys Road**. The property was self supporting – with cattle, poultry, orchards and vegetable gardens. In 1876, Margaret died at age 58 and George moved to Glebe and the house was occupied by their son George and his wife Annie.



*Besborough.  
Photo: Bayside Libraries*

By 1901, Preddeys estate was the largest, single unsubdivided land in the Municipality of Bexley. In 1910, the government purchased 10 acres on **Stoney Creek Road** from Annie Preddey after lobbying from the Bexley Progress Association for a park. The new park, Bexley Park, was a reserve of land known as Preddey's Paddock that already had 2 cricket pitches. The park was the home of the Bexley District Cricket Club and the St George Baseball Club. The park had swings for children but they could not be used on a Sunday. Likewise, sport was banned on Sundays until 1963 when the ban was lifted. The lawn was kept trim by sheep and by 1932, there were 20 sheep and a ram keeping the park tidy.

# kinsel grove, bexley



*Kinsel Grove in 1959.  
Photo: Bayside Libraries*

**Kinsel Grove** in Bexley is named after the grand house that once stood on the estate at the corner of **Forest Road** and **Stoney Creek Road**.

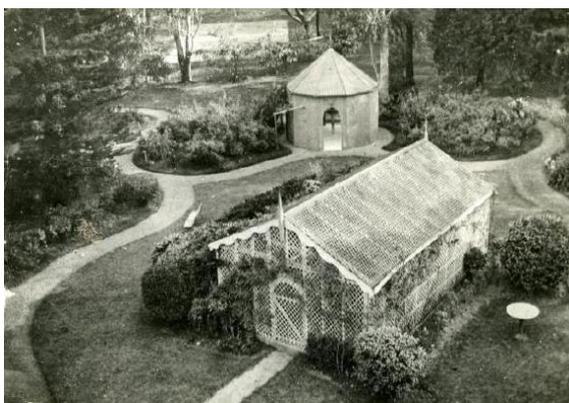
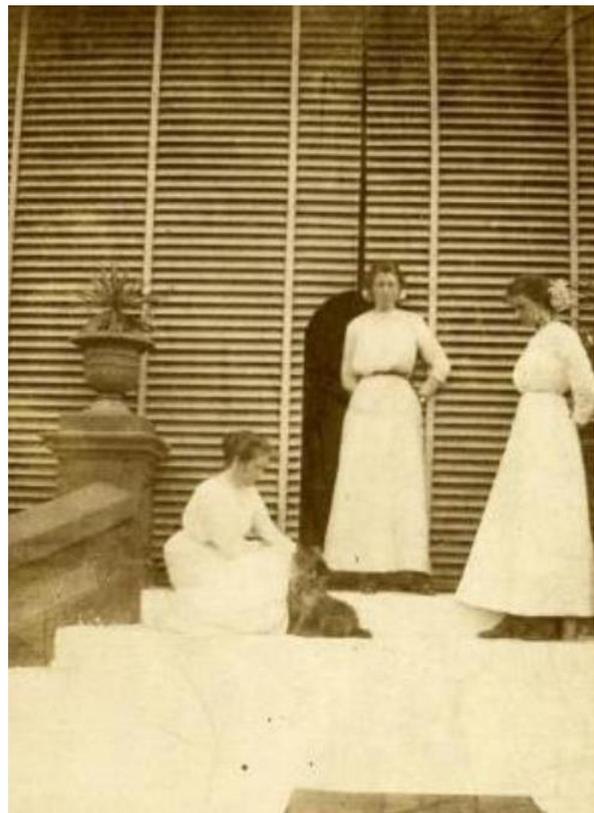
In 1880, Henry Kinsela (b.1846, d.1915) bought 27 acres from the George Preddey estate and built 'Kinsel Grove' for his family – his wife Mary and 9 children (3 of whom died in their infancy). With his two brothers, Kinsela was a principal of Charles Kinsela & Sons, a Funeral Directors firm started in 1830 by his father. After his father's death, he sold his half of the business and retired to his estate to breed horses.

'Kinsel Grove' was a grand, two storey house with magnificent gardens that included a cricket pitch and a private zoo. The property was a stud farm and the grounds included large stables and even a race course. Kinsela was instrumental in the establishment of Bexley Public School, the Christ Church at Bexley and he also financially supported local activities such as providing instruments for the St George District Band. The house, gardens and grounds at 'Kinsel Grove' were often the setting for various local causes and events.

Kinsela died in 'Kinsel Grove' in 1915 and parts of the estate was offered for sale. The advertising noted that this was a valuable piece of land "On the HEIGHTS, overlooking ROCKDALE, and ON THE TRAMLINE (ARNCLIFFE to BEXLEY)...having 108 ft 2 In frontage to STONEY CREEK-ROAD (along which the Tram passes) and 405 ft 7 in to FOREST ROAD...and ADJOINING "KINSEL GROVE," the Residence of Mrs. Henry Kinsela..." (1)

In 1918 Mary Kinsela died and, in the following year, the land was subdivided further and offered for sale with 46 residential allotments, 19 commercial sites and the house (2).

And then, in 1929, the house was offered for sale. Described as having a hall, drawing room, dining room, 9 bedrooms, verandah and balconies all around, the advertisement suggested that it would be "Suitable for conversion into flats, hospital, school, boarding house, etc." (3). Instead it was demolished.



Clockwise from top left – Kinsel Grove, the Kinsela girls on the back verandah at Kinsel Grove and the greenhouse in the gardens.  
Photos: Bayside Libraries

- (1) *The Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW : 1842 - 1954) **Saturday 15 November 1913** p 16 Advertising
- (2) *The Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW : 1842 - 1954) **Saturday 19 April 1919** p 14 Advertising
- (3) *The Propeller* (Hurstville, NSW : 1911 - 1954) **Friday 30 August 1929** p 5 Advertising

# rockdale



The intersection of Bay Street and the Princes Highway looking north.  
Photo: Bayside Libraries

The suburb of Rockdale started life as the White Gum Flats or Frog Hollow. The suburbs to the south were swampy and marshy, and to the west they were forested and woody. White Gum Flats was “carpeted with a light cover of scribbly gums, angophoras, pittosporums and acacias, together with banksias, boronias, flannel flowers and Christmas Bells.” (1) with dense heathland covering the windswept ridges.

The first white landowner was Thomas Holt, the first Treasurer of the Colony of NSW. In 1853, Holt bought the land between what we now know as **Bestic Street** and **Bay Streets**. However, Holt did not live here and the first resident of Rockdale was James Beehag, who settled in Rockdale in 1853. By 1870, 10 families were settled along Muddy Creek Road (now **West Botany Street**).

In 1862, Thomas Morse opened the first general store on Rocky Point Road (now **Princes Highway**) opposite the current Town Hall. Poor roads and swampy marshland meant that progress in the area was slow with a lack of schools and medical help.

(1) Rathbone, Ron. *From White Gum Flats to the Suburb of Rockdale*, 2006, p. 3

The area had a boost when, on the 13 January 1871, a group of landowners successfully applied to create the Municipality of West Botany. This allowed the Municipality to apply for civic funding from the government. However it still did not have a name until the local postmistress intervened.

In 1876, Mrs Mary Ann Geeves was granted a license to run a post office in the municipality. A name for the postal address was needed and Mrs Geeves "*Looking round at the rocky hills and noting how the district rested in a dell or dale she formed the happy combined word Rock-dale and so this name was accepted by the Department.*" (1)

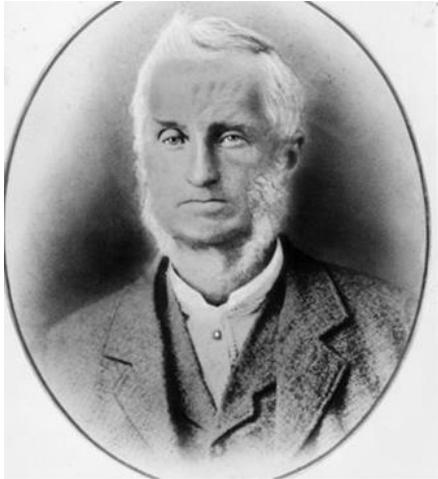
In 1884, Rockdale Station was built in the backyard of Mrs Geeves post office making the area more attractive to land developers and speculators which led to 4 decades of rapid subdivision and the construction of residential blocks.



*The post office in the early 1900s. The existing post office stands in the same location.  
Photo: Bayside Libraries*

(1) *The St George Call (Kogarah, NSW : 1904 - 1957) Friday 11 November 1927 p 2 Article*

# Lydham Avenue, Rockdale



**Lydham Avenue** is named after Lydham Hill, the original name of the estate and the location of the sandstone house which still stands at the crest of the street and is now a museum. The location of the house is the peak of the St George area - the highest point of land between the Cooks River and Georges River.



Joseph & Ellen Davis.  
Photos: Bayside Libraries

The house was built in 1860 by Joseph Davis (b.1827,d. 1889), a successful butcher from Newtown who, a year earlier, had bought 67 acres of land, primarily to fatten his cattle for his butchering business. The real estate advertisement noted that the land was a *"...picturesque locality, commanding perhaps by far the finest prospect which ever this extensive region, so noted for the finest view, can possibly furnish. The prospect combines the delightful expanse of the wide ocean, including the Botany Heads, together with an extensive horizon encircled on all sides by a boundless range of bold woodlands."* (1)

The street was originally called Joseph Street and, in a later subdivision by his wife Ellen, surrounding streets were also named after family members – **Herbert** (St.) and **Frederick** (St.) were sons of Joseph and Ellen, whilst **Clarence** (St.) and **Oswell** (St.) were grandsons.

In 1884, the estate was subdivided by the family and 188 allotments were offered for sale. After his death in January 1889, a further 51 allotments were to be sold including a 2 acre parcel which contained a *"...well known stone cottage, so visibly*

(1) *The Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW : 1842 - 1954) **Thursday 23 June 1859** p 7 Advertising

*elevated...*" which had 4 main rooms, 2 bedrooms, pantry, store room and a verandah all around and was "...furnished throughout in a superior manner." The grounds also had stables, a coach house, servants quarters, a separated kitchen and a laundry. (1) The house sold to Frederick Gibbons, an oyster farmer who owned a grand house nearby on **Wollongong Road** – Dappeto.

Lydham Hill was leased to various tenants until 1907, when Gibbons provided the house rent free to his daughter Ada and her new husband David Stead, and Stead's 5 year old daughter Christina. The house is most well known for its association with David Stead, who was a prominent naturalist, who was responsible for the naming of the suburb of Banksia, and his daughter Christina who became a renowned novelist.

In 1917, Gibbons went bankrupt and the Lydham Hill estate was further subdivided. The house changed hands regularly and, then in 1958, further allotments were sold which caused the demolition of the out buildings such as the stables, coach house and kitchen.

In 1960, the house was bought by Rockdale Council specifically to be used as a local house museum and home for the St George Historical Society.



*Lydham Hall as seen from the back in the 1950's.  
Photo: Bayside Libraries*

(1) *The Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW : 1842 - 1954) **Saturday 10 August 1889** p 15 Advertising

# walz street, rockdale

The cliffs and outcrops of the Rockdale, Arncliffe and Banksia areas provided much of the sandstone that kerbed the new streets of the St George District and provided the foundations and walls for many local houses. This sandstone would most likely have come from one of the many local quarries owned by the Walz family.

Joseph and Johanna Walz arrived in Sydney in 1855 from Germany as a newly married couple escaping the turmoil of Europe. After spending their early years in the Shoalhaven region, they settled in an area called White



*Joseph and Johanna Walz.  
Photo: Bayside Libraries*

Gum Flat (now known as Rockdale) in the late 1850's. The Walz's took up a parcel of land in **Frederick Street** Rockdale and Joseph went on to build many houses and shops in the vicinity. His own residence was a sandstone house on what is now 35 Frederick Street – a block of units in its place.

Staunch Roman Catholics, they generously donated a parcel of land to the church on the corner of **Walz Street** and **Parker Street**, Rockdale, and St Joseph's Church School was opened with much fanfare in 1892. The school was originally conducted by the Sisters of Charity but, by 1912, the Sisters of St Josephs cared for the students. The church building on Walz Street that we see today is the convent that was built for the sisters in 1926.

The Walz's had 12 children, many of whom lived in surrounding streets in houses built their father or siblings.

In 1894, an accident caused the shocking death of one of Joseph's and Johanna's granddaughters. The 4 year old child was sitting in a paddock in **Frederick Street** with some other children whilst her father, Anthony, chopped firewood nearby. Horrifically, "...by some means the axe slipped from his grasp, and flew with tremendous force in the direction of the children, the edge striking Margaret under the right ear" (1). The accident nearly decapitated the child and she died within minutes.



One of the Walz quarries – this on is now Gardiner Park in Banksia  
Photo: Bayside Libraries

One of the Walz's quarries was on the site of what is now Gardiner Park, Banksia. The walls created by the excavation of the sandstone are still discernible in the western and northern walls of the park and along **Wolli Creek Road**.

Joseph died in 1898 aged 72. Johanna lived another 13 years and died in 1911 at aged 80.

(1) *Truth* (Sydney, NSW : 1894 - 1954) **Sunday 7 January 1894** p 5 Article

*on the street where you live*

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