

Windows into Bexley

Part 1: To 1899

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INTRODUCTION

It would be a facile ignorance to say that all there is to Bexley is a chunk of land, 14km south of the CBD, belonging to the City of Rockdale and with a population of almost 20,000. Yet it is an impossibility to describe the history of any suburb in a linear, uncomplicated way. And so it is a necessity to be a bit crafty to present the story of Bexley thoroughly, accurately and clearly.

History isn't a simple walk down Queen Victoria Street. We must take a peek inside the windows (temporarily setting aside morality and respect for privacy) to achieve a more meaningful understanding of what made Bexley what it is today.

Part 1 of this history will follow the development of Bexley through its formation as a suburb and community up until (and including) 1899, on the way meeting things (people, places and events, etc.) that shaped or were shaped by these developments in "windows".

Images may have been edited (e.g. cropped, brightened).

PRE-1770: BEFORE THE EUROPEANS

As we all know, numerous Aboriginal groups lived in the Sydney area before the arrival of British settlers. The traditional custodians of the Botany Bay region (encompassing what is now the City of Rockdale) included the Gweagal and Bidjigal people.

Aboriginals of Southern Sydney

The **Gweagal** clan lived on the southern shores of Botany Bay and their territory included the areas between the Cooks and Georges River. They were the northernmost tribe of the Thawaral people and spoke the Thawaral language. The Gweagal people were known as the "Fire Clan".

The **Bidjigal** clan also lived in the area between Cooks and Georges, though they are believed to also have occupied land in the Hills District of Sydney. It is uncertain whether they are a clan of the Eora or Dharuk people, or their own group with their own language.

Artwork: Aboriginal woman fishing
(<http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au>)

The Aboriginal communities in this area were skilled hunter-fisher-gatherers. They lived along the shores of Botany Bay and the lower reaches of the Cooks and Georges River. Middens along the Georges River where shells, fish bones and other waste products were dumped give evidence of where Aborigines camped for long periods – none lived permanently in Bexley, although hunting parties visited what is now Bardwell Valley and Wolli Creek in search of berries, birds and small mammals for food.

Fish and oysters were available in the Georges River and diverse soils meant that a variety of edible and medicinal plants grew. Due to this abundant food source, the Sydney Aborigines were less nomadic than those of outback Australia.

1770-1822: JAMES COOK

In April 1770, then-Lieutenant James Cook and his HMS *Endeavour* sighted the east coast of Australia and, after several days of mapping, landed in Botany Bay. The Gweagal Aborigines mentioned earlier were the first to make contact with the party on 29 April. However, Cook was not there to learn about the native people (and indeed the meeting was hostile) but to observe and explore. Thus he undoubtedly would have noticed the heavily timbered ridge through what is now Earlwood, Bardwell Valley and Bexley North, though he did not document this in his journal. So began the long period of unimportance associated with this western area, and the nonexistence of Bexley as of yet.

James Cook's First Voyage

James Cook, having been in the Royal Navy for 11 years, was promoted to lieutenant and given command of HMS *Endeavour* in 1766. The expedition set sail from England on 26 August 1768, heading to Tahiti in order to observe the transit of Venus across the Sun. The result of this observation was not as successful as had been hoped – but there was a set of secret instructions that famously yielded much more incredible repercussions.

Cook and his crew were to seek evidence of the *Terra Australis*, a hypothesised southern land balancing the landmass in the Northern Hemisphere. And so, after circumnavigating New Zealand, he sailed the *Endeavour* westward. The rest would be history:

On 19 April 1770 Lieutenant Zachary Hickes sighted land in Victoria, which Cook named Point Hicks after him. Ten days later the crew reached Botany Bay, whose name comes from the extensive scientific documentation of flora and fauna conducted at the site.

And although the British discovery of the east coast of Australia did not solve the problem of the enigmatic “unknown land”, it paved the way to European settlement and ultimately the development of today's Australia and today's Bexley

Artwork: *Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770* (E. Phillips Fox)
(<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au>)

The insignificance of the Bexley area was heightened when in fact the whole Botany Bay area itself fell into unimportance. When Captain Arthur Phillip arrived there with the First Fleet of eleven ships in January 1788, he soon realised that Cook's glowing reports of Botany Bay and Joseph Bank's continued recommendations of it to become the penal colony site were far too romanticised. Insufficient fresh water and swampy foreshores rendered the site unsuitable for settlement, Phillip noted. However, luck was on his side. When he sailed a few kilometres north there was the excellent natural harbour of Port Jackson sitting there in all its glory, waiting to be colonised. And so it was.

For over thirty years (as the Sydney settlement pulled through near starvation in the early years and the chaotic governorship of William Bligh, eventually experiencing undergoing a long-needed period of constructive social and economic development), the land south of the Cooks River was only home to the native population and a handful of escaped convicts, occasionally being visited to hunt for wallabies and other small animals to sustain the hungry and struggling colony. One of these visits did beget significant results, however, when an Aboriginal man named Pemulwuy speared Governor Phillip's gamekeeper at night, likely out of revenge for previous killings of Aborigines. This led to what is known as Pemulwuy's War, in which Pemulwuy led the Eora, Dharug and Thawaral people in resistance to British occupation.

Even when Hannah Laycock was granted 500 acres (2km²) of land west of the ridge mentioned earlier, she built her 120-acre farm (500,000m²) on the other side of Wolli Creek, about where what is now Canterbury stands, rather than on the Bexley North side.

The promise and excitement of Botany Bay brought about by James Cook had long dissipated. It was only until another James came along that things started happening in the area and the history of Bexley starts to become more definitive.

1822-1836: JAMES CHANDLER

In March 1822, a free settler named James Chandler did what most other permanent citizens of the newly-founded Sydney did to elevate his social status and quality of life: he purchased some land. It was a 100-acre (400,000m²) property called "Sylvester's Farm" that had been granted to Thomas Sylvester about ten years earlier. The property was located in present-day Clemton Park, next to Laycock's aforementioned "King's Grove" property (later to become – you guessed it – Kingsgrove!) and bounded on one side by Wolli Creek. It was but a measly amount of land for those early days of the colony, however, so in July Chandler petitioned Governor Sir Thomas Brisbane for an additional land grant. A month later, he was granted 1200 acres (4km²) of land in "any part of the colony already surveyed" along with four convict servants and materials with which to develop it. Chandler decided to take a plot of virtually untouched land neighbouring his existing property. Of course, this area would become what is now Bexley (and also most of Bexley North, Rockdale and Kogarah) – though not through Chandler's undertaking.

James Chandler

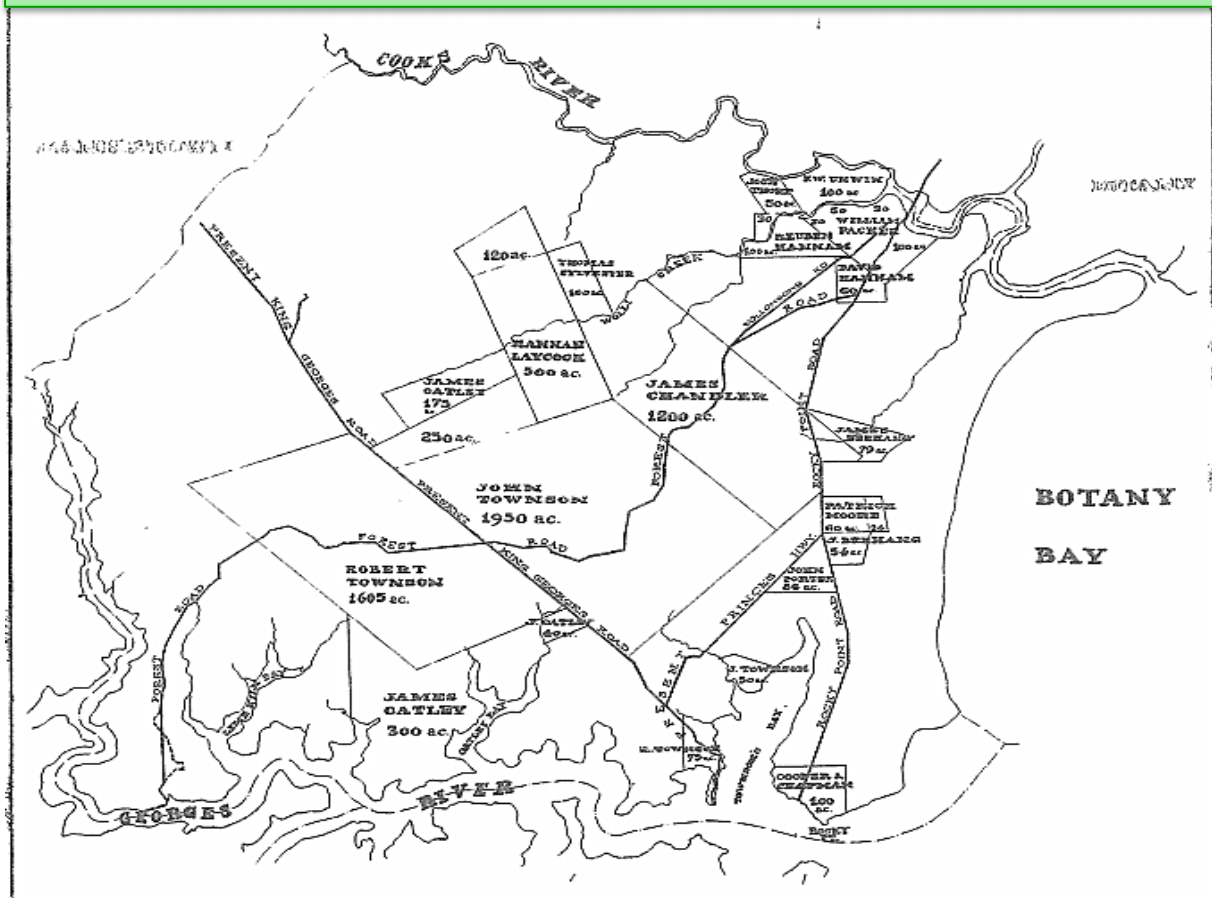
James Chandler was born in 1797 in a quaint village in the south-eastern English county of Kent. This village was called Bexley – the origin of today's name "Bexley" in our Rockdale City today, as you may have guessed. Little else is known about his life in England apart from that he received a fine education and became a wealthy and devoutly religious man.

But that does not matter too much, as it is his pursuits closer to home that were of most importance. On 24 September 1820, Chandler arrived in Sydney on the sailing ship *Surry*, having voyaged for six months and acquainted himself with Reverend Ralph Mansfield, who described Chandler as a "serious young gentleman". Mansfield later became an editor of the *Sydney Gazette*, a feature writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and a close friend of Chandler. After arriving in Australia, Chandler opened a shop at 99 Pitt Street selling cloth, grain and other commodities. He also attended the Sydney Bible Association.

As well as Bexley and Thomas Sylvester's farm, Chandler acquired land in Liverpool and Hawkesbury, although farming soon fell out of his interest. In 1826, he became a catechist – a teacher of Anglican faith paid by the church – in Hawkesbury by appointment of the Archdeacon.

He died at his Pitt Street residence on 31 March 1839, aged 42.

Map: Early land grants in the Parish of St. George
(*Rockdale: Its Beginning and Development*)



Although the acquisition of what he named "Bexley" in 1822 (though it was not officially documented until 1831) brought Chandler increased social standing (and the local nickname of the "Squire of Bexley"), it was otherwise a burden that seemed impossible to do anything with. Its isolation rendered it a haven for escaped convicts (a similar situation to before) and other hooligans and a mediocrity for potential buyers. Regarding the former, this area south of Cook's River was a dense forest perfect for hiding, and abundant with food, water and timber to steal. The various farms scattered around the area also provided plenty of items for fugitives and bushrangers to loot. In addition, Chandler's vast estate was largely unattended – what single owner, even with servants, could ever manage to supervise 1,300 acres of land, after all? Chandler was indeed the victim of several robberies. In fact, after the theft of two savings bank receipts, each valued at £1, from his convict servant Thomas Sweeney on 11 April 1824, Chandler sent a letter to the Colonial Secretary petitioning for a ticket-of-leave (on parole) convict to be made a constable for the protection of a district "much infested with bushrangers". This was not granted but Chandler was able to get his own servant to fulfil this role. Unfortunately, this was to no avail, as the trespassing, theft and nuisance continued. Timber thieves were rife, seeing as trees on Crown land were branded with the King's mark and any person who cut such timber would be prosecuted. Private litigation being a much less daunting option, these

criminals preyed on properties like the Bexley estate instead. When Chandler announced the acquisition of Bexley in *The Australian* in October 1825 and offered to raise cattle on his estate, he also issued a warning to potential malefactors:

"Notice is hereby given that twelve hundred acres of land, in the district of Botany Bay, having been measured to the undersigned, bounded on the one side by Captain Townsend's, Mr. Laycock's, and Thomas Sylvester's grants, and on the other sides by government grounds; all persons are cautioned to beware of trespassing thereon, by cutting down timber, running their stock, or in any other way detrimental to the interests of the same.

As the vicinity to Sydney must render this farm a convenient run for cattle, the advertiser ... shall be happy to receive any quantity above twelve head, at the rate of 4d. [shillings] per week each, and promises that every care will be taken of such as may be sent to him."

A more unexpected robbery occurred in 1825, when one of Chandler's own servants, William Cornwallis, stole various kitchen utensils which he sold in the city. He was then arrested and sentenced to three years transportation – possibly the only instance on Chandler's estate where crime didn't pay!

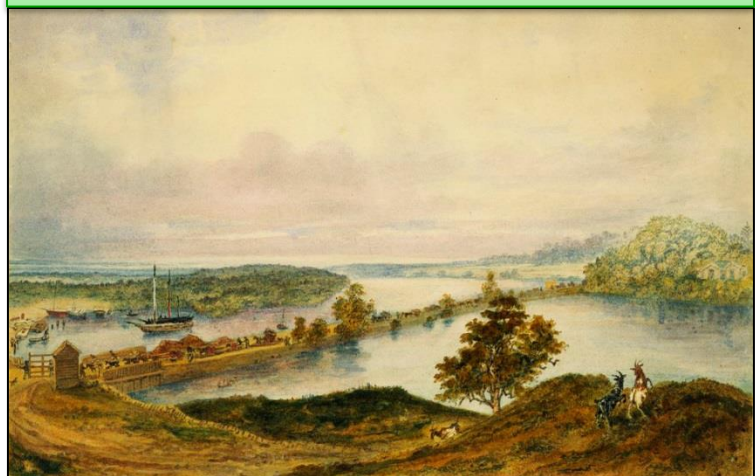
Regarding the lack of interest towards Chandler's land, on the surface this seems unlikely. The land had a ridge with a variety of timbers, fertile slopes and meadows excellent for grazing, numerous streams facilitating irrigation and a myriad of wild animals for hunting. However, there was no road access to the settlement at Sydney Cove (Cooks River had to be crossed by a punt ferry service provided by one of the landowners) and so there was little Chandler could do to develop his estate. Thus for years he tried to sell or subdivide and lease the land, but to no avail due to the aforementioned inaccessibility. In 1832, Chandler mortgaged his estate to John Connell, merchant and landowner, for £300. The year after, he paid off the mortgage and divided his estate into 27 allotments of 25 to 100 acres (101,000–405,000m²), hoping to lease them out at an auction on 20 June 1833. But despite his enticing and probably exaggerated advertisement published in various newspapers describing the proximity of "Bexley Park" to local taverns as well as the natural virtues of the land, Chandler failed. He mortgaged twice again – firstly to the same John Connell and a year afterwards to William Sherwin of Paramatta. In 1836, Chandler made another effort to dispose of Bexley, offering it for sale outright along with his Sylvester's Farm home/property. Finally, in August, he found a buyer named Charles Tompson. There were no improvements to the Bexley estate, despite the original grant from the governor stipulating either 85 acres of farming or £425 of buildings and other permanent developments – but the selling point was not Bexley but Sylvester's Farm, which boasted things like fruit trees, a vinery and a stockyard with milking sheds. Perhaps Tompson, a landowner and wealthy grazier who had so much expertise that he wrote long articles for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, would be inspired by Sylvester's Farm and create something decent out of the rich, diverse land of Bexley?

1836-1855: *THE ILLAWARRA ROAD*

But alas, nope. Thompson fared just as well as James Chandler in developing Bexley – that is, not very well at all, even though he had bought the property for almost a thousand pounds. Like Chandler (who lived on Sylvester's Farm), Thompson did not reside on the estate. Like Chandler, he suffered from a plague of thieves and trespassers, his land still unfenced. Like Chandler, he was not able to grow crops, raise livestock or otherwise make money out of Bexley. And so, like Chandler, he tried to subdivide and lease, and like Chandler, he failed.

Fortunately, however, the colony's developments were not as stagnant as Bexley's. A dam at Cooks River had been built in 1839 to supply water following a severe drought. This scheme ultimately proved to be a disaster, failing as a source of freshwater and causing pollution and flooding (the dam was destroyed in 1900), but the roadway on top of it did finally allow a road providing direct access to the area south of the river to be built.

Artwork: Cooks River c. 1860, by Samuel Charles Bree
(<http://digital.slv.vic.gov.au>)



Illawarra Road

Between 1843 and 1845, chained convict gangs under the personal supervision of Sir Thomas Livingstone Mitchell, Surveyor-General of New South Wales, constructed a new road to the Illawarra. It was one of the last major projects undertaken by convicts as punitive transportation had ceased in 1840. The road started at the Cooks River in Tempe and followed the ridge to Georges River (cutting through Michael Gannon's estate, which covers today's Hurstville), where Mitchell established a ferry service to cross at Lugarno. It then followed the present-day Old Ferry Road and Old Illawarra Road, joining the old coach road at what is today Lucas Heights. The road was a result of a major campaign of exploration and development across NSW at the time, and it was a much-needed impetus for the growth of the St. George area, as there had been no direct road to the Illawarra past Cooks River beforehand.

The road has had many names throughout history and for its different sections. A section of it became known as Gannon's Forest Road, now Forest Road – a name much less difficult to say than the original Sir Thomas Mitchell's New Line of Road to the Illawarra (later shortened to Illawarra Road), and one we should be grateful for.

As for Charles Thompson, he was grateful for something else – though the terrible financial depression of the 1840s precluded the sale of his property, the construction of the new road allowed him to lease tracts of land to people who made better use of it than he.

This was all to do with the vast forest of Bexley and the trees that lay inside it.

The Timber Getters

Here the “heavily timbered ridge” of earlier re-enters into relevance. It provided myriad varieties of timber for myriad uses – spotted gum, blue gum, red gum, white gum, iron bark, whitewood, bloodwood, turpentine, stringybark, blackbutt and so on, for building furniture, houses, ships, coaches, and so on. In fact, the trees were so large and numerous that it was easier to build around them than remove them – thus the many twists and turns of Forest Road. It is no wonder that numerous bands of timber getters pounced on the opportunity to work in Bexley when Illawarra Road was built.

These were hardworking teams who toiled (without machinery, of course) throughout all the daylight with their axes and bullocks. The timber getters were followed by charcoal burners, who converted waste timber into charcoal for the blacksmithing needs of the colony. Both jobs were done by hard-living men residing in primitive huts with few facilities for comfort, though they enjoyed regular visits to the various inns around this southern district.

Photograph: Timber getters in Queensland c. 1900
(<http://www.bonzle.com>)

As the timber getters chopped down the enormous trees that had stood there for centuries, the vast original Bexley estate also began to break up. The lease fees from these sawyers and the renormalisation of the economy enabled Piddocke Arthur Tompson, who had taken over his father's affairs at Bexley, to in 1850 sell all of the property except for Sylvester's Farm to Charles James Tindell, a grazier from Fairy Meadow. Tindell then succeeded in doing what Chandler and the other Charles had failed miserably at, greatly facilitated by the absence of an economic depression and the deluge of free settlers into Australia after the convict transportation system was scrapped: in 1855 he subdivided the estate into rectangular lots and started selling them. Soon the rich river flats near Rocky Point Road on the far eastern side of the property were nabbed by keen purchasers. And on 10 December 1855, a timber getter decided to buy an 18-acre (72,000m²) block of land bounded by today's Harrow Road and Forest Road, Watkin Street, and the rear of the houses along Frederick Street. He was probably Bexley's first European resident, and the suburb is now still a residential area, but with far more properties than at this point in time two centuries ago!

Before we delve into a section about this timber getter and some other of Bexley's earliest residents, let us again look at a change of ownership. In April 1856 Charles Tindell sold the remainder of the estate, still encompassing over 1000 acres (4km²) of land, to John Garsed, a builder and land developer (a veritably befitting occupation), for £3500. His undertakings will be covered soon – but now, to a fellow named Isaac Parkes.

1855-1860: BEXLEY'S FIRST RESIDENTS

The Parkes Family

In 1797 arrived a convict to Sydney on the ship *Barwell*. His name was John Parkes, and he had been sentenced to seven years' transportation for allegedly "stealing a great coat". He served his sentence and in 1816 he was promised a 50-acre land grant from Governor Ralph Darling at the top of the ridge we are now all familiar with. Though this grant was only officially gazetted in 1831, he had taken up residence there five years earlier along with his wife Margaret and their children. Thus the Parkes family became the first settlers of what is now Earlwood, and the area subsequently became known as Parkes Camp (later Parkestown).

Parkes Camp began as a base-camp for a gang of timber getters, who of course were tough, brutal men. Their recreational activities included running an illegal liquor store, bare-knuckle fist-fighting and hunting. The area soon became an attractive meeting place for both lawful and unlawful boxing contests – undoubtedly because the Parkes family lived there.

Among John Parkes' children were three champion fighters: William, or "Fighting Bill Sparkes", Thomas, or "The Sprig of Myrtle", and Isaac, or "The Cook's River Bloomer". Of them three, Fighting Bill Sparkes was the most successful and almost became the World Champion in 1847 but for breaking his wrist during his fight with the British champion.

But Isaac Parkes, born in Petersham in 1823, had talent too – as a boxer, a sawyer and soon a settler, as we will see. He married Sarah Dent on his 18th birthday, and they went on to have eight children, all but one surviving until adulthood. He died at the turn of the century in 1900, but the Parkes legacy continues today, with numerous descendants of the pioneering couple Isaac and Sarah still residing in Bexley..

If we take a look at a very simplified "family tree", we can see that there were many Isaacs in the Parkes ancestry (→ indicates "fathered"): Isaac Parkes (1742-????) → three children including John Parkes (1768-1839), who settled Earlwood → twelve children including Isaac Parkes (1823-1900), who settled Bexley → eight children including another Isaac Parkes (1849-1917) → ten children including another Isaac Parkes (1880-1933)

Photograph: George, Arthur, Spencer and Isaac Parkes Jr. in Bexley c. 1909, copyright Ron Hunt and Parkes Family Reunion Association (City of Canterbury Local History Photograph Collection, <http://www.photosau.com.au/Canterbury/>)

Isaac Parkes' estate was a fine natural property, with a free-flowing natural spring near what is today the remnant of St. George Bowling Club (more on that in Part 2), giving its immediate vicinity the name of Spring Creek.

In 1857, two years after his purchase, Parkes decided to construct a simple but homely building on his land – a three-roomed slab hut made from vertical slabs of overlapping timber, with a bark roof and a detached kitchen as can be seen on the left side of the picture.



Artwork: Isaac Parkes' Bexley residence
(*Cameos of Bexley*)

This crude structure was at first leased to a series of tenants who used it as an inn where, as we know, the timber getters would satisfy their thirst – first called “The Mitre Tavern”, then “The Grand Old Irish Gentleman” and “The Foresters’ Retreat” until it was finally occupied permanently by the Parkes in 1862 (he was still shown as living in Canterbury on the 1861 Electoral Roll), although he would often be away for long periods of time and did not appear permanently in the Postal Directory until 1867. Now this land is occupied by the administration block of Bexley Public School (of which we will soon encounter more information).

Now back to John Garsed. He successfully sold several more lots of land along Rocky Point Road, like Tindell had, and on 15 February 1858 he sold 30 acres (121,400m²) of land by the Illawarra Road to William Sixsmith of Paramatta for £84. This land is now occupied by the properties along Campbell, Carrington, Lymington and Glenfarne streets.

After 1865, Sixsmith built a cottage and vineyard on his land, naming it “Rhinelands”, but there is no evidence of his having ever resided there, all Electoral Rolls from 1861 to 1877 showing his address as Redfern.

William Sixsmith

William Sixsmith was born on 18 November 1815 near Liverpool, England. Even as a boy he was fascinated with trains, working on constructing a new railway:

“When did I first become connected with railway working? Why, before I was twelve years old. My first job was carrying picks for the stonecutters on the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, the first railway in England, which was then only being cut.”

He later became a train driver on this line and many other railways, claiming to have driven trains carrying the Duke of Wellington and King Louis-Phillipe.

Sixsmith moved to Sydney in 1853 with his wife and family. On 26 September 1855, in his top hat, he drove the vice-regal train carrying Governor William Denison to mark the opening of the first railroad in New South Wales from Sydney to Paramatta. Later in his lifetime, the railway system would extend to almost all settled parts of the state.

He died at Redfern in 1893.

Artwork: Portrait of William Sixsmith
(<http://www.stevekebblewhite.com/>)

This was the only sale by John Garsed that is important to the history of Bexley, however, as in June 1858 he became bankrupt. He was then also charged with insolvency-related fraud, having treated a *cancelled* January property lease as a debt security and borrowing money upon it, in order to prevent his brother-in-law from paying to the estate (by cancelling the lease). The question for the jury was whether this was also an attempt to defraud his creditors by deliberately treating the lease as valid, using it as a security long after cancellation. They decided that Garsed was not guilty, which was an honourable decision in the fairness of the law considering that Garsed had been very irritating during the trial – he constantly went on tangents about the sad depreciation of his Bexley property, his admirable character in England, the sale of furniture and other trivial matters. He even

objected to the prosecution calling another witness for a non-existent legal reason, to which the judge responded that his quotation could do him no good unless it might lead to the jury acquitting him on the ground of insanity. Some excellent badinage that proves that the bleak black-and-white photos of the mid-18th century and the ridiculous wigs worn by judges don't necessarily reflect their character!

Anyhow, that was a bit of a tangent in itself. You may be wondering what interesting character next acquired the Bexley estate, or at least what remained of it. Unfortunately there is not much information about Frederick Michael Stokes – although two of his sales are of interest to this history: on 20 October 1859 he sold two blocks of land to George Preddey for a little over £450. They were along the western side of the Illawarra Road, at the opposite ends of the estate; one was 68 acres (275,000m²) and the other was 38 acres (153,000m²). Then several days later, on 1 November, he sold 67 acres on the eastern side of the road to Joseph Davis.

George Preddey

George Preddey was born in Bath, England in 1807. He was sentenced to seven years' transportation (like so many other convicts) for housebreaking and arrived in Sydney aboard "Prince Regent" on 27 September 1827. In England he was a "tallow chandler", or candle maker (was John Chandler a john maker?), but upon arrival in Sydney he was made to work for Daniel Smallwood, a farmer in Pitt Town (near Richmond) under the indentured servitude system.

After his sentence, in 1836, he married free settler Margaret Carey and then worked as a mineral surveyor, dairyman, dray proprietor (cart driver) and sail maker until finally becoming a timber merchant, buying the Summer Hill sawmill and acquiring the business of John Booth and Company, wholesale fuel, timber and produce merchants, in Kent Street, Sydney.

Preddey made two of his sons partners at his business and soon his company became very successful and he very wealthy. He also had strong involvement with the community, becoming the churchwarden of St. George's Anglican Church in Hurstville, Chairman of the Gannon's Forest Road Trust which maintained the Illawarra Road, and a member of the Board at the first government school in Hurstville (or Gannon's Forest as it was known back then).

George Preddey died in 1879, having moved to Glebe two years earlier.

For Preddey, buying the heavily forested land at Bexley was logically the next thing to do when he became a timber merchant, and in 1860 he built a house on the 38-acre site. In April 1872 he purchased an additional triangular block of land that extends to the what is now the corner of Forest and Stoney Creek Road, adjoining this residence.

It was a spacious two-storey house which he named "Besborough". The property was self-sufficient and had its own cattle and poultry, large vegetable gardens and an orchard. Preddey lived there in great comfort until his death in 1879, when his son inherited Besborough and lived there until *his* death. In 1911 his son's widow subdivided most of the estate and Bexley Council used 10 acres (40,500m²) of it to make Bexley Park (more on that in Part 2).



Photograph: Besborough
(Rockdale Library Local History Photograph Collection, <http://library.rockdale.nsw.gov.au/>)

Now to Joseph Davis. He was born in the village of Brede in Sussex, England in 1827 and migrated to Sydney at age 20 with his brothers. There he married Ellen Turner and set up business on King Street, Newtown, first as the manager of a pub then a butchery. His business burgeoned and Davis purchased 67 acres between Frederick Street and Villiers Street adjoining Isaac Parkes' land, where he raised and fattened his cattle before slaughtering them at Arncliffe and transporting them to Newtown.

Lydham Hall

In around 1860, Joseph Davis commissioned Swedish stonemason Sven Bengston to build a house on one of the highest points of land between the Cooks and Georges rivers, with sweeping views of Botany Bay. It was built from stone quarried on the site, just a few hundred metres away near Villiers and Arlington Street.

Davis named this beautiful house "Lydham" after Lydham Hill near his birthplace in Brede (the "Hall" was added after it was converted to a museum). Its design is influenced by the simple Georgian colonial and more ornate mid-Victorian styles of architecture and is a good example of the transition between the two. Full-length French windows face north, east and south (undoubtedly to take advantage of the cool sea breezes), with the windows to the west smaller to shield the hot westerly winds. The verandah used to extend to all four sides of the house. The house's roof is blue slate and has two large, unusually-designed chimneys. On the interior, there are four rooms with a wide central hallway. Narrow stairs lead to two rooms on the upper floor, and there is an attic. In 1919, the detached kitchen and servants' quarters were demolished and the kitchen was attached to the house.

Shortly after Davis's death in 1889, his wife sold the house to Frederick Gibbins, who lived in "Dappeto", Arncliffe (now Macquarie Lodge Aged Care). For 17 years Gibbins leased the house to various tenants until his daughter Ada moved in with her husband David Stead in 1907, renowned marine biologist and conservationist. He had a daughter from a previous marriage: Christina Stead, born in 1902. She was raised at Lydham and became a famous author.

In 1970, after several sales, Rockdale Council purchased Lydham for \$26,000 in the interests of preservation and to celebrate the council's centenary. It repaired and restored the house to its original condition and opened it to the public a year later in February.

Lydham Hall is now a museum run by the St. George Historical Society hosting various items of antique furniture, a collection of historical artefacts and of course the atmosphere of being in the historic house itself. It is available to visit at 18 Lydham Avenue, Rockdale (although part of Chandler's original "Bexley" it now lies just outside the boundary of the suburb Bexley).

Photograph: Lydham Hall today
(<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/>)

The land boom following the arrival of the railway in 1884 led Davis to subdivide his land, leaving 8 acres (32,000m²) surrounding Lydham for himself.

Joseph Davis had four sons and three children. Later in his life, he suffered from an unfortunate accident later in his life, slipping on the carcass of a newly-killed bullock and being impaled by its horns. This left him crippled, having to always drag his right foot and travel in a reclining position. As he grew old and because of his devotion to his children and church, Davis's wife became the primary workperson and she continued his butchering business after his death in 1889.



Photograph: "Davis Butchering Co.", Newtown
(Rockdale Library LHPC)

In addition, there were two less significant sales in 1859 – 17 acres (69,000m²) to former convict John Burton and 13 acres (53,000m²) to Job and James Tomkins in July and September respectively, near what had been named "New" Illawarra Road (in what is now Bexley North) to distinguish it from "Mitchell's". Despite the several sales over the years, including that of most of what is now Rockdale, the bulk of Chandler's original 1200-acre (4km²) land grant was the same, and Frederick Stokes sold his remaining 840 acres (3.4km²) to William Alexander Wolfen, a Sydney merchant who would later become Consul for Norway, for £1074.1

In summary, as this section has been a little all over the place: the first resident of Bexley was probably Isaac Parkes who began permanently living on the hut he had built in 1857 around ten years later. There were two other resident families – the Preddeys and the Davises, who both began living in Bexley in 1860. Now, we will take a look at the way and environment in which these earliest inhabitants lived.

1860-1870: *THE SIXTIES*

These sixties are not remembered for war, anti-war, drugs and sex; in fact, the atmosphere was virtually the complete opposite – idyllic rural life aplenty with picnics and boating. We shall take a look at this lifestyle through two sources, one of them contemporary.

Mrs Frances Carey, one of Isaac Parke's daughters, was interviewed in 1939. She had experienced Bexley over more than eighty years and gave this account of sixties Bexley:



Artwork: A view of Bexley in 1861, Samuel Elyard
(*Pictorial Memories St George*)

"The area was heavily timbered and birds abounded. Ferns grew in great profusion and there were waratahs everywhere. Where the Church of England now stands was a fine mushroom patch. Bands of wandering Aborigines used to camp under a large gum on Mr. Preddey's property opposite our home. Father kept a few cattle and we used to get our water from a creek which now runs under the St. George Bowling Club. It was supposed to contain medicinal properties. Often at night we sat by the roaring log fire and listened to the dingoes and the wild dogs howl."

We can see various interesting things here. The Aborigines who had been displaced by white settlement obviously continued to live their lives, albeit now on settlers' "property". Yet the European residents of Bexley also lived very rural lifestyles, collecting water from the Spring Creek mentioned earlier and sharing the land with the native flora and fauna, relatively untouched.

Indeed, the pioneer families of the St. George area lived a very self-sufficient lifestyle. Apart from freshwater from creeks such as Spring Creek, some families had wells fed by conduits from their houses' roofs. Households usually had large gardens tended by younger members of the family for a supply of fresh vegetables, cattle for milk and meat, poultry for eggs and orchards for fruit. In some places there was even a system of barter between families for times of temporary shortage.

In the previous source we also see Carey's reference to "Mr. Preddey's property", which begs the question: how much contact did the three resident families of Bexley have with each other? This in turn provides the answer: not much, apart from Sunday meetings and the occasional big wedding at the St. George's Church, a small weatherboard building accessed by horse and carriage via Forest Road, to which was attached an equally dilapidated school (or whatever else you might call a single classroom, run by the Church of England, providing a questionable quality of education to a small number of students). In May 1865, the local Inspector of Schools, J. Kruger-Baker said this about the educational establishment:

"The school at Lord's Forest in the Parish of St. George is well situated. It is of good form and size but dirty and ill-ventilated. The closets are in a filthy state and not sufficiently separated for decency. The furniture is insufficient for the number of children and there is but a scanty supply of apparatus. The children read and spell badly, understand nothing of what they read and write poorly. Little is known of arithmetic and nothing of grammar. Tolerable regularity of attendance prevails but the children are very unpunctual. They are also dirty, noisy and disorderly. The master, though intelligent, is not efficient."

Although the area of St. George was expansive and relatively untouched – a lovely environment to live a peaceful life and to entertain business associates and relatives – its isolation also resulted in this low quality of education, along with poor medical assistance (just the untrained midwives, usually wives of local blacksmiths), almost impassable roads and the cutting-off of access to Sydney when the Cooks River Dam flooded.

This was about to change, however.

1870-1880: NEW NEIGHBOURS (AND A NEW IDEA)

The cause of this change was, of course, the railway. The turn of the decade saw the announcement that a railway line was going to be built connecting Sydney to the Illawarra area, Wollongong being of particular interest.

Railways in Sydney

In 1849, the Sydney Railway Company started building a railway track between Sydney and the major agricultural centre then part of Parramatta (now the suburb of Granville). The project did not have enough funding and was taken over by the New South Wales Government in 1853. The line was completed and officially opened in 26 September 1855, marking the beginning of NSW's railway system, and in fact the first government-owned railway in the British Empire.

From there, early railway expansion during the 1860s was largely undertaken for exploiting the economic wealth from farming and industry – as such, railways were built to connect with rural services to major regional centres such as Bathurst and Goulburn. These new lines were constructed under the direction of John Whitton, Engineer-in-Chief of the NSW Railways, known today as the “father of the railways”.

Photograph: The second “Sydney Railway Station”, c. 1884
(Digital Gallery – State Records NSW, <http://gallery.records.nsw.gov.au/>)

Indeed, when the idea of a railway heading south from Sydney was first raised in the 1870s, it was primarily because of the thought that it would help develop agricultural and mining potentials in the Illawarra (though of course other benefits would come out of such a project). Surveys commenced in early 1873 under the direction of the Government Surveyor, and three schemes eventuated: one idea was to cross the Georges River by bridge and embankment at Rocky Point near Ramsgate, a second suggested skirting the escarpment and crossing at Como, and a third proposed following the line of Forest Road to cross near Lugarno. Ultimately it was the second scheme that was chosen – the first was abandoned when the owners of the Holt-Sutherland Estate demanded too much money for the land the railway was to pass through, and the third scheme's gradients were too steep.

But (apologies for the cliff-hanger) the railway was not yet to come. And neither, incidentally, was another cause for excitement for Joseph Davis. In June 1870, a group of local landowners in the Parish of St. George decided to petition for municipal status, encouraged

by the Municipality Act of 1867 detailing the process for the creation of new districts. Incorporation would mean, most importantly, better roads, and so Davis was most pleased when the Municipality of West Botany was proclaimed on 13 January 1871. When he realised it did not include his property, however, it's safe to say that his enthusiasm would have died down – although the Municipality of West Botany (later renamed the Municipality of Rockdale) did include a tiny portion of today's suburb of Bexley, off the eastern side of Harrow Road.

Now, having peeked into some exciting new developments ahead, we will return back to the 1870s and meet some new neighbours and catch up on some new sales.

Having lived some fourteen peaceful years with his family at Bexley, George Preddey finally acquired a neighbour. Thomas Milsop was a man who had moved to Australia in 1852 during the Gold Rush. Although they didn't have success in Victoria or New Zealand, he and his brother Alexander made a fortune at the Kurrajong goldfield at Forbes, NSW. In 1874, Alexander purchased land and moved to present-day Carlton while Thomas moved to Bexley with his family, settling on the land now occupied by Glenfarne, Vivian, Shirley and Wood Streets. Thomas became good friends with Preddey; in fact, his daughter Alice married Milsop's son Edward. Later, in 1881 the Milsop brothers sold their holdings and took residence on Wollongong Road, Arncliffe, building two identical Victorian homes called "Belmont" and "Fairview".

In April 1876, two more families took up residence in Bexley.

Solomon Peter Benson was a Swedish stonemason whose father Sven Bengston had built Joseph Davis's home Lydham. He married Mary Ann Parkes, Isaac Parkes's daughter and settled on part of the Parkes's property at the corner of Forest and Harrow Roads aged about 32, where they raised a family of (eventually) four children. Benson died in 1904 and Parkes died 15 years later.



Photograph: Eliza Pearse
(Rockdale Library LHPC)

Amos and Eliza Pearse, who had been resident in the district for some years, purchased a little over an acre (4,000m²) of land in 1876. Eliza had been born in a small village in Somerset, England in 1838. On 20 Dec 1859, 22 years old, she migrated to Australia with her husband and two children on the "Dirigo" out of Liverpool, arriving in April 1860. After Amos Pearse's death, she married David Saunders White, a founder of Christ Church Bexley and changed her name to Eliza Ann White. She died on 29 Jul 1920 and was survived by ten children.

As you may have noticed, the families in Bexley were large, though there were only four. Children of landowners

usually took up residence on their parents' holdings when they grew up. Thus by the mid-1870s more than 50 people resided in the Bexley area, and Eliza Pearse was able to successfully open a shop.

Bexley Store

Bexley Store was a general store opened by Eliza Pearse in 1882 on Forest Road near the corner of Bexley Road, on the acre (4,000m²) of land she had bought in 1876. It was the first shop in Bexley (although Dick Stone had been selling meats in the Rockdale/Bexley area since 1868) and would remain the only one for almost 20 years.

The shop itself was a tiny whitewashed building made from wooden slabs, with a dirt floor and a shingle roof. Later, a brick front and a corrugated iron roof were built. The rear of the property was leased to a Scottish blacksmith named Henry Hoggan, whose forge remained intact until the early 1950s.

In 1882, an unofficial post office was established in the store with Pearse as postmistress. The Bexley boom of the late 1880s resulted in requests to expand its services from simply selling stamps and providing mail bags for the receipt of letters, but to no avail. In September 1899, Eliza Pearse passed the business on to her daughter Jessie Clune because of her declining health. More on the post office in Part 2.

Photograph: Bexley Store
(Rockdale Library LHPC)

In 1876, George Preddey decided to retire from his business interests and allow his sons to carry on. He was now 69 and his wife had died in October that year. As a refresher: in 1859 Preddey had bought two blocks of land – one was 68 acres (275,000m²) and the other was 38 acres (153,000m²). On the latter he built his residence Besborough and purchased a 27-acre (109,000m²) triangular piece of land extending off this 38-acre block in 1872. Chandler's original Bexley land grant was still mostly in one piece, owned by William Alexander Wolfen and his business partner Benjamin Buchanan, who sold off most of the Kogarah section by 1877. On 9 October 1877, all that remained, which included most of today's suburb Bexley, was sold to the (deep breath!) Sydney and Suburban Mutual Permanent Building and Land Investment Association.

One month earlier, Preddey had sold his 68-acre property to land developer Myles McRae and moved to Glebe. A man named Henry Kinsela then bought the triangular piece of land from George Preddey Junior.



Photographs: Henry and Mary Kinsela
(Rockdale Library LHPC)

Henry Kinsela was born in 1846 in Liverpool, NSW, to Susannah Nichols and Charles Kinsela, who had founded the firm of Funeral Directors, Charles Kinsela and Sons in 1830. Needless to say, Henry went on to become an undertaker working with his brothers at this well-known firm, and he was also a property investor. In 1871, he married Mary Holliday, the daughter of a Kingsgrove baker. They had nine children together, though three died in infancy.

After purchasing the 27-acre (109,000m²) block of land at the corner of Forest and Stoney Creek Roads on 25 March 1880, Kinsela built an opulent two-storey, twenty-room High Victorian style mansion that he named "Kinsel Grove". He landscaped the surrounding grounds with lawns, trees and shrubs and created a private zoo where deer, emus, kangaroos, wallabies and hares were kept.



Photograph: Making tea at Kinsel Grove c.1895
(Rockdale Library LHPC)

As you can probably deduce from the descriptions of Kinsel Grove, Henry Kinsela was a very wealthy man. When his father died in 1883, he sold his share of the family business and retired to his lavish estate. He then became a well-known local identity – the "Squire of Kinsel Grove" – through his generosity and support of charities and programs in the area.



Photograph: King Harold
(Rockdale Library LHPC)

Kinsela was an early member of the Australian Jockey Club, and owned and trained some of the finest pure-bred horses in Sydney, such as a troupe of Hungarian ponies, champion mare "Welcome" and a champion trotting stallion named "King Harold". He held numerous contests at his private racecourse, meeting all expenses and providing generous prizes for the winners. Kinsela's love of horses was so great that he was able to race and even drive a coach and six horses singlehandedly, with an almost paralysed right arm.

The St. George Cricket Club was also established by Henry Kinsela, who had built Bexley's first cricket pitch on his paddocks.

Kinsela held various activities such as picnics, sports matches, fetes and fundraisers at Kinsel Grove, encouraging residents of the local area to get involved with his family and magnificent property. He also donated generously to St. George's Church at Hurstville, contributed greatly to the establishment of Christ Church at Bexley, led the move for the construction of a school in Bexley and provided the St. George Band with its first instruments.

Why were there all these organisations and programs in the St. George area by then, you ask? Well, soon it will be time to go back to our discussions of the Illawarra railway line.

1880-1884: *THE RAILWAY*

In June 1880, Thomas Luck bought 2½ acres (10,100m²) of Isaac Parkes's land on Forest Road, next to Solomon Benson's land. Luck was born in Northamptonshire, England in about 1840 and had arrived in Australia when he was just 14. He had married Isaac Parkes's daughter, Elizabeth and together they had six children. Luck named his holding "Springfield" and operated as a wood, coal and coke (a fuel made from coal) merchant there.

Also in 1880, Elizabeth Isabella Cartwright, a widow whose timber getter husband had died three years earlier, took up residence on part of the Kinselas' estate. She had been their housekeeper and in her retirement erected a small weatherboard cottage, where she lived with her granddaughter until her death in 1906.

In 1881, John McLeod bought 3½ acres (14,200m²) of land fronting Harrow Road on the Parkes's estate. McLeod was born in 1830 in Scotland and was a stonemason on the Duke of Sutherland's estate. He migrated to Australia in 1855, settling in Pyrmont, and built cottages, lighthouses, the fort at La Perouse and the Centennial Hall of Sydney Town Hall.

His son Hector P McLeod also built a house in Bexley: "Cluny Brae" at 496 Forest Road, which is now Victoria House Wedding and Function Centre. Hector was tragically killed when he fell from a building site in 1901 at the age of 38.

John died in 1894 and his funeral arrangements were carried out by the Kinsela brothers.

Dunvegan

John McLeod built a two-storey, Victorian-Italianate-style mansion on his land in 1881. He named it "Dunvegan" as a link with his ancestral clan castle in Dunvegan, Scotland. Adjoining Dunvegan was "Linwood", home of Frederick Hanks.

Dunvegan was later purchased by the Morse family, who renamed it "Esrom" for a whimsical little reason (if you can spot it).

After that, it was used for the Lucy Gullet Convalescent Home, which opened on 9 November 1946. It was then converted into a nursing home, the large rooms made into accommodation. This nursing home was firstly part of the Rockdale Centenary Village at 6 Albyn Street, managed by the Benevolent Society of New South Wales, and is currently part of the Scalabrini Village at 28-34 Harrow Road.

The house has been slightly altered, with the removal of unsafe upper verandah, but retains most of its original features. It also has four stone lions in the front garden that originally stood in grounds of the Sydney Town Hall.

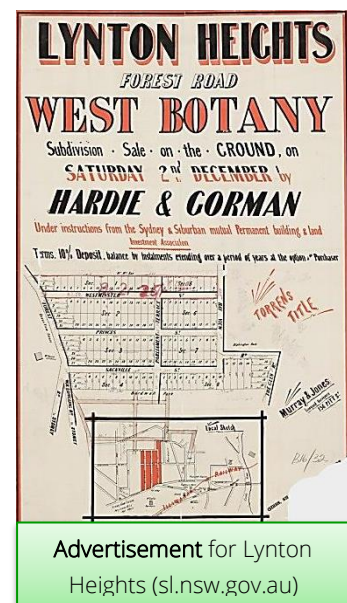
Photograph: Dunvegan

(<http://sydney-city.blogspot.com.au/2012/01/bexley-house.html>)

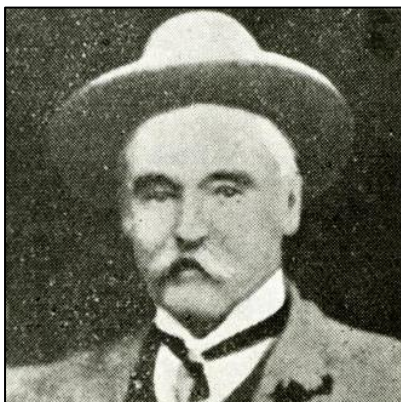
Now back onto the subject of the railway. The section between Sydenham and Hurstville had been approved in 1878, and on 6 April 1881 Governor Augustus Loftus approved the Public Works Act providing £1,020,000 for the construction of the whole line to Kiama. The completion date for as far as Hurstville was set for 30 September 1884. Work commenced in 1882, and although a few hiccups occurred relating to the more southern section of the route, they were on track (excuse the pun) to finish in time.

In fact, a number of companies and developers which owned land in Bexley decided to pre-empt the opening of the railway, which would of course have a huge effect on land sales all along its route. (There was no station to be built at Bexley as the gradient would have been too steep, but it was close to the proposed Rockdale Station.) They snapped up and subdivided large blocks of land, and some developers tried to sell them.

In October 1883, the Sydney and Suburban Mutual Permanent Building and Land Investment Association, which had acquired a portion of the land formerly owned by George Preddey from Myles McRae (amongst a heap of other Bexley land), put their "Lynton Heights" estate on the market, encompassing the streets now known as Westminister, Princes and Sackville, and Parliament Terrace. The property was described as being "close by the proposed Illawarra Railway Line, the heavy railway works of which are about to be completed and the rails shortly laid." Until the railway actually opened, however, the only transport for prospective purchasers was horse-bus – either one of the six provided by the Association or the existing service between the Cooks River Dam and Penshurst.



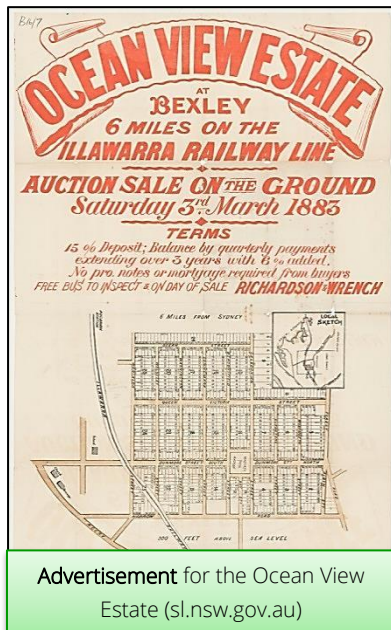
A few sales were made to property investors who had no intention on building anything, but most of the 192 allotments remained unsold.



Photograph: Myles McRae
(Rockdale Library LHPC)

Myles McRae, a land speculator (investor), pioneer alderperson of both Kogarah and Hurstville Councils, and later Member of the Legislative Assembly (1889-1891) who had retained the remainder of Preddey's land, didn't fare much better when he placed his "Lynton Park" estate, comprising today's Broadford, Bayview, Lloyd and George Streets, up for sale in November 1883. He had subdivided and registered the land five years earlier, but the only sale was several blocks on the corner of Broadford and George Street, bought by Isaac Parkes after he sold part of the family's original holding to Thomas Luck, his son-in-law.

Isaac Parkes Junior settled on this land with his wife Margaret and remained there until his death in 1917. Even a century after the purchase of the land, it was still in the ownership of the Parkes family!

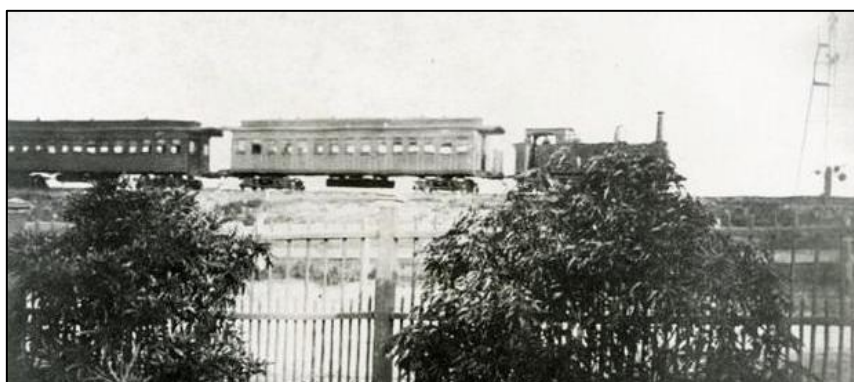


Advertisement for the Ocean View Estate (sl.nsw.gov.au)

A similarly underwhelming outcome befell the first attempts to sell off the “Alphington Hill” and “Alphington Park” estates (Highgate, Abercorn, Medway Streets, Arthur Terrace, and Eddystone Road) which had been acquired by the Sydney and Provincial Land and Building Company.

The Ocean View Estate also didn't do that well, although great success was to be achieved very soon. Ocean View was an estate of over 800 building blocks – the largest estate on the Illawarra Line. It had been surveyed in 1879 and the streets named after directors of the Company and important British figures in the Mahdist War occurring at the time, the first war Australia had participated in (more on street names in Part 2).

On Wednesday 15 October 1884, the railway line from Redfern to Hurstville was opened, comprising the stations Sydenham, Tempe, Arncliffe, Rockdale, Kogarah and Hurstville. Magnificent celebrations were held – a regatta on Kogarah Bay, and gatherings at the new stations, which were decorated with wildflowers and greenery, for example – but there was also a darker side. Accusations were rife that the government had secretly given some land development companies prior knowledge of the railway's route so they could buy up large areas at a fraction of their real value. We do not know if these accusations were true (they were vehemently denied by the Public Works Minister) but the land development companies continued on with their business. The opening of the Illawarra railway line was a very significant event in the development of Bexley – practically the entire present-day suburb of Bexley was subdivided and sold by 1893 – and the Ocean View Estate was a big part of this. On the following pages will see how this Bexley boom played out.



Photograph: An early train of the Illawarra Line, late 1890s (Rockdale Library LHPC)

A few allotments on Ocean View had been sold prior to the railway's opening. One of the first purchasers was John Elder, postal and telegraphs inspector, whose home "Clyde" stood at 18 Albyn Street. But it was on Saturday 25 October, ten days after the opening of the line, when the prestigious estate held a huge auction. Real estate agents Richardson and Wrench advertised in *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

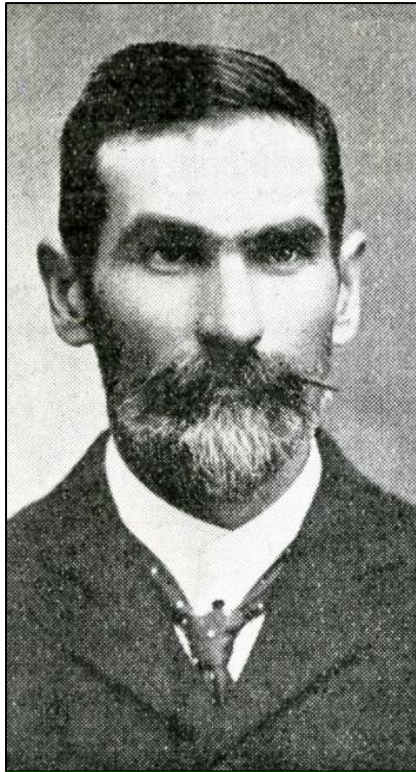
"The Illawarra Railway runs through it, and Rockdale and Kogarah stations are very handy. ... Its convenience to the city, its elevated position, its pure air, its grand streets and squares, its good drainage, its church and school accommodation, its proximity to Botany Bay for sea bathing, its reception of sea breezes which qualify the heat of the sun at midday, and scores of other advantages, will make Ocean View the most healthy, convenient, agreeable and popular place of residence within 20 miles of Sydney."

Hundreds flocked to Ocean View via a special train service provided for free (similar train services had been organised by other sellers too), attracted by not only the benefits extolled above but also the free afternoon tea and the brass band that would play music. However, the huge blocks with sweeping views over Botany Bay were quite expensive, and only a few sales to wealthy businesspeople were made. People of more modest means had to settle with settling in smaller blocks, without water views, on the western side of Forest Road. This began a class consciousness in Bexley that persisted for many years.

The Saturday after the Ocean View auction, 1 November 1884, Joseph Davis put to auction 45 acres (182,100m²) containing 133 blocks on his "Lydham Hill" estate, described as "on the elevated slope overlooking Rockdale Station commanding most lovely views both of land and water scapes". As usual, there was free transport and free refreshments, attracting hundreds of people, but few bought.

Still, the number of people settling in Bexley was significant compared to previously. Let us take a look at some of those who did purchase land shortly after the railway's opening.

Henry Parker Tidswell was a man of great wealth, as one had to be to purchase prime land from Ocean View! He was an art connoisseur and a wine and spirit merchant until the financial crisis of the 1890s. Tidswell built an enormous mansion called "The Hearning" in Gladstone Street. Like most other rich people in the district, he was driven to Rockdale Station each morning to catch the train in a monogrammed coach with a liveried driver and footman. (For the plebeians who don't know what some of those words mean, a dictionary or Google is always helpful!) Tidswell had been born at Alderley near Manchester, England and had come to Australia with his father, also a wealthy merchant, in 1854. In 1881 he married Matilda Lamrock and they had four children. Tidswell died in 1937 at the age of 85, but he was to play a very important part in the development of Bexley before that, as we shall see.



Photograph: William Taylor
(Rockdale Library LHPC)

William Taylor built a home at the western corner of Forest Road and Herbert Street in 1883. Taylor had been born at sea in March 1860 while his parents were migrating from Scotland to Melbourne. The family settled in Ballarat, but after marrying Elizabeth Laverick he moved to Sydney to open a branch of the firm John Gray and Sons. Taylor was an alderperson of the Municipality of West Botany (Rockdale) from 1890 until his death in February 1922, and was mayor from 1892 to 1895 and 1904 to 1909. He was the New South Wales Legislative Assembly's Member for St. George in 1908 to 1913. Taylor was also one of the founders of the Bexley Presbyterian Church and was a prime mover in various developments in the district, including the creation of the Banksia railway station in 1906, the Arncliffe-Bexley tramway and the acquisition of Bexley Park as a public reserve (of which we will discuss the latter two in Part 2). In addition, Taylor showed a strong interest in fire protection, being a member of the Fire Brigades Board as representative of the suburban councils and held that position until his death, and contributing greatly to the improvement of fire services in the district.

George F. Windon was an accountant who built a large home called "Burraneer" on Forest Road. Joseph Palmer later built "St. Elmo" on his Harrow Road property in 1897, and William Shepherd "Lorna Doone" on Monomeeth Street.

Apart from wealthy businesspeople, there were also skilled tradespeople that flocked to the area to meet the demand for houses created by the former. In fact, the first six residents of Abercorn Street were all builders (though one was a coachbuilder).

The burgeoning population following the opening of the railway resulted in some interesting things happening, so now there need not be so much repetitive detailing of land sales. We will explore the consequences of Bexley's huge growth in this next section.

1884-1890: *BIGGER (AND BETTER?)*

Prior to the railway, Bexley mostly consisted of fields, orchards, farms and small cottages. Now, however, houses were going up everywhere and we can no longer talk about every family who settled here! This rapid growth did come with some concerns, however.

Though there were numerous grand residences built in Bexley, as we have met and will continue to meet, many of the houses being built in other parts were very basic. Some were little better than timber huts, and because the district was unincorporated (not governed by its own municipal corporation) there were no controls on the buildings being erected. There was also no sewerage system, water supply (only wells, tanks and creeks) or environmental health officer (then known as an inspector of nuisances). The threat of disease was very real – indeed, outbreaks of diphtheria and typhoid fever became common.

All this doesn't sound much "better" than before, but there were some notable developments that occurred as well.

The Municipality of West Botany had been created in 1871, and in December 1885 the land to the south and east of the railway line as far as Georges River was proclaimed the Municipality of Kogarah. The residents of Bexley were thus galvanised into action themselves in regards to incorporation, and the Bexley area became part of the new Municipality of Hurstville on 28 March 1887.

The Municipality of Hurstville

The first moves towards the establishment of a Municipality of Hurstville were taken at a public meeting at the Blue Post Inn, Hurstville on 13 September 1884. In 1886, the Hurstville and Peakhurst Progress Committee, headed by Locrin Tiddy, retired headmaster of Hurstville Public School and Joseph Walker Bibby, a wealthy company secretary and accountant who had settled on Forest Road, drew up a petition for incorporation. The 635 signatures included names we are familiar with, such as George Preddey, Henry Kinsela and Henry Parker Tidswell.

The Municipality of Hurstville was proclaimed on 28 March 1887. The area was approximately bounded by the railway, Georges River, Salt Pan Creek to Punchbowl Road, and the boundaries of the Canterbury and West Botany Councils. It included all of today's Bexley. The Municipality had 1,050 people, around 400 houses, 36 shops and two hotels.

Elections for the nine alderpeople were held at Blue Post Inn on 18 June. Myles McRae and Henry Parker Tidswell were elected. Henry Kinsela had stood for election but did not win a seat. The first council meeting had Alexander Milsop, brother of the Thomas Milsop we encountered earlier, become the first mayor of Hurstville.

Early meetings were held at Locrin Tiddy's home and Treacy's shop at the corner of Forest and Park Roads, but later a Council Chambers at the opposite corner were established and in 1890, the Council moved to the corner of Forest Road and McMahon Street.

Photograph: Alexander Milsop, first mayor of Hurstville
(Rockdale Library LHPC)

The increasing population between 1884 and 1887, mostly of white Christians (as can be expected), also created demand for churches. Bexley's Catholic population was reasonably well-served at the time (two at Gannon's Forest and one at Rockdale) were within walking distance. Wesleyan Methodists also only needed to travel a short distance to the chapel in Bay Street, Rockdale. However, Bexley's Anglicans and Presbyterians faced long journeys, often on foot, to Hurstville or Kogarah. The rector of St. Paul's Church of England, Kogarah tried to cater for the district's scattered Anglicans by holding open air services near White's brick kiln in Princes Street, but a church would have been better.

In May 1885, a fund was opened to buy land to build an Anglican church upon. Later that year, two parcels of land on the Ocean View Estate on the corner of Albyn and Dunmore Streets were purchased.

On 17 July 1886, the Bishop of Sydney and Primate of Australia Alfred Barry journeyed to Bexley to lay the foundation stone of the new Christ Church; however, severe weather prevented the ceremony from taking place and Barry returned the following Saturday to lay the stone.

On 26 Feb 1887, the Primate, accompanied by Reverends E. Salinerie, James Clarke and William H. Saunders, the church's first rector, again came to Bexley to dedicate and open the newly completed church, named Christ Church, which had cost £1,400 to build. The first Church Committee consisted of Henry Kinsela, George Preddey, Joseph Davis, Thomas sand Alexander Milsop, Charles J. Burney, Thomas Leeder, Frederick Gibbins, David White and Henry Parker Tidswell, one of the church's founders and its churchwarden for over 50 years. The sandstone wall surrounding the church today (seen in the picture below) is dedicated to Tidswell.

On 22 July 1899 a group of Bexley residents performed Gilbert and Sullivan's opera *H.M.S. Pinafore* at Rockdale Town Hall to raise funds for the church

The church's original seating was unusual as it had no centre aisle like other Anglican churches. This was altered in the 1930s, when the church was extended (see below).



Photographs: Christ Church, 1902 and now
(Rockdale Library LHPC, Flickr user *dunedoo*)

Many of the clergy members of Christ Church were well-known personalities of Bexley, including Reverends Charles James Byng, famed for his passionate and eloquent sermons, J. Howell Price, Rural Dean of South Sydney, and Henry T. Holliday, Mary Kinsela's brother, known affectionately as "the racing person" because of his love of horses and his co-ownership of Henry Kinsela's racecourse.

Onto the next church opened: many of the new residents of Bexley were Presbyterian, and there was also a large Presbyterian community in Arncliffe, another railway suburb. Services in the district had been operating by an itinerant preacher since 1872. In 1886, Reverend Thomas Hill began preaching in the Oddfellows' Hall at Kogarah, but since most of his congregation came from Bexley and Arncliffe it was decided to purchase land around that area.

Three blocks of land at the corner of Forest Road and Sackville Street were bought, and the foundation stone of a church was laid on 24 May 1887, by prominent Presbyterian layman and Minister for Education James Inglis. In October 1887, St. George's first Presbyterian church was opened by the New South Wales Moderator Robert Steele. Reverend Thomas Hill was called to be the church's first minister. He was inducted in January 1888 and served until 1913. Interesting to note is that Hill was actually blind, and his sister learned Ancient Greek so that she could read to him. He later graduated with Honours in Classics and became a professor in England before moving to Australia.

Charles James Byng

Reverend Charles James Byng was the rector of St. David's Church, Arncliffe (the suburb in which he lived) and Christ Church, Bexley. He had previously been rector of St. Matthew's Church, Dunedin, New Zealand, from 1877 to 1883. Byng was a fiery orator and attracted huge congregations to hear his sermons. He was highly esteemed within the community, known for his friendly character.

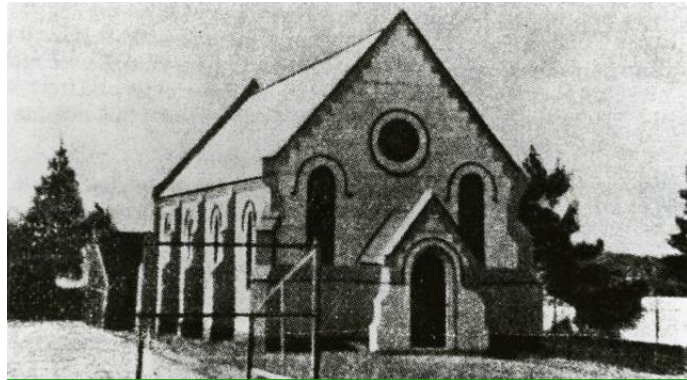
Byng was a native of India, born in 1829 of a British Army officer and an Anglo-Indian mother. He was related to the 1st Earl of Stafford, who had fought in the Napoleonic Wars and whose family name was Byng. Charles James Byng died in November 1904.

An interesting incident occurred a few weeks before his death. He went to attend the funeral of an old friend who he thought was to be buried at Rookwood. On arrival at Arncliffe Station, he found out that the funeral was actually at Sutherland. The stationmaster Mr. Brown noticed Byng's annoyance at missing the train to Sutherland and invited him to his residence to listen to a phonograph. After playing a few recordings, Mr. Brown joked that since Byng was unable to officiate his friend's funeral service, he might want to record his own funeral service on the phonograph. Byng agreed and many of his friends were invited by Mr. Brown to listen to it after Byng's death. Was it a curse?!

Photograph: Charles James Byng
(Rockdale Library LHP)

In March 1941 the church changed its name from the Bexley Presbyterian Church to St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Bexley.

The church still runs at 269 Forest Road near the boundary between Arncliffe, and began construction of a new hall in September 2013.

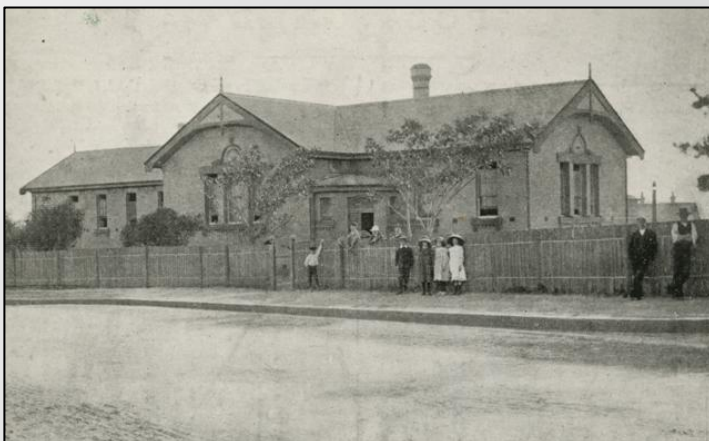


Photograph: St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
(Rockdale Library LHPC)

Another facility that became necessary as the deluge of new residents and their large families came in was a school. In June 1855, George Preddey, Joseph Davis and James Glen petitioned the government to build a school at Bexley. The petition was refused, claiming that the move was motivated by land developers wishing to use the proximity of a school as a selling point for their land, and that plenty of room existed in schools at Arncliffe, Kogarah and Hurstville.

But these schools were considered inconvenient and too far way, and they too felt the impact of the exploding population after the coming of the railway. In addition, the Public Instruction Act of 1880 made education free, compulsory and secular and the withdrawal of subsidies to non-government schools resulted in the closure of most of the church schools in the district. Thus a second application, supported by 60 of the district's citizens, some very influential, was successful.

Bexley Public School



Photograph: The original Bexley Public School building, after an 1892 extension (Rockdale Library LHPC)

In December 1886, land was secured in Forest Road between Bayview and Broadford Streets and the construction of Bexley Public School commenced. The school consisted of a building of brick and slate with one large classroom and one small one. There were four 3m desks. The total cost was £1,124.

In May 1887, Kendall Hume was selected as the first teacher from nine applicants who had answered an advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The school opened in October 1887 and enrolled 103 pupils. Towards the end of the year a student teacher, Anne Crawford, also began working at the school.

By 1889 the enrolment had reached 258 and a third teacher was appointed. The school continued growing and when the enrolment reached over 300 pupils in 1892, the original building was extended.

At the end of 1895, Hume's health failed and John Saunders Middenway took over as school principal. Middenway was an enthusiastic amateur photographer born in Sydney in 1855. He became a student teacher in 1869, and later in his career became headmaster at Clarence Town, Greta and Wagga Wagga Public Schools. He remained at Bexley for 22 years. During this time the school grew enormously. In 1913 it was split into two departments, and Alma Ryan became the first Infants' Mistress. In the same year, the Parents and Citizens' Association was created and it demanded immediate improvements to the school, which was severely overcrowded. In 1917, the two-storey building facing Broadford Street was built, and Middenway retired, succeeded by James Jacobs.

In 1922, the Department of Education obtained the property formerly owned by Thomas Luck on the eastern side of Forest Road, together with a large two-storey home built by James Glen. Two years later, it constructed on the former site a new building (which was demolished in 1932 to instead build a new Infants' Block, opened two years later) and on the latter additional classrooms.

In 1971, the school was reorganised, moving ever so slightly along the street, with the Primary Department on the eastern side of Forest Road and the Infants' on the western side. The same thing occurred in 1995 when the school crept a few hundred metres across to occupy 330-354 Forest Road, between Forest and Harrow Roads and Albyn and Frederick Streets. The original site of 1887, with its local heritage listed buildings, is now occupied by St. Mary & St. Mina's Coptic Orthodox College. At its current rate of movement (approximately 200m every 100 years) Bexley Public School will reach Lady Robinsons Beach by 4000CE (straight line distance extending from Harrow Road used in calculations).

Now, back to the serious business of subdivisions and sales, rather than schools as snails. William Sixsmith had bought 30 acres (121,400m²) of land in 1858, naming his cottage and vineyard "Rhinelands" because the latter reminded him of the wine growing areas along the River Rhine in Europe. He had sold the property to William Swinney in 1877, and he in turn had sold it to Reverend James Jeffries in 1880. The Sydney and Suburban Mutual Permanent Building and Land Investment Association then bought the land in December 1884 and offered it for sale the following year. The Rhinelands Estate covered Campbell, Carrington, Lymington and Glenfarne Streets, formerly part of Kogarah Heights.

As usual, there were few initial purchasers. By 1888, three people had taken up residence on the estate – Perry Brown, an architect, in Carrington Street; James Parkes, a stonemason, in Northbrook Street; and James Murray, a quarryman, in Glenfarne Street.

By now there were also many people settling in other parts of Bexley.

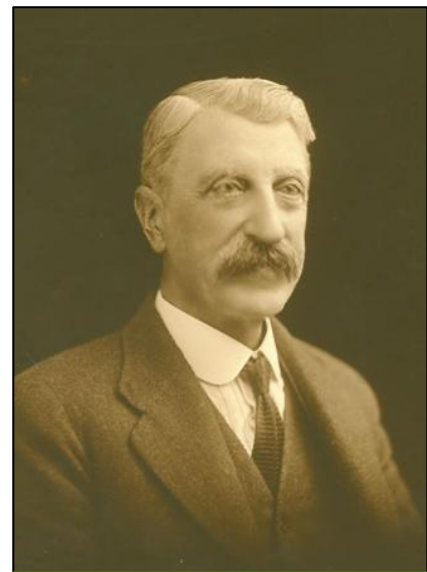
The most populous street in Bexley by far was Abercorn Street, where more than 15 families lived. Some of their descendants still live in the homes these pioneers built.

Notable new Bexley residents between 1884 and 1890 included Gladstone Street's Frederick C. Tidswell, a senior officer in the Lands Department and brother of the Tidswell we have met a few times already; Edward Arnold, Managing Director of a department store on Oxford Street, who built his house "Lynton" on Sackville Street; and William Kenwood.

(There had also been some more shops built at Bexley, though none of particular note – two butcheries, a blacksmith, etc.)

William Kenwood was an architect and engineer born in the village of Wadhurst in Kent, England. He migrated to Australia in 1878 and four years later he joined with Harry Kerle to start the firm of "Kenwood and Kerle – Architects and Consulting Engineers", which operated until 1896 when Kenwood his career alone. He was also a foundation member of the Architects' Institute of New South Wales, for which he was treasurer until 1897, and the Royal Australian Institute of Architects.

In 1884, he was employed by Thomas Saywell to design his seaside resort, New Brighton (now in Brighton-Le-Sands), consisting of the New Brighton Hotel, a bathing enclosure two streets of villa cottages, and an entertainment pavilion.



Photograph: William Kenwood
(Rockdale Library LHPC)

In 1887, Kenwood designed the Bellambi and Bulli Family Hotels, a large residence for the manager of the South Bulli Colliery, the Hotel Wollongong and the Bulli Cottage Hospital.

He also built several residences in Harrow Road, including his own house named "Wadhurst" at No. 21. Two other significant buildings he designed were "St. Elmo", one of three large houses on Harrow Road he designed in 1891 (the two others having been occupied by Harry Kerle and Alfred Cooke), and the clubhouse of the St. George Bowling and Recreation Club, of which he became senior vice-president, also on Harrow Road. We will meet both again in Part 2, in tragic circumstances.

Kenwood died in 1930, aged 74. His son Thomas was also a prominent architect with whom William had run the firm W. Kenwood and Son for over 40 years after leaving his partnership with Harry Kerle.



Photograph: A row of cottages along Harrow Road between Monomeeth and Gladstone Streets, all designed by William Kenwood in 1897 for Thomas Saywell. (Google Maps)

A REFLECTION ON WEST BEXLEY

We have been following the story of the development of what was originally James Chandler's plot of land for a while. Now is a good time to introduce a part of Bexley we have ignored for a few decades for the sake of convenience – west Bexley. This is an unofficial term we will apply to the portion of the suburb of Bexley that was part of Captain John Townson's original land grant of 11 April 1810 and also including all of Hurstville, Allawah and Carlton. This section is approximately bounded by Croydon Road to the west, Stoney Creek Road to the North, Preddeys Road and Vivian Street to the east and Caledonian Street and Forest Road to the south.

Captain John Townson was an army officer and settler born in 1759 at Clapham, Yorkshire, England. He transferred to the New South Wales Corps in October 1789 from Britain, and spent most of his military service in the colony at Norfolk Island where he was stationed between 1791 and 1799.

He returned to England in 1800, but came back to the colony in August 1806, allured by the prospect of owning lots of land (excuse the pun, again). He had a letter stating the intention of the British secretary of state to direct Governor William Bligh to grant him 2000 acres (8.1km²) of land, but Bligh refused to honour this at the time until there was official instruction from England. In December the following year, the secretary of state sent these instructions for this grant along with others, but before it arrived the Rum Rebellion occurred and the Governor was deposed by the New South Wales Corps. Thus it was Major George Johnston who granted Townson his 1950-acre (7.9 km²) piece of land in St. George.

Townson used his property for raising sheep but his declining health led him to sell the grant to Simeon Lord in December 1812, two years after he had acquired it. Lord was a former convict who became one of the wealthiest people in the colony, an entrepreneur with various business interests (he was a retailer, auctioneer, sealer and pastoralist, to name a few). Unfortunately, Lord didn't have much success in developing or capitalising on this particular land (his extensive holdings over his lifetime also included land at Liverpool, Petersham and even Tasmania), suffering the same problems that isolation had brought James Chandler's adjoining grant, despite the excellent timber forests in the area.

In March 1844, with Mitchell's Illawarra Road under construction through his estate, Lord was finally able to sell off the land to John Holden and James Holt. They in turn sold 1906 acres (7.7 km²) to Michael Gannon on 18 November 1850 for £732. Gannon, an Irish-born innkeeper and land speculator who named his property Gannon's Forest and whose name we have seen a few times before, divided the estate into rectangular blocks ranging from 10 to 30 acres (40,500 to 121,400m²), which he sold or leased.

Several families settled in this area by the opening of the railway line 34 years later.

John Downey was an Irishman who arrived in Australia with his wife Mary from Kerry County early in 1853. On 5 October that year, he bought 88 acres (356,100m²) of land between Forest and Stoney Creek Roads, bounded on the east by Preddey's Road. Downey did not settle on the property immediately (probably sometime in the early to mid-1860s but farmed in other parts of the Cooks River district. On his Bexley property, Downey raised cattle and conducted a large poultry farm and market garden. In 1883, he sold this property to a land development company and retired to Frederick Street, Rockdale until his death in 1993.

John Downey's Cottage

In around 1858 John Downey built a sandstock brick cottage at the corner of today's Downey and Mimosa Streets, originally reached by a wooden bridge across the creek which ran in front of it. The cottage is probably the oldest Bexley home still standing today (at 14 Downey Street).

An interesting fact to note is that from an aerial view the cottage does not line up with the other buildings on its street owing to its original position as Downey's farmhouse.

Keith and Janine Sharpe bought the property in 1995 and spent 12 years renovating the property, restoring the cedar timber detailing, English-style landscaping and fencing.

Photograph: John Downey's cottage today
(<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/7640318>)

In 1854, a charcoal burner named George Perry purchased the area between today's Willison and Croydon Road (parts of which are in today's Carlton) and built a home that still stands today at 666 Forest Road, albeit heavily altered. He had been born in Somerset, England in 1817, had a son in 1949, moved to Australia shortly after, and worked as a charcoal burner in the forests near Cooks River before deciding to settle permanently in the area. Perry died on 6 Jan 1885.

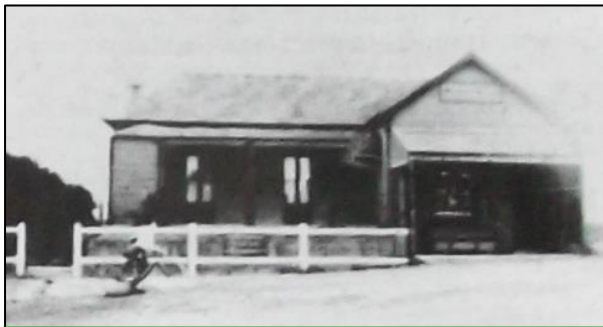


Photographs: 666 Forest Road as it originally stood, and today
(*Cameos of Bexley*, Google Maps)

In early 1855, Richard Rose Lardner, a baker at 42 Windmill Street, Miller's Point, purchased 127 acres (513,951m²) of land in five lots along Forest Road. Lardner had arrived in New South Wales in the 1840s with his wife Sarah Elizabeth Laughton, from Oxfordshire, England. He had 13 siblings – he was from a family who had been yeomen (people holding and cultivating a small estate) for generations. He did not take up residence on his holding immediately, building a small weatherboard cottage in 1867 on today's Waratah Street. He, unlike his predecessors, farmed for pleasure rather than as a source of income. He died in 1884. The property then passed to his daughter and his son Charles Lardner, who married Mary Anne Cartwright, the daughter of the Elizabeth who settled on part of Henry Kinsela's estate in 1880. In 1905, his daughter Annie Mary sold the last remaining part of the estate and Waratah Street came into being.

In November 1855, Thomas Smithson acquired a 25-acre (101,200m²) property on the corner of Stoney Creek and Croydon Roads, land now part of Bexley Golf Course, and land that he would use for a variety of different purposes. Smithson had arrived in Australia with his family three years prior, from Leeds, England, where he was a tobacco manufacturer. He continued this profitable industry on his land in Bexley, setting up a factory manufacturing locally-grown tobacco and snuff (fine-ground tobacco for sniffing). This factory supplied most of Sydney for around 20 years.

Smithson married the daughter of Evan Evans, who owned the "Man of Kent" Inn nearby at Kingsgrove. After his stint as a tobacco manufacturer he used his property as a slaughter yard and a vineyard.



Photograph: Smithson's wine bar
(*Cameos of Bexley*)

In front of his slaughter yard he established a wine bar. It operated from about 1880 to the 1930s (later run by a man named Alfred Ball). The bar was very popular among the timber getters of the district for many years, producing wines that apparently had a "medicinal" quality. Its cellar, which is now the sandstone building fronting Bexley Golf Club at one point contained a bottling room and 450 cargo casks!

During the ostrich feather boom of the 1890s, Smithson also raised ostriches on his property. Hopefully no drunken people got into any incidents with these big birds!

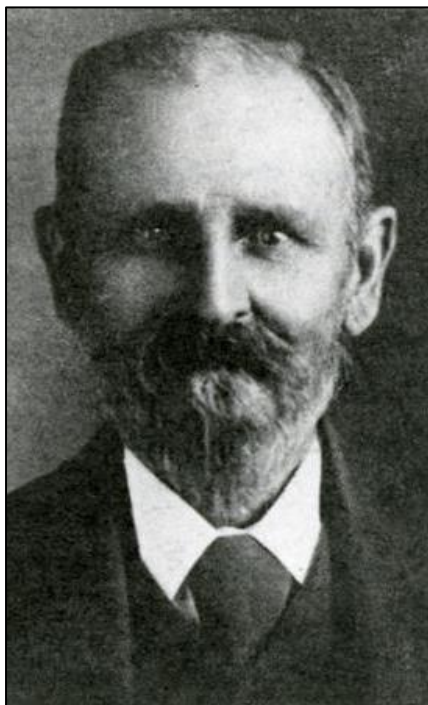
Onto our next landowner: in October 1854, William Albert Beresford Greaves had bought 31 acres (125,500m²) of land now occupied by Iliffe and Ada Streets. This property had passed through a number of owners until it was sold to Rockdale nurseryperson John Iliffe in 1875.

In the 1870s, John Iliffe had taken over his father's *blooming* nursery business in Rockdale and built the quaint sandstone cottage "Rosevale Villa". It was so successful that he purchased this land off Croydon Road in Bexley to establish a reserve nursery. There he grew fruit trees, camellias, tiger lilies and over 500 different varieties of roses for sale at Rosevale. For over 40 years, Iliffe's reserve nursery was managed by Owen Mascord, a member of another well-known pioneer family, while Iliffe attended to his Rockdale business. The nursery was eventually sold and subdivided after World War I and the streets named after members of the Iliffe family (more on that in Part 2). John Iliffe died on 3 Sep 1910 aged 70.



Photograph: Rosevale Nursery's entry to the 1903 Rockdale Flower show (Rockdale Library LHPC)

Sometime between 1858 and 1862 Henry James Edwards, a native of Somerset, bought six acres (24,300m²) of land on Croydon Road. He also conducted a nursery, where he raised exotic plants and palms.



Photograph: Charles Amey Howard (Rockdale Library LHPC)

In 1865, having married the daughter of Bexley North pioneer Job Tomkins, Charles Amey Howard settled on the 10 acres (40,500m²) of land, adjacent to the Smithsons' holding on Stoney Creek Road, that his father had bought in 1858.

Howard was a timber getter, charcoal burner, orchardist and later storekeeper. He had been born in St. Albans, Hertfordshire, England in 1846, and moved to Australia just one year later. Before moving to Bexley, he lived in Canterbury, and in 1869, he converted to the Baptist faith and started a Sunday school in an empty house near his property.

In 1875, he gave the land for the construction of the King's Grove Baptist Chapel. He was one of the alderpeople elected to Hurstville Council in 1887, (spoiler alert!) a member of Bexley Council from its inception in 1900 until 1917, and its mayor in 1906, 1907 and 1911.

Howard's son carried on his father's church work – he was organist for 75 years, made all the pews for the new church in 1952 and resigned as church treasurer on his 90th birthday.

In November 1880, Michael Tierney purchased 9 acres (36,400m²) of land off Regent Street, most of which is now occupied by Evatt Park. There he ran a market garden, poultry farm and dairy.



Photograph: "Alabama"
(Rockdale Library LHPC)

In 1883, Joseph Bibby, an accountant, had purchased land along Forest Road near Willison Road and built a large villa with a distinctive tower shaped like a fire extinguisher. Later, it was the home of Harry Budge, official secretary to the NSW Governor. In 1908, it was acquired by Ebenezer Glencross Grant, who had worked in America for the multinational farm implement manufacturing firm of Massey Harris. He named the house "Alabama" after the U.S. state because 'Murica!

Grant was the manager of Massey Harris' operations in New South Wales. He was also a steward of the Hurstville Methodist Church and laid its foundation stone. In 1926, he retired from business and Alabama was sold along with its spacious surrounds.

Now, let us briefly discuss the subdivisions sold in west Bexley following the coming of the railway, as we have done with the rest of Bexley.

In 1884, Thomas Milsop's Hurstville Heights Estate (Forest Road, and Forest, Glenfarne, Shirley and Vivian Streets) was auctioned and Francis Dickin, a cabinet maker who settled in Vivian St, became its first resident. A later resident was Patrick McCarthy, who had worked as a carpenter in Pyrmont, then as a cold storage unit manufacturer. In 1889, he established a farm and workshop off St. George's Road and became a prominent local builder. He was also an inventor, holding patents for the thermostat used on early refrigerators and special inks used for industrial drawings. Patrick's son Timothy served as an alderperson of Rockdale Council and was Mayor in 1962.

During the same year, the Grove Estate, consisting of the land formerly owned by John Downey (Mimosa and Downey Streets, St. George's Road) was sold off.

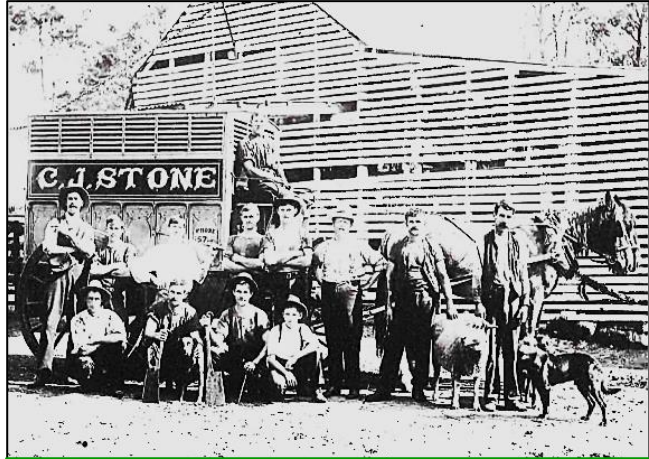
In August 1885, the Mooreville Estate off Croydon Road was auctioned. This land had been purchase by James Unwin, a market gardener of Parramatta, in 1878, and was subdivided by his widow, Elizabeth May Unwin.

From here onwards we will incorporate the story of west Bexley into the continuing narrative of the suburb of Bexley.

1890-1899: *DEVELOPMENT AND DISCONTENT*

During the 1890s, Bexley continued to shape and grow. We will discuss two significant sites developed in Bexley during this decade, before moving on to talk about people.

Sometime during the 90s, Charles John Stone established Stone's Slaughter Yards on the site of today's Bexley Golf Club and abattoirs in present-day Kingsgrove. The drovers were often drunk as cattle, sheep and pigs were driven by horse and cart from Homebush to Bexley. The animals would then graze for about a week before being slaughtered. Stone's Slaughter Yards closed in 1920, when all slaughtering began to be carried out at the abattoirs.



Photograph: C. J. Stone's slaughtermen
(Bexley Golf Club: 1939-1989)

The Stone family had a long association with butcher shops in the St. George area – Dick Stone had commenced selling meat in Rockdale and Bexley in 1868, and meat supplier Dick Stone Pty Ltd, established on 4 Dec 1954, still runs today, managed by Gary Stone.

Due to the bank crash of 1893, Henry Parker Tidswell, owner of "The Heneage" in Gladstone Street, became bankrupt and resigned from Hurstville Council. In 1895 he moved to more modest premises on Queen Victoria Street. At the auction his home, designed by Cyril Blacket, and 7 acres (28,300m²) of land were bought by Reverend Charles Thomas Forscutt.



Photograph: C. T. Forscutt, his wife Louisa Francis and his youngest daughter Olive, c. 1910 (Rockdale Library LHPC)

Rockdale College and Bexley Ladies' College

Charles Thomas Forscutt was a Church of Christ minister. He was born in South Australia, spent his childhood in Melbourne and was educated at Lexington, Kentucky, U.S.A. where he qualified for the ministry and took a degree in Classics. He then returned to Melbourne and ran several Churches of Christ before coming to Sydney where he became pastor of the Enmore Tabernacle. However, his main role was not in the ministry but as an educationalist.

In 1892, Forscutt established a small private school at St. Peters. In 1896 Forscutt moved this to Bexley, opening "The Heaning" as a boarding college for boys with himself as principal and his wife Louisa Francis, whom he had married in January 1888, as a teacher along with a small number of other staff. Rockdale College prided itself on its beautiful grounds and its unique curriculum of three different courses – Commercial, Civil Service and University – including practical subjects like book-keeping, practical arithmetic, shorthand and typewriting. School fees provided tuition, boarding (including laundry and mending) and also piano lessons – music and drama were very important to the school. An advertisement from 1899 says:

"The college is charmingly situated in its own Park-like grounds ... overlooking the beautiful harbour, the Heads, and the Ocean. ... No extras. No useless school uniform. No long holidays. No fee for plate or linen."

It soon became one of the most privileged private schools in Sydney and attracted the sons of some of Sydney's most eminent families, such as the youngest son of Sir Henry Parkes, former Premier of New South Wales and "Father of Federation". Events such as Speech Days (which were accompanied by a school band), garden parties and concerts were attended by very distinguished guests. Bexley was an appropriately elite location for such an elite school.

In 1905 an additional classroom and dormitory building was built facing Monomeeth Street. The school flourished until 1908 when it closed briefly following the death of a boarder who fell from an upstairs window.



Photograph: Bexley Ladies' College, Gladstone St, c. 1910 (Rockdale Library LHPC)

The school reopened in 1909 as Bexley Ladies' College, an exclusive finishing school (a school for young women focusing on social etiquette and upper class cultural rites) for the daughters of wealthy parents. An emphasis on music and drama continued (the college was described as "a musical home for your daughter") but the Ladies' College also introduced a curriculum "suitable for the daughters of gentlemen", including elocution, sewing, dancing and "athletic sports which are especially desirable for delicate girls", and prizes for neatness. At the college, girls had "a mother's care under the personal attention of Mrs. Forscutt". The school again attracted many, some from as far as Coonamble. C. T. Forscutt also started a magazine about social etiquette, *The Girls' Companion*, that year.

College Speech Days were elaborate ceremonies with high-profile guests, like previously, and at one garden party in 1914 attendees were able to meet the Prime Minister Joseph Cook and his wife.

In 1920, Rev. and Mrs. Forscutt retired from active teaching and the college was taken over by their daughter Alice Melleuish, who was skilled in drama, oratory, piano and singing. Reverend Charles Thomas Forscutt died aged 75 on 7 April 1930. The Bexley Ladies' College continued to operate until 1956 when increasing costs and dwindling patronage forced its closure.

On the subject of people: so far we have seen some truly charismatic characters settle in Bexley, and also some extraordinarily rich families – often both, in fact. Now, we will meet some more interesting people who settled in Bexley during the 1890s.

But first, to two noteworthy mayors of the Municipality of Hurstville from the Bexley Ward.



Photograph: Charles Bull

(<http://campbelltown-library.blogspot.com.au/>)

Charles Bull had been born at Liverpool in 1846, one of twin brothers. He became a solicitor in 1873 and soon built up a lucrative practice in criminal law and municipal law, the latter of which he was a well-known expert in, holding briefs for many metropolitan councils.

Bull moved to Bexley in 1889 and built a large home on the corner of Albyn Street and Harrow Road.

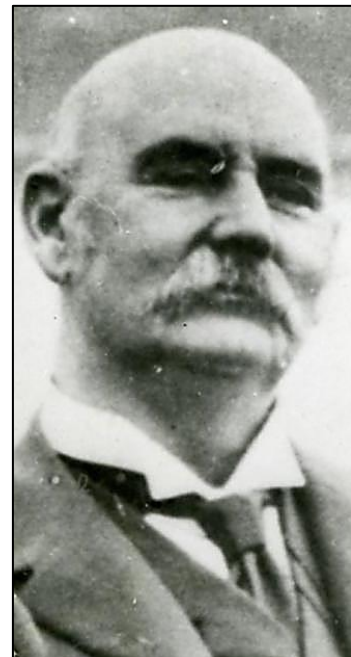
He was Mayor of Campbelltown from 1883 to 1884 and Mayor of Hurstville in 1892 and 1895 (he had been elected as an alderperson for the Bexley Ward in 1891). During 1895 to 1898 he was the Member for Camden in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly. Bull was part of the Free Trade Party led by Henry Parkes, who was mentioned on the previous page, and George Reid, who we will see on the next page. However, Bull had an abrasive personality which quickly made enemies, including at council meetings.

Bull was also a keen sportsman. He played cricket and football as a boy and was also one of the earliest members of the Mercantile Rowing Club, as well as a boxing enthusiast. He died in 1906, aged 60.

John George Griffin had been born in Richmond, Victoria in 1846. He was educated in England and later came to Sydney to set up business as a surveyor in the firm of J. G. Griffin and Harrison, Surveyors, settling in Carlton in 1890. He was also a civil engineer, and had worked on railways in Bulgaria and the Great Northern Railway Line in NSW.

Griffin took a great interest in local government. He was elected to Hurstville Council for the Bexley Ward in 1893. At one time he was alderperson of Bexley, Sydney and Manly councils simultaneously, and over the course of his life he became mayor of all three. He bitterly opposed the (spoiler alert!) separation of Bexley from Hurstville Municipality and was not successful in the first election as a result. He was, however, elected in 1902.

However, he also had an abrupt and abrasive personality and was easily angered. As the photograph might suggest, he was willing to go to great lengths to get what he wanted done – at the Hurstville election of 1899, he was strongly challenged by W. H. Wicks as he had committed the following year's Council income without authority. Griffin simply got all of the paid council employees to be his election agents and used the council's fleet of vehicles to transport his supporters to the (optional) polls on election day.



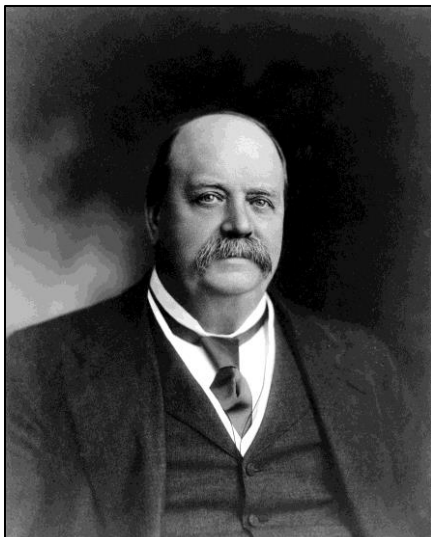
Photograph: John Griffin

(Rockdale Library LHPC)

In 1891, Eveline Hodson, her engineer husband John Hodson and their family settled in Lloyd Street. She began tailoring work for the department store Anthony Hordern and Sons, which later established the Palace Emporium in 1905, a huge six-storey building on the corner of George, Pitt and Goulburn Streets in the CBD.

Hodson's work became so sought after that she hired several women to assist her, but still she could not meet the great demand, so she built a large brick factory on the adjoining block facing Bayview Street in 1895. At one time, she employed 15 women in her clothing factory – a very insignificant number for our days, but the largest single employer of labour in Bexley until just before World War I.

Eveline's husband John was also noteworthy in that he was the first resident of Bexley who owned a phonograph. Whenever he played it, people would come to the paddock outside his home to listen – another fact that seems unusual in the context of our modern-day lives.



Photograph: George Reid
(<https://upload.wikimedia.org/>)

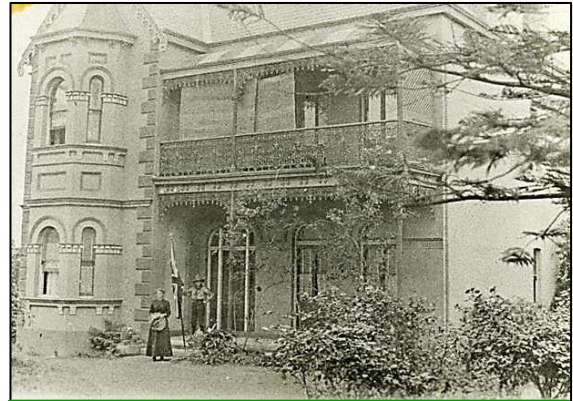
In 1893, Sir George Reid settled at 2 Beaconsfield Street, which still stands today as "Bayview Lodge".

George Reid had been born in 1845. He was the 12th Premier of New South Wales from 1894 to 1899. He founded the Free Trade Party, campaigned for Federation, then took an ambiguous position on it during the campaign for the first referendum in June 1898, earning him the nickname of "Yes-No Reid". He was then the 4th Prime Minister of Australia from 1904 to 1905, the only prime minister of the Free Trade Party, although his term lasted for less than a year (he was Opposition Leader for the other six of the first seven years of Federal Parliament). From 1910 to 1916 Reid was Australia's High Commissioner in London and from

1916 until his death in 1918 he was the Member for St. George's Hanover Square in the House of Commons – an interesting name tying in with this district.

However, Reid is remembered more for his personality and quirks rather than his political achievements. Not only was he outstandingly talented in oratory (making him a true force as Opposition Leader when debating policy), described as "perhaps the best platform speaker in the Empire", but his quick wit and entertaining speeches attracted many to his election meetings as a form of entertainment. A heckler once pointed to his belly and exclaimed: "What are you going to call it, George?" to which Reid replied: "If it's a boy, I'll call it after myself. If it's a girl I'll call it Victoria. But if, as I strongly suspect, it's nothing but piss and wind, I'll name it after you."

In 1895, Nicholas Charles Lockyer moved from Glebe to Bexley, and from 1897 until he moved to Melbourne in 1911 he lived at "Oaklands", the home on Forest Road (entrance facing Oriental Street) originally built for Charles James Burney, ironmonger, on the Ocean View Estate. Lockyer was a public servant, the son of Major Edmund Lockyer, who had founded the first British settlement in Western Australia. His home, with its magnificent rose garden along Forest Road, became a place of interest and admiration during his residence.



Photograph: Oaklands
(Rockdale Library LHPC)

Another grand residence of 1895: that year, marble importer and general merchant Frederick Gagliardi bought land on the corner of Beaconsfield Street and Harrow Road, opposite George Reid's home. There, he built an Italian bungalow he named "Italia". This Italian's Italia had floors, fireplaces and a huge bath, all made of very nice marble (Italian, of course). The bath was unique for its time in that it was cut from a single piece of marble. It also contained a cellar, making the home even more valuable for a seller. When they entertained, the Gagliardis often had a full orchestra performing on the lawns. Frederick Gagliardi loved his home, but "Italia" could not compare to *Italia*, and he returned to his mother country in August 1913.



Photographs: "Italia", 77 Harrow Road, then and now
(Rockdale Library LHPC, Google Maps)

In 1896, Alexander Burnett, the New South Wales Superintendent of Mails, built a house on Dunmore Street, Bexley. Burnett had been born in Scotland and came to Australia in 1858. He was also a keen sportsman, an amateur Shakespeare actor and a talented baritone singer and bagpipes player.



Photograph: Margaret Parkes
(Rockdale Library LHPC)

The final 90s resident we will meet was in fact related to the very first resident of Bexley: Margaret McFarlane, wife of Isaac Parkes Junior, son of the man who had bought land off Forest Road back in December 1855.

She had been born in 1852, daughter of Robert and Bridget McFarlane. In 1870 she married Isaac Parkes at St. Peter's Church, Cooks River. They lived in that area for a while before moving to four blocks of land on 90 Broadford Street, Bexley, where they built "Doreen".

"Granny Parkes", as she was familiarly known by Bexley residents, was a very noble and dignified woman in both character and appearance. She always wore her stiffly starched apron and would never be seen outside without her hat and gloves. Although she was not extremely wealthy, she opened up her home to take care of those in need or distress who sought her help.

Margaret and Isaac had seven children together, and she later became grandmother to dozens of Bexley residents. Margaret died on 19 May 1935, mourned by a community which held her in universal respect

Now to the "discontent" part of the title. To help create a dispirited unhappy mood, no pictures have been included in this section, and if you wish, you may put on some atmospheric music suited to our discussion of Bexley's problems. Firstly, the recession of the 1890s that we have briefly mentioned before.

As we have seen throughout this history, Bexley became a rather privileged suburb after the railway was built, and although there were social tensions between the elite on the eastern side of Forest and Stoney Creek Roads and the not so fortunate to the west, a healthy community spirit developed, facilitated by the assembly of residents at church services and the like. Many of the wealthy families of Bexley, such as the Kinselas, would open up the grounds of their homes for garden parties and fundraising activities. Overall, it was a happy lifestyle, even for the poorer, who enjoyed the privileged status of the other residents of this gracious suburb. But the economic state of the state (and country) was changing. Many of the land development and building companies which had been a bit too rapacious during the land boom of the 80s became bankrupt. Pressure began mounting on the banks, which were being inundated with loan requests, and on 30 January 1893, the Federal Bank failed, and most other commercial banks followed suit. The building industry collapsed, businesses were ruined, unemployment and poverty soared and thousands were bankrupted as local banks shut down, costing many depositors their savings.

Secondly: ever since incorporation into the Municipality of Hurstville in 1887, Bexley's residents had felt neglected. In 1891, the municipality was divided into three wards – Bexley, Peakhurst and Hurstville – and Bexley was the wealthiest in terms of land value, as well as the most densely populated. The ward therefore provided a large portion of the tax for the Municipality, but elected the same number of alderpeople as the other two wards. The residents of Bexley also didn't particularly like their money being used to subsidise works elsewhere in the municipality that had no impact on their lives. Furthermore, the recession had rendered many unable to pay their taxes, and most of those who still could refused to do so, because despite the efforts of Mayors Bull and Griffin, most of Bexley's inhabitants remained frustrated and disillusioned with the Hurstville Council. This contributed to the funding problems which so incensed Bexley residents, as we will explain now.

Despite the improvements begot by incorporation (the gas service had been extended to the municipality in 1887 for street lighting and household use, for example), there were numerous problems that the residents of Bexley were vexed by and felt deserved particular attention, such as: insufficient funding for projects in their own suburb, such as improvements to Seaforth Park, which had been established by the Ocean View Company when its Ocean View Estate was divided in 1884 and later dedicated to the council; straying cattle and goats chomping on gardens (more on that in Part 2); unsatisfactory roads, most of which remained unmade and unaligned, with the ones that *were* made crumbling; the lack of health services, efficient sewerage (most residents either buried their waste in their backyards or dumped it illegally in creeks and waterways) and facilities to dispose of household garbage, and the frequent outbreaks of diphtheria and typhoid fever due to these poor hygienic conditions; the inability of the council to enforce regulations on slaughterhouses, poultry farms, dairies and other industrial businesses; insufficient police forces; the flooding of creeks when it rained, causing inaccessibility and inconvenience; the inefficiency of the council exacerbated by personality clashes and disputes with other councils such as Rockdale; and the inadequate staffing to deal with these myriad complaints.

And on that discomfiting and suspenseful note finishes Part 1 of *Windows into Bexley*: the beguiling story of Botany Bay, buying land, beautiful rural landscapes, the boom and burgeoning begot by the railway, the busy building of buildings, a bigger and better suburb, the brewing of bitter discontent, and incredibly cheesy alliteration. Next up: a resolution to this ongoing dissatisfaction, the Arncliffe-Bexley tramway, a *harrowing* murder at St. Elmo, the flu epidemic following World War I, a problem with trucks, a piece of history going down in flames, the origins of Bexley's street names and much more. See you next time!

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