

THE HISTORY OF ROCKDALE WOMENS NETBALL COURTS AT 310 WEST BOTANY STREET



By Jessica Vrckovski
Year 6

INTRODUCTION

Every Saturday I come to the Rockdale Women's Netball Courts at 310 West Botany Street Rockdale to play in the district netball competition. Because I live so close to the netball courts, I tend to walk there. I pass many houses along the way with one particular house I notice being very peculiar but unique. In fact, it is not a house but a dilapidated cottage from a different time. I always tend to avoid it as it looks very creepy and probably haunted. Despite its eerie facade, I have often wondered about what was previously here in place of the netball courts and the history behind the land and the creepy looking cottage that still stands there today.

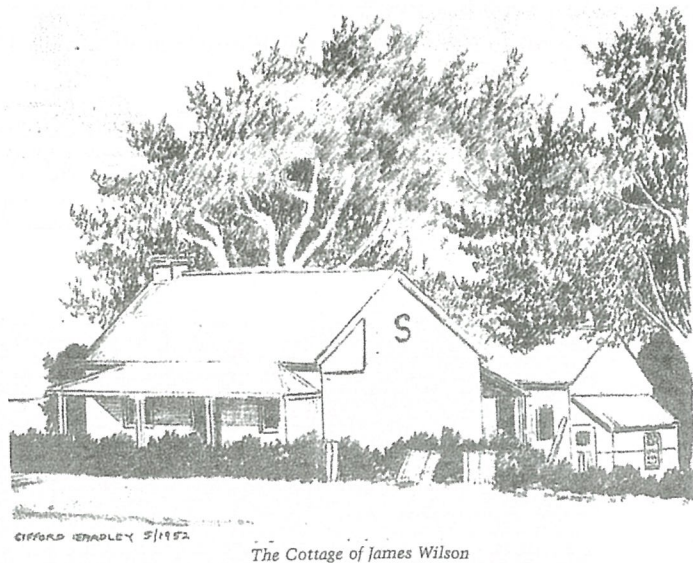
What I didn't know was that the old cottage I walk past every Saturday and the entire netball complex was all part of what was known as Wilson's Farm back in the late 1800's. The old cottage standing there today is officially known as Wilson's Cottage (Farmhouse). It is one of the last surviving examples of modest pioneer homes built by early settlers in our district.



Source: Google Maps 2014

EARLY SETTLERS AT 310 WEST BOTANY STREET ROCKDALE - 1850's

A man named James Wilson purchased the land at West Botany Street around 1855 from local landowner John Bowmer. The entire piece of land stretching across both sides of Muddy Creek was named 'Wilson's Farm'.



James Wilson went on to build this 4 bedroom single storey cottage with a detached kitchen to rear of the main house (demolished in later years). It was constructed of locally quarried sandstone with rendered rubble partitions, internally. Furthermore, he established a farm on his West Botany Street parcel of land, actually where today's netball courts are. After the house was built, James, his wife Isabella and his eight children moved into their new home. While living there James made a living from farming & selling his produce to other local settlers, as a market garden.

James Wilson lived there until his death in 1869 while, his wife Isabella remained in the cottage until 1880. The property remained in the possession of the Wilson family until 1910.

WILSON'S FARM 1910 - 1960's

The cottage was starting to separate and wear away by the early 1900's and so it required some repairs. Large 'S' shaped iron braces were installed which clamped against the outside of both end walls holding them firmly in place. After 1910, the events of Wilson's Farmhouse are unknown.

On March 7th 1958, the the property of 3 3/4 acres was purchased for town planning purposes by the Cumberland Country Council from the estate of Lily Maud Loveday.

When this Council was dissolved, it was automatically absorbed by the newly formed Rockdale Municipal Council. The council decided to make the land (under leasehold conditions) into a Market Garden which continued to be operated until the 1970's by Chinese immigrants.



This aerial photograph was taken in 1943

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At June 1970, the little cottage was still in operation and in fairly good condition. It was being used as a workman's cottage although it was almost 120 years.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WOMEN'S NETBALL COURTS 1970's

In the early 1970's, the St George District Netball Association partnered with Rockdale Municipal Council to develop the land as a women's sports field. On April 2nd 1978, the Rockdale Women's Netball Complex officially opened at 310 West Botany St. Shortly after on the 16th of August 1981, the first 2 sealed courts were ready for play with the remaining courts still with grass surface.

The Netball Complex slowly started to develop and by 1995 on the 13th of May, Hon. Gary Punch officially opened the Control Room building on the West Botany Street site.

In 2005, an agreement with Rockdale City Council was made to invest in another 15 hard surface courts (sealed) at a cost of \$165,000. Also in the same year a new bridge was built over Muddy Creek with the help of Sydney Water and Frank Sartor MP. This later allowed more grass courts to be made and these are still played on today by the youngest age players. In 2013 the canteen was upgraded.



Rockdale Womens Netball Complex



Grass Courts at Rockdale Womens Netball Complex

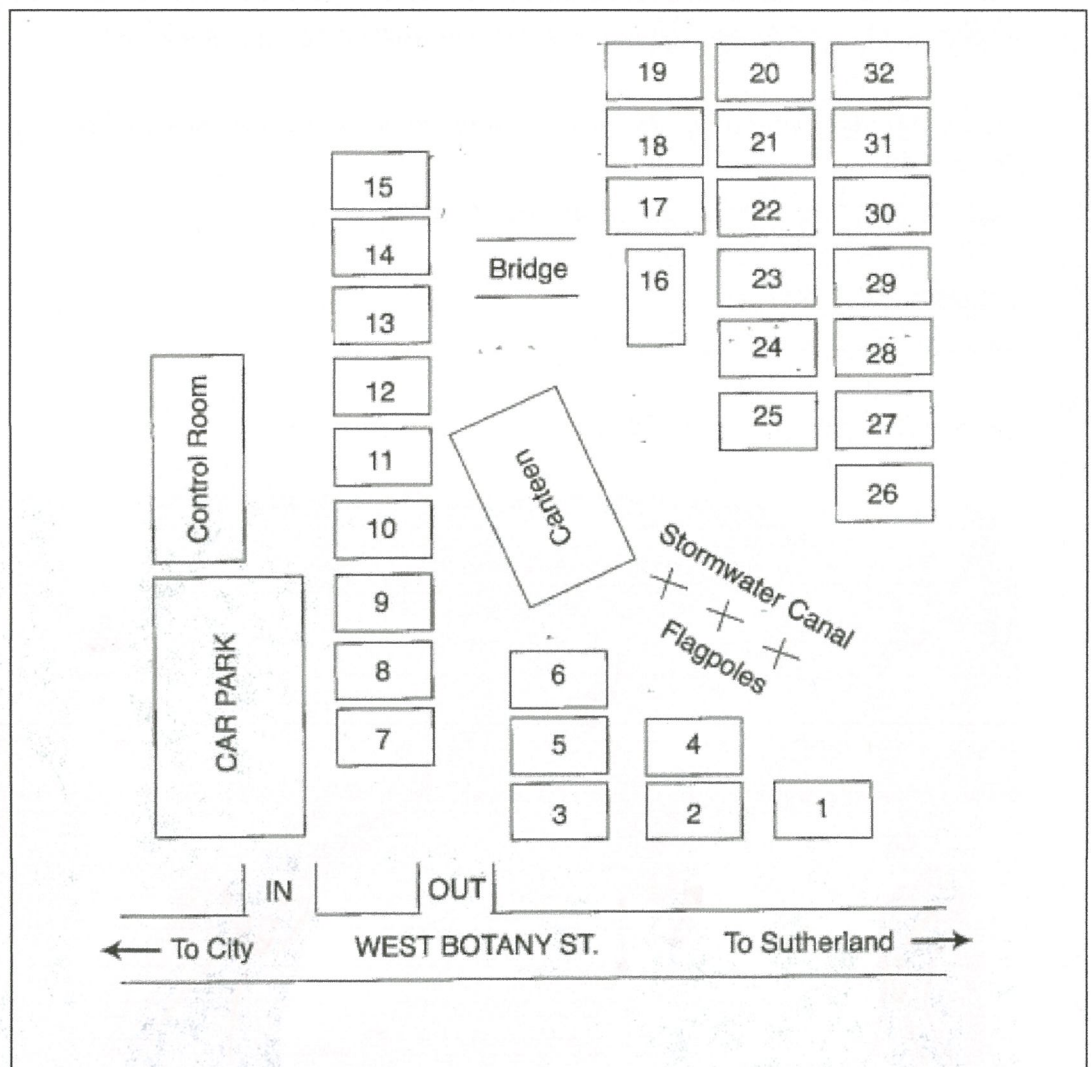


Muddy Creek Bridge connecting hard surface courts and grass courts



St. George District Netball Association

COURT LAYOUT



THE FUTURE OF ROCKDALE WOMEN'S NETBALL COURTS & WILSON'S FARMHOUSE

The Rockdale Women's Netball Complex has grown over time from a few courts in 1978 to 32 courts by 2016. The complex continues to grow and improve with most recently a development application lodged to add lighting masts to the existing courts, as follows:

Development Application DA2016/371 - Addition of six (6) light masts to existing netball courts located on

State Heritage Item known as Wilson's Farmhouse

Status: Awaiting DA Approval

Lodged: 19/05/2016

Estimated Cost of Work: \$ 95,000

Source: Rockdale City Council Website



Women's Netball Courts today at 310 West Botany Street Rockdale

In addition, Wilson's Farm House is an important piece of our city's colonial past and as a result the cottage was heritage listed in November 1986. A year before this, Rockdale Council approved some restoration and refurbishment work of the cottage as it was in fairly poor

condition and could be barely seen from overgrown bushes and weeds. However, it is unclear whether this work actually went ahead. Unfortunately, the cottage has not been maintained regularly over the years. It certainly is worthy of some care and conservation given its historical importance in our local district.

Now as I walk past Wilson's Cottage every Saturday, I am a fascinated observer. I look forward to seeing this cottage be restored to its former glory, some time in the future.



Me at Saturday netball game at Rockdale Women's Netball Courts (old Wilson Farm)

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<http://postcardsydney.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Womens-Playing-Fields-Canal-GrassCourts.jpg>

Google Maps